



Inheriting the Goddess – continuity or change? Have the values and beliefs of the Goddess movement that formed the spiritual foundation of Greenham Common women's peace camp in the nineteen-eighties, informed women's climate change activism in the contemporary Extinction Rebellion movement?

**CAROLE TAYLOR**

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## DECLARATION

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Carole Janice Taylor

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis provides an ethnographic exploration of the British Feminist movement as it has evolved over the last forty years. Specifically, this research examines the Goddess movement that underpinned women's anti-nuclear activism at Greenham Common women's peace camp in the nineteen-eighties and considers whether it has continued to inform the spiritual world of female climate change activists involved in Extinction Rebellion (hereafter referred to as XR) since two-thousand-and-eighteen.

This reflective ethnographic approach, based on focused field research among women directly involved in related activism, has been framed by the works of Robert A Orsi (2007, 2008, 2013) and suggests that the presence of the Goddess during the Greenham actions was very much part of the overall spiritual experience and, indeed, motivation to act. Furthermore, I will draw on the work of Donovan O Schaefer (2015) and examine the role of grief in relation to affect theory as it has underpinned women's activism from anti-nuclear to climate change crisis over the past four decades.

I have approached this thesis primarily as a historical enquiry into Goddess feminism at Greenham Common women's peace camp, comparing it with Goddess feminism in XR, expecting to find that the values and spiritual beliefs in relation to the Goddess would be little changed in forty years. I have used a reflexive ethnographic approach with the collection of qualitative data through recorded interviews, to understand the lives and similarities between Goddess feminists four decades apart. These interviews and observations, which provide the backbone of my research, have revealed rich and informative testimony from my informants, which I hope will add considerably to the fairly limited body of work on the Goddess at Greenham and, to a lesser extent, in XR.

This study has been comprehensively supported by literature drawing on relevant material from the areas related to Theology, Presence and Affect, Goddess feminism, Greenham Common women's peace camp, feminist activism, and patriarchy. They have included the works of Sasha Roseneil, Melissa Raphael, Robert A Orsi, Monica Sjoo and Barbara Mor, Carol P Christ, and Margaret Laware.

The significance of my research lies in the retrieval of the Greenham Goddess feminists' story, their fight against patriarchy and the unexpected discovery that an androcentric society oppressing women continues among the twenty-first century activists in XR.

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**Supervisors:** Dr Martin Wood

Dr William Large

## PREFACE: My personal journey

*'Omnia Feminae Aequissimae'* (Women are equal to everything) – Motto on the Coat of Arms created by Lady Hale on her appointment to the House of Lords in 2004<sup>1</sup>

I have been interested in socio-political protest since the early 1960s when I heard Bruce Kent talk about the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND). Fired with enthusiasm, I took part in CND's 'Ban the Bomb' London to Aldermaston marches, held to promote the global abolition of nuclear weapons.

Wanting to take a more active part in CND, I joined a local group for young people and went on marches and protests. Even in those days I quickly realised that most of the heavy-lifting was being done by the girls – not physically, but in terms of enthusiasm and commitment. Talking about women's emancipation, the playwright George Bernard Shaw said: "The vote will never be won by men speaking on behalf of women. The speaking must be done by the women themselves."<sup>2</sup> That resonated with me, and I realised that the solidarity of a group of women fighting for a cause and speaking for themselves, was a powerful weapon. Women are equal to everything.

Nevertheless, traditional gender roles and expectations built around the dominant ideology of patriarchy still prevailed in mid-twentieth century Britain. At that time the world was living through the Cold War, waged on political, economic and propaganda fronts as the result of rivalry between the Britain, United States of America, and the Soviet Union following the Second World War and the development and testing of new atomic weapons. Various peace movements, including CND,

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<sup>1</sup> Brenda Hale, *Spider Woman: A Life – by the former President of the Supreme Court* (London: The Bodley Head, 2022). See also Owen Bowcott, 'Women are equal to everything: Lady Hale lives up to her motto' in *The Guardian*, 21 July 2017. <https://www.theguardian.com> [Accessed 16 May 2021].

<sup>2</sup> George Bernard Shaw, campaigning for the right for women, not only to vote, but to represent their own views in *Women and Power: The Struggle for Suffrage* (National Trust, 2018), p. 3. [www.nationaltrust.or.uk/guidebook/womenandpower](http://www.nationaltrust.or.uk/guidebook/womenandpower) [Accessed 29 September 2021].



sprang up as 'nuclear fear' pervaded society and there was a widespread anxiety that the world was standing on the brink of destruction.<sup>3</sup> In the late nineteen-seventies, it was announced that US Cruise and Pershing II missiles were to be deployed in Britain. Consequently, the decision to site ninety-six Cruise missiles with nuclear warheads at the United States Airforce base at Greenham Common sparked the walk from Wales to Berkshire and the establishment of the Greenham Common women's peace camp.<sup>4</sup>

When the Greenham peace camp hit the news headlines in nineteen-eighty-one, I was dismayed to realise that two decades after CND Ban the Bomb marches, the threat of nuclear war was still a real possibility. I visited Greenham only once – on a day trip organised by a friend who had taken up residence in a tent at Green gate. The impression that day made has stayed with me for a lifetime and has culminated in this research.

My trip to Greenham also introduced me to Goddess feminism, which I found both intimidating and beguiling in equal measure. I subsequently realised that the rituals and rites of worshipping the Goddess were not so very different from the liturgy of the Anglican Church to which I belonged – just the honouring of a different divine being.

The Goddess re-surfaced during my Religion, Philosophy and Ethics undergraduate course at the University of Gloucestershire. Modules on Goddess Spirituality and Emerging Spiritualities, led to me exploring Eco-Shamanism, Feminist Wicca, climate change and feminist protest. During that time Extinction Rebellion (XR) was formed in Stroud, Gloucestershire in two-thousand-and-eighteen, to fight climate change and the ecological emergency threatening the planet.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Sasha Roseneil, *Disarming Patriarchy: Feminism and Political Action at Greenham* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1995), p. 28.

<sup>4</sup> The Cold War ended in 1991 with the collapse of the Soviet Union, but some women stayed on at Greenham until 2000.

<sup>5</sup> *This Is Not A Drill: An Extinction Rebellion Handbook* (London: Penguin Books, 2019), pp. 1-2 and 21.

The lives of the twenty-first century feminist activists in XR may differ greatly from their Greenham sisters four decades previously. Nevertheless, the Greenham and XR campaigns have highlighted the voluntary fight to sustain life and compel governments to take action to avoid anthropogenic and ecological disaster overcoming the earth.<sup>6</sup> Both groups became aware of the connection between the threat of atomic annihilation or ecological destruction and patriarchal violence against women and nature. This realisation motivated a turning towards spirituality and the revival of a Goddess-based religion - indirectly leading to activism.<sup>7</sup>

Although no longer a teenager, I have once again contemplated non-violent protest on behalf of the Earth, its inhabitants, and future generations. I have come a full circle. I am once again prepared to be a feminist rebel for a just cause

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<sup>6</sup> Sam Knights, 'Introduction' in *This Is Not a Drill*, pp. 11-12.

<sup>7</sup> Maria Mies and Vandara Shiva, *Ecofeminism* (London: Zed Books, 2014), pp. 16-17.

## INTRODUCTION: Is history repeating itself?

*“Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.”* – George Santayana, writer, and philosopher (1863-1932)<sup>8</sup>

The overarching aim of my research is to expand the historical knowledge and dimension of activism in the British feminist movement during the past forty years, and to discover whether the same values and spiritual beliefs that formed the foundation of feminist activism at Greenham Common women’s peace camp in the nineteen-eighties are still evident four decades later among the feminists fighting climate change with Extinction Rebellion (XR). Is history repeating itself?

Goddess feminism was a major part of spirituality at Greenham, and I am seeking to discover if this is also the case with the feminists in XR. This research is based on anonymous informant interviews among feminist activists who have a connection with either Greenham Common or XR. The transcripts of these interviews are contained in the Appendices.

The main body of my research will be divided into three chapters.

In Chapter One I will outline my contention that worship of the Goddess, seemingly eliminated thousands of years ago by patriarchy, and further suppressed by Christianity, has re-emerged in the past forty years or so in the ongoing fight against patriarchal power structures that have suppressed and marginalised women’s position religiously, politically, and culturally. I will examine the rise of modern feminism and consider the contemporary Goddess movement which ushered in the revived vocation of priestess and, importantly, the experience of real presence. I will also briefly introduce the importance of Goddess feminism at Greenham Common women’s peace camp and among the women engaged in activism with XR.

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<sup>8</sup> George Santayana, *The Life and Reason of Common Sense* (New York: Scribner’s and Sons, MIY, 1905).

Chapter Two will explore the back story of the Greenham peace camp, focusing on the part Goddess feminism played in both the day-to-day praxis and the ideology behind it. I will consider the importance of grief as an emotional affect and suggest that real presence was a lived reality for the Greenham women who experienced and worshipped the Goddess.

Chapter Three moves on forty years to investigate Goddess feminism in XR and consider whether values and spiritual beliefs in relation to the Goddess, which formed the foundation of feminist activism at Greenham, are still evident. I will further consider whether real presence and grief as an emotional affect are lived realities for the XR Goddess feminists as they were at Greenham. Finally, I will question whether the fight against patriarchy continues to be an on-going battle for feminists in the twenty-first century.

#### Rising feminism, Emergent Goddess

Women's role in society, and what it means to be a woman, has been questioned since the nineteenth century, when the struggle for female suffrage began. Over the past hundred years, thousands of women from all walks of life literally put their lives on the line so that feminist activists in the twenty-first century can protest – and for the most part, protest legally.

The National Society for Women's Suffrage was formed in 1868 in a bid to get women the vote and a voice in public life. Despite a quasi-military campaign by the Suffragettes, it took fifty years until the Representation of the People Act allowed a selected group of women to vote. It was another decade before the 1928 Equal Franchise Act gave the vote to all women over the age of twenty-one on equal terms with men.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Helen Pankhurst, *Deeds not Words: The Story of Women's Rights Then and Now* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2018), p. 27.

The fight for suffrage had been so protracted, bitter, and violent, that one would imagine it would long be remembered. However, as George Santayana suggests, memories fade and past events soon become events of the present.<sup>10</sup> Thus, half a century after emancipation, the British government encountered a new group of fearless females – the Greenham Common peace camp women, who banded together to protest at ninety-six Cruise missiles with nuclear warheads being located at the United States Airforce base in Berkshire. Just forty years later, the feminist activists of XR are involved in non-violent civil disobedience in a bid to compel governments to take action to avoid the ecological disaster of climate change overcoming the Earth.<sup>11</sup>

It is important to note that ‘Goddess’ means different things to different people and the terminology can be confusing. When I asked Professor Melissa Raphael about the various terms, she maintained that Goddess worship, Goddess religion, Goddess spirituality and Goddess feminism are, to some extent, interchangeable. However, she stressed that a lot of Goddess feminism, though not all, dates from the later nineteen-seventies to the end of the twentieth century, where the Goddess was not so much an object of worship as a gynocentric, earth-based trope or image by which to celebrate the liberative/ecological transformative power of the feminine.<sup>12</sup>

In *Introducing Theology*, Raphael maintains that some on the alternative fringes of Christian and Jewish communities seek to transform their own religion and spirituality by incorporating the Goddess into the (reclaimed) theology, ritual, and liturgy of the tradition. So, although Goddess feminism has a distinctive spiritual/political stamp, emphasising emancipatory politics and the sacrality of female embodiment, it can also be understood as something of a composite religion

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<sup>10</sup> George Santayana, *The Life and Reason of Common Sense*, p. 284.

<sup>11</sup> Sam Knights, ‘Introduction’ in *This is Not a Drill*, pp. 11-12.

<sup>12</sup> Melissa Raphael, ‘Goddess’ (Email to Carole Taylor, 5 January 2022).

which draws upon those parts of other religions which are considered empowering to women, or which already honour female divinities.<sup>13</sup>

Goddess feminism arose in clear opposition to patriarchy and patriarchal religions, asserts Carol P Christ. It emerged with a critical political edge and is about women affirming that being female means you can still be strong.<sup>14</sup> It enables women to take pride in their female selves, encouraging men to treat women and children with respect and acknowledge their own connection to the life force.<sup>15</sup>

My informants understood the term 'Goddess feminism/feminist' and several used it when referring to themselves. For the purposes of this thesis, I will mainly use the appellation 'Goddess feminism/feminists' which I believe fits well with both the Greenham Common women and the XR activists who generally celebrate the Goddess on account of their feminist convictions.

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<sup>13</sup> Melissa Raphael, *Introducing Thealogy: Discourse on the Goddess* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), p. 18.

<sup>14</sup> Carol P Christ, 'Sacred Feminism or Goddess Feminism?' in *Feminism and Religion* (2016). [Accessed 3 May 2022].

<sup>15</sup> Carol P Christ, *Rebirth of the Goddess: Finding Meaning in Feminist Spirituality* (New York: Routledge, 1997), p. 165.

## METHODOLOGY

*“You have permission, grand permission, to have a voice. And to use it. And to let others have theirs too. So, add your voice to the Grand Mosaic, your brilliant tile to humanity, and not be silenced.” -*

From ‘Sacred Dreams’ by Rachel Alana (R A Falconer) *Midwives of the Soul*

Researching Goddess feminism across four decades with divergent groups of women required the dedication of a great deal of time to field research. I therefore chose to engage retrospective and interpretive/constructive paradigms, using qualitative fieldwork and reflexive ethnography to understand the similarities between the Goddess feminists at Greenham Common women’s peace camp in the nineteen-eighties and those in Extinction Rebellion (XR) forty years later.

My aim was to discover whether the same values and spiritual beliefs that formed the foundation of feminist action at Greenham were still evident among the feminists fighting climate change with XR; to ascertain if history was repeating itself. I was also seeking to discover the importance of the ‘women only’ rule at Greenham compared with the gender interaction in XR, where men and women protest together. The Greenham women decided fairly early on that men should not be allowed to live at the peace camp, although they were welcomed as visitors. This created a shift leading to feminist politics of anarchist, lesbian radical, socialist and Eco hues.<sup>16</sup> Sasha Roseneil, who left school to live at Greenham notes that Greenham was not feminist *because* it was women-only but became women-only as it became feminist.<sup>17</sup>

Many women believe that Goddess feminism flourished at Greenham because it gave women a space where there were no men, to experiment with their spirituality in their own way. One of my

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<sup>16</sup> Sasha Roseneil, *Disarming Patriarchy*, p. 40.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*, p. 63.

informants was adamant that it was because Greenham was only for women that they were able to really explore Goddess feminism. [See Appendices: Informant 7].

I decided to use an ethnographic approach to my research with the collection of qualitative data through recorded interviews, backed up with notes. The information I have gathered has allowed me to see the world through the eyes of my informants, and the resulting documentary data has produced comprehensive accounts of the lives of Goddess feminists protesting about the siting of Cruise missiles at Greenham, and those fighting climate change with XR. However, it is important to emphasise that I have not just investigated feminist activism at Greenham and in XR, but the influence Goddess feminism has had on the women in both socio-political organisations.

### The ethnographic project

A qualitative approach for the analysis of the interviews has allowed rich depth of comparability between participants and scenarios. Therefore, my informants have been of central importance. As Charlotte Aul Davies maintains, the cultural knowledge of participants is the basis on which ethnographers build an understanding of the people and societies they study.<sup>18</sup>

Reflective ethnography demands that the studies of others must also be studies of ourselves.<sup>19</sup> Bob Schulte called for a reflective and critical anthropology based on the recognition that fieldwork and subsequent analysis constitute a unified praxis, the first results of which are mediated by the 'in here' as much as the 'out there'.<sup>20</sup> Therefore, as Aul Davies suggests, the reflexive ethnographical approach has put me within a specific social context and setting as a conscious, self-aware researcher.<sup>21</sup> I concur with Michael Crick's view that 'the ethnographic enterprise is not a matter

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<sup>18</sup> Charlotte Aul Davies, *Reflective Ethnography: A guide to researching others and ourselves* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2008), pp. 88-89.

<sup>19</sup> Charlotte Aull Davies, *Reflective Ethnography*, p. 13.

<sup>20</sup> Bob Schulte, 'Toward a reflexive and critical anthropology' in Dell Hymes (ed) *Reinventing Anthropology* (New York: Random House, 1969), p.438.

<sup>21</sup> Charlotte Aull Davies, *Reflexive Ethnography*, pp. 7-9.



of what one person does in a situation but how two sides of an encounter arrive at a delicate, workable definition of their meeting'.<sup>22</sup>

I believe my approach to interviews has been empathic. As a mature woman I found I could effectively relate to women of the same age, and they appeared comfortable talking to me about their past experiences at Greenham. Although I do not have an explicitly shared experience, I have a good level of contextual understanding of the Greenham story, which had a profound effect on me as a young woman searching for my own sense of identity in a patriarchal world. My experiences with granddaughters and young associates at work and university also facilitated my relationship with the younger women in XR.

As well as using qualitative fieldwork and reflexive ethnography, I also worked in an Eco-feminist and cultural framework to discover the underlying spiritual significance of events and activities within socio-political feminist activism over the past forty years, with the emphasis on Goddess feminism. 'Eco-feminism' was coined by French feminist Françoise d'Eaubonne in her nineteen-seventy-four book *Le féminisme ou la Mort (Feminism or Death)*.<sup>23</sup> The first premise of Eco-feminism is that women and nature are structurally interconnected and that there is a significant link between the treatment of women and the treatment of non-human nature. Whenever women have acted against threat of anatomic annihilation or ecological destruction, they become aware of the connection between patriarchal violence against women, non-human animals, and the planet.<sup>24</sup> I have, therefore, also explored the effect of patriarchy on my informants and this is examined in future chapters.

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<sup>22</sup> Michael Crick, 'Anthropological field research, meaning creation and knowledge construction' in *Semantic Anthropology*, ed. D Parkin (London: Academic Press, 1982a), p. 25.

<sup>23</sup> Françoise d'Eaubonne, *Feminism or Death: How the Women's Movement Can Save the Planet* (London: Verso Books, 2022). *Le féminisme ou la Mort* was originally published in French (Paris: Editions le passage clandestine, 1974).

<sup>24</sup> Maria Mies and Vandra Shriya, *Ecofeminism*, pp. 16-17.

Having carefully planned the framework for collecting data, I was mindful that the research process did not end with fieldwork but continued into the analysis and writing. Fieldwork is a means to an end, posits John van Maanen. Ethnography is the result of fieldwork, but it is the written report that must represent the culture it is interpreting. Ethnography is deskwork, not fieldwork.<sup>25</sup>

Thus, I also considered for whom I was conducting the research and noted the advice of sociologist Maxine Birch, who contends that a great deal of inner dialogue, self-examination and self-reflection is required to enable me to feel confident, and content with what I am doing and why I am doing it.<sup>26</sup>

My research is based on anonymous informant interviews and observations with Goddess feminists who were willing to provide case studies of their time at Greenham and in XR. These studies have become the main component of my research. I have interviewed ten women – nine of whom are Goddess feminists with a connection to either Greenham Common women’s peace camp, XR, or both. My tenth informant, a teenage girl who is too young to have been at Greenham and is not a Goddess feminist, nor a supporter of XR, was interviewed to give the Generation Z understanding of sacred feminist activism.

Following early reading for my research project, I decided to use semi-structured interviews but was also prepared for organic conversation, hoping to be a qualitative researcher who would allow those who are studied to speak for themselves. In advance of the interviews, each of my informants received an information sheet explaining the aims and objects of my research. I felt it was important that the women understood what I was hoping my research would achieve, giving them the chance to decide if there were certain aspects they preferred not to discuss. Advance information also

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<sup>25</sup> John Van Maanen, *Tales of the Field: On Writing Ethnography* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), p.3.

<sup>26</sup> Maxine Birch, ‘Re/constructing Research Narratives’ in *Feminist Dilemmas in Qualitative Research: Public Knowledge and Private Lives*, ed. Jane Ribbens and Rosalind Edwards (London: SAGE Publications, 1998), p.183.

avoided lengthy explanations at the beginning of meetings, meaning we could get to the crux of the matter fairly quickly.

I had prepared a few questions I wanted to ask, ranging from “Were you at Greenham? / Are you in XR?” and “Do you identify as a Goddess feminist?” to the more specific “Does Goddess feminism maintain a similar degree of importance in XR as it did at Greenham?” and “Has the appetite for feminist activism been passed on to younger generations?” I also had in mind other more ‘tailored’ questions depending on which organisation my informants were representing. However, from the interview with my first informant, it quickly became obvious that feminist activists and Goddess feminists are strong and feisty eco-warriors who had every intention of speaking for themselves. After posing the first couple of questions, I realised that apart from the occasional guidance and interjection, my questions were superfluous. My informants knew exactly what they wished to communicate, and the organic conversation flowed. I merely recorded the conversations, backing up the recording with notes and adding the occasional aside.

### Presence and Grief

Throughout my research I encountered a great deal of evidence from informants that they had developed a very real and immediate experience of the Goddess. I wanted to explore this aspect of experience further and in this respect, I have developed an analytical drawing upon the work of Robert A Orsi and the presence of the supernatural in relationship with humans (particularly the Catholic relationship with the Virgin Mary). I have, therefore, used Orsi’s theory to explore presence among Goddess feminists at both Greenham and in XR.<sup>27</sup> This has demonstrated that the Goddess

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<sup>27</sup> Robert A Orsi, ‘The Problem of the Holy’ in *The Cambridge Companion to Religious Studies*, ed. Robert A Orsi (New York, Cambridge University Press, 2013) pp. 84-104; Also ‘Abundant History: Marian Apparitions as Alternative Modernity’ in *Historically Speaking*, 9:7 (September/October 2008), pp.14-15. <https://10.1353/hsp.2008.0033>. [Accessed 27 January 2022]; and ‘When 2 + 2 =5: Can we begin to think about unexplained religious experiences in ways that acknowledge their existence? In *The American Scholar*, 76:2 (Spring 2007), pp. 34-43 <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41222688> [Accessed 16 February 2022].

is very real to all who experience and worship her – as real as transubstantiation and the Virgin Mary are to Catholics. The very word ‘Goddess’ has magical transformatory power and each woman makes the Goddess real by allowing the Goddess archetype to do its transforming work through her own liberated consciousness. When the priestess invokes the presence of the Goddess during ritual, she becomes the Goddess.<sup>28</sup>

Toma who was at Greenham between nineteen-eighty-two and nineteen-eighty-four, told me: “She [The Goddess] was who we were, our ethos and our religion’. Singing, both at Greenham and in XR, is further evidence of Orsi’s theory of real presence. Kathy, who was a regular visitor at the peace camp in the early nineteen-eighties, recalled standing in the woods at twilight and singing. On the inside of the fence were weapons, soldiers, and policemen, on the outside were the women, standing with candles and singing. “Singing liberated me in that moment to think of the Goddess and to understand the divine as ‘She’.”

Bliss, a priestess in service to the Goddess, pointed out the similarity between Goddess feminists in XR and those who were at Greenham – circles of women empowering and raising awareness in the presence of the divine feminine, while feminist philosopher and writer Nelle Morton asserts that the Goddess is present in every person and in all creatures and elements that possess or impart vital energy.<sup>29</sup>

I have used Orsi’s work because although it relates to radical presence, which he calls ‘abundant events’, within the Roman Catholic Church, it was not difficult to translate Orsi’s methodological approaches to the Virgin Mary, to the study of the Goddess. Abundant events are characterised by aspects of the human imagination that cannot be completely accounted for by social and cultural

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<sup>28</sup> Melissa Raphael, *Introducing Thealogy*, pp 55-56.

<sup>29</sup> Melissa Raphael, *Introducing Thealogy* p. 56.

codes, contends Orsi. In Mary's company the devout enter a relationship with a supernatural figure of great power and compassion, who bends to them and attends to their needs and fears. What is real about the Marian event is the presence of the supernatural in relationship with humans and the power of the needs, fears, desires, and imaginings, conscious and unconscious.<sup>30</sup> In the same way presence of the Goddess brings hope and peace to those who experience her. As well as the Virgin Mary, we can see that the Goddess can be understood to merge with saints and other religious figures. Take for example the Celtic saint Bride (or Brigid) at Glastonbury who, Marion Bowman argues, exemplifies certain characteristics of both contemporary spirituality and vernacular religion and can ride the tide of changes in spiritual focus and ethos.<sup>31</sup>

Meanwhile studies of Santa Muerte, a marginalised Mexican folk saint, depicted as 'a tall, skeletal, reaperesque and non-judgemental Angel of Death' can also be seen as appropriation of Virgin Mary iconology by believers in South and Central America. Like the Virgin Mary – and the Goddess – she is a religious phenomenon who transcends borders. More importantly, because Santa Muerte is not recognised by the established Church, devotees feel they can request certain deeds they would not ask a consecrated saint like Mary.<sup>32</sup> Similarly, those who worship the Goddess have a deep personal relationship with her, believing that she is overtly powerful and present in the real world, helping those who need her. Also, shrines and icons are as important to those who worship the Goddess as they are to those who are deeply devoted to Santa Muerte or the Virgin Mary. So, we can see that Orsi's notions of radical presence in terms of Marian apparitions can be applied across several

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<sup>30</sup> Robert A Orsi, 'Abundant History: Marian Apparitions as Alternative Modernity', pp. 20-22.

<sup>31</sup> Marion Bowman, 'Restoring/Restorying Arthur and Brigid: Vernacular Religion and Contemporary Spirituality in Glastonbury' in *Vernacular Religion in Everyday Life: Expressions of Belief*, ed. Marion Bowman and Ulo Valk (Sheffield: Equinox Publishing Ltd, 2012), p. 344.

<sup>32</sup> Kathryn Louis McDonald, '*Santa Muerte and the Politics of Malleability: The Angel of Death in Mexico City*', MA Thesis, The University of Texas at Austin (2016); See also Josiern Janssen, '*La Santa Muerte as a Site of Encounter Between the Licit and Illicit, A Religious Perspective in Border Studies*', MA Thesis, Radboud University Nijmegen (2016). [Both accessed 2 March 2022].

contexts. For the purposes of this study, Orsi allows us to bring the real presence of the Goddess as experienced at Greenham and elsewhere fully into the academic discourse.

Furthermore, as in many situations when emotions run high and there is a sense of collective activism for or against a common cause, situations can occur that appear to be directly related to the notion of affect. In the case of anti-nuclear weapons and environmental activism, this seems to manifest itself through grief. Therefore, in addition to Orsi's work on presence, I have also researched the emotion of grief in relation to affect, through the work of Donovan O Schaefer, among others. Here affect could be understood in terms of the waves of energy that move through activists in constant ebb and flow underpinned by a sense of urgency and grief among Goddess feminists at Greenham and in XR. Grief fires action, stimulates movement, and is transmitted from one activist to another during mass actions. It can be recognised as the propulsive elements of thought, sensation, feeling, and action, that are not necessarily captured by language or 'consciousness', maintains Schaefer. Felt experiences like affect are pieces of our personhood. At the emotional level, affects are the flexible architecture of our animal lifeways, the experimental shapes that herd together and carry religion on their backs.<sup>33</sup> Thus, there are many similarities between grief as an affect at Greenham and among the activists in XR – most notably the deployment of bodies as powerful blockades, using affect as 'non-violent action'.

Forty years later, the activists in XR are experiencing affect when they 'mourn' the impending loss of the earth through climate change. They too are using their bodies in non-violent blockades, chaining themselves to railings or super-gluing themselves to pavements. Grief marches feature chanting and marching to music accompanied by XR drummers, everyone moving in the same way

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<sup>33</sup>Donovan O Schaefer, *Religious Affects: Animality, Evolution, and Power* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015), p. 24.

to the same rhythm. Their movement adds an element of affect to the demonstrations, with the semantics of grief being triggered by the affect of grief, and the affect of grief becoming collectively embodied during the marches. I will examine the notions of presence, especially in relation to the Goddess, and the affect of grief throughout this research. This will be based upon discussions I have had with my informants, and throughout I will examine and relate, in their own words, their understanding of exactly what they were encountering, feeling, and experiencing as they engaged in their activism.

### Challenges faced

Setting out on my research project, I was prepared for a probable compromise between what was required of me academically, what was expected of me by my informants, and what I wanted to express as a woman with a certain view of the social world and the life I have lived. I was not prepared, however, for the problems thrown into my path in the wake of Coronavirus (Covid 19), which hit the world in the spring of 2020.

From the outset, I was mindful that as my investigation progressed, it might be appropriate to rethink my data gathering and analysis in the light of what my interviewees were telling me. However, the advent of Covid-19 in Britain, and the subsequent lockdowns, meant 'in the same room' field work was completely out of the question due to social distancing and mitigation restrictions. My intention had always been to conduct face-to-face interviews and realising this was now impossible for the foreseeable future, I spent my time reading and researching in preparation for the time when interviews could be conducted. During this interlude I also undertook the mandatory M401/M402 modules.

Reading and researching Goddess feminism, Greenham Common women's peace camp and XR, together with other green activism, took up most of the first year of my Masters' study. Apart from

the mandatory modules, very little of my thesis had been written and I was aware that I needed to start interviewing informants. It was at this point that I accepted that compromise had become a necessity. Although, in the early summer of 2021, I met up with two Goddess feminists - one in XR and the other who had been at Greenham and was now an XR activist - who were happy to speak face-to-face, it became apparent that further 'in person' meetings were unlikely to be possible. I had a list of women who were willing to speak to me about their experiences at Greenham or in XR, and when planning these interviews, I always intended they would be face-to-face encounters. Now, I had to reluctantly accept that the practicalities of doing these interviews face-to-face were a remote possibility. When planning interviews, I had not considered that on-going problems with Covid-19 meant most of my informants would not be comfortable with face-to-face meetings. Added to that was another unconsidered fact, that Greenham women and many XR activists were scattered across the United Kingdom, making face-to-face interviewing difficult to achieve and thus, largely unrealistic.

The next hurdle to be tackled – particularly among the older Goddess feminists – was the difficulty of interviewing via Zoom as well as ensuring each informant signed the Informed Consent Form required by the University of Gloucestershire. While all these women owned mobile phones, several of them did not have fixed addresses and some found it difficult to get internet connection. I eventually posted consent forms to each informant, many to the addresses of friends or family. It sometimes took several weeks for the forms to be returned, but I now have a signed consent form for each informant. Notwithstanding numerous difficulties, Zoom meetings were achieved despite fragile internet connections. Therefore, I embarked upon the interviews for my research confident that, as a mature student, my background, and the life I had lived, would inform my research and original methodology.



Returning to the question posed by Maxine Birch – for whom was I conducting my research? I contemplated whether my work would provide nostalgia for the now ageing Goddess feminists who were at Greenham Common in the nineteen-eighties? Would it inspire young feminists in XR to engage with their feminist heritage and find out more about the trail-blazing women like the Suffragettes, who had gone before? Would it make the public aware that the actions of women demonstrating against ‘the system’ in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries were, and are, good for all humankind and the protection of civilisation and planet Earth? These questions will be considered in a subsequent chapter ‘Reflection’.

Goddess feminism, like many other contemporary social and political movements, challenges all social and political institutions founded on dominance and oppression. The problem is not just patriarchy, but the ‘power-over’ principle dominant in Western society which permeates our social, economic, and religious institutions, informs our attitudes towards and treatment of ethnic groups and cultures, shapes relationships between men and women, and determines our attitude to the natural world.<sup>34</sup> I am hoping that my research will be a useful addition to the history of spiritual feminist strategies of resistance in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

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<sup>34</sup> Kathryn Rountree, ‘The Politics of the Goddess: Feminist Spirituality and the Essentialism Debate’ in *Social Analysis: The International Journal of Anthropology*, 43:2 (1999), p. 146. <https://www.jstor.com/stable/23166525> [Accessed 18 June 2020].

## LITERATURE REVIEW

*“Thealogy is not founded upon a body of authoritative and sacred texts...Most [Goddess feminists] do not so much theorise the Goddess but experience her more immediately in themselves and the natural environment.”* – Melissa Raphael in ‘Introducing Thealogy: Discourse on the Goddess’.<sup>35</sup>

To answer the question: ‘Have the values and beliefs of the Goddess movement that formed the spiritual foundation of the Greenham Common women’s peace camp informed women’s climate change activism in the contemporary Extinction Rebellion movement?’, I have divided my research into three chapters, each with the Goddess at its centre.

There is an enormous amount of academic literature on Goddess feminism, (for example Rountree 1999, Spretnak 1982, Ursula King 1995, Mary Daly 1991); and Greenham Common women’s peace camp (Petitt 2006, Drew 2021, and Rowbotham 1989), which provided useful background information and influenced my writing. While important and informative, these titles have been considered but not drawn upon directly in my thesis. Quite a lot has been written also on Extinction Rebellion (XR), but not in relation to spirituality and religion. Thus, in many ways I am presenting an innovative approach and theme in respect of contemporary research in this area.

### *Ethnography and the questions of Presence, Affect and Grief*

My approach to ethnographical field research was shaped mainly by Charlotte Aul Davies (2008), John Van Maanen (2011) and Gavin Flood (1999). The reflexive ethnographic approach was ideally suited to my research because it allowed me to gather information from Goddess feminists across four decades and examine it to see if I could spot any recurring patterns, without using statistical analysis. This also allowed for the rich testimony of my informants to shed light upon the diversity of lived experience over many years. Van Maanen made me aware that I would be decoding one

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<sup>35</sup> Melissa Raphael: *Introducing Thealogy*, p. 10.

culture while recording it for another – and more importantly that it was the written report that must represent the culture, not the fieldwork itself.<sup>36</sup> However, I was confident that as a mature woman, my background, and the life I have lived would shape the way I talked to my informants and the way in which they responded to me.

Aul Davies maintains that reflexivity is a process of self-reference, with awareness of one's background, contexts and predilections affecting the way we do research, while Flood asserts that without some degree of reflexivity, any research is blind and without purpose.<sup>37</sup> Aul Davies stresses the importance of researchers building an understanding of the people they are studying,<sup>38</sup> and my cultural knowledge of Goddess feminism proved to be invaluable when I was interviewing my informants. The most important thing was that we 'spoke the same language' and I understood their jargon and colloquialisms. This put them at ease, and I was quickly accepted as a friend. Thus, the ethnographic approach perfectly fitted my need to explore the questions of presence, affect and grief because it allowed a more intimate, less formal, and less self-conscious relationship with my informants, which encouraged them to speak, knowing I understood their culture.

Framing and informing the shape of my research and its central themes, was exploration of Robert A Orsi's theory of real presence and Donovan O Schaefer's work on the emotion of grief in relation to affect, which I was able to link to Goddess feminists both at Greenham and in XR.

The studies I found most informative concerning presence were three by Orsi, each considering radical presence or 'abundant' events in the Roman Catholic Church. In 'Abundant History', (2009), Orsi explores the experience of apparitions of the Virgin Mary and the importance of shrines to

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<sup>36</sup> John Van Maanen, *Tales of the Field: On Writing Ethnography* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), pp. xii and 4.

<sup>37</sup> Gavin Flood, *Beyond Phenomenology: Rethinking the Study of Religion* (London: Cassell, 1999), p. 35.

<sup>38</sup> Charlotte Aul Davies, *Reflexive Ethnography*, p. 4.

believers; while in 'Can 2 + 2 = 5' (2007), he investigates unexplained religious experiences and responses to objects such as the Host in the Eucharist, senses of perception, and relationships with special beings such as the Virgin Mary. He stresses that abundant events are characterised by aspects of the human imagination that cannot be accounted for by social and cultural codes – an experience of *déjà vu* or uncanny awareness. Perhaps the most pertinent of the three was 'The Problem of the Holy' (2013) where Orsi explains that holy figures such as Jesus or the Virgin Mary are as real to believers as other people around them. They do not 'believe in' Jesus or Mary. These holy figures are present to them and have a life of their own within the lives of devotees.

It was not difficult to translate Orsi's methodological approaches to the Virgin Mary, to the study of the Goddess, demonstrating that the Goddess is very real to those who experience and worship her. All the Goddess feminists I interviewed had utter belief and unquestionable faith in their personal relationship with the Goddess and their experience of an unseen 'felt presence' which they absolutely knew were not dreams or delusions. Thus, Orsi's extensive work on presence has been an important element of my research and my understanding of real presence.

Alongside my exploration of Orsi's work on presence, ran the emotion of grief in relation to affect through the work of Donovan O Schaefer 'Religious Affects: Animality, Evolution and Power' (2015), and Jenna Supp-Montgomery's 'Affect and the Study of Religion' (2015) among others.

Schaefer demonstrates that Affect theory is about showing the multi-directional vectors of influence between embodied emotions and politics, not about consigning emotions to a private domain. The relationship between affect and power moves bodies, while the compulsions of affect are better understood as addictions, as thick passions for bodies, objects, and relationships. Supp-Montgomery maintains that while emotion and affect appear to be similar, there is a difference between emotion as a state of feeling (affection) and affect, the wave of energy that move through

and among bodies in constant ebb and flow. It is the constant movement between coming together and falling apart that constitutes any mode of being. Acknowledging the waves of energy that move through activists in constant ebb and flow, underpinned by a sense of urgency and grief, was an important part of my research. The work of Supp-Montgomery in particular, aided my understanding of the grief for humankind and the planet, which was transmitted from one activist to another during mass actions.

### Thealogy and the Goddess

An understanding of Goddess feminism must commence by understanding the difference between Thealogy (*Thea* meaning Goddess) and Theology (*Theo* meaning God). The term Thealogy, said to have been coined by Canadian scholar Naomi Goldenberg in the late nineteen-seventies, has empowered a spiritual/political paradigm shift now known as Goddess feminism.<sup>39</sup>

The first chapter of my research is based on the re-birth of Goddess religion and how not only Pagan women, but also those in the Abrahamic religions of Christianity and Judaism, have embraced Goddess feminism. In addition to Raphael, *Introducing Thealogy: Discourse on the Goddess* (1999) and *Thealogy and Embodiment: The Post-Patriarchal Reconstruction of Female Sacrality* (2006), I also found Carol C Christ's *Rebirth of the Goddess: Finding Meaning in Feminist Spirituality* (1997) provided a succinct understanding of the ethos of Goddess feminism, while Christ's *Laughter of Aphrodite* (1987) gave a powerful interpretation and celebration of women's spiritual experiences. Christ described the re-emergence of the Goddess in western cultures as 'one of the most unexpected developments of the twentieth-century'.<sup>40</sup>

This thesis has also been informed by the writings of Starhawk, *The Spiral Dance* (1989), which reveals the ways Goddess feminism and the practice of ritual have developed and adapted in the

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<sup>39</sup> Melissa Raphael, *Introducing Thealogy*, p 9.

<sup>40</sup> Carol P Christ, *Rebirth of the Goddess*, p. xii.

face of an ever-changing world. Her explanation of Witchcraft, the creation of sacred spaces, and the principles of unity, were crucial to my understanding of the essence of Goddess feminism. Meanwhile, *The Great Cosmic Mother* (1987), Monica Sjoo and Barbara Mor's seminal survey of the place of the Goddess in the historical context, allowed me to formulate how patriarchy has come to dominate human society and culture in ways that could be seen to be ultimately destructive - something that was palpably understood by the women at Greenham Common peace camp. A critical look at women's experience of patriarchy is also explored by Ursula King, *Women and Spirituality* (1993), and this led me to question to what extent androcentric thinking is inherent in all religious beliefs and practices and encouraged me to further investigate patriarchy in XR. These key sources have contributed greatly to my understanding of the Goddess and how she is experienced and worshipped.

### [The Greenham women](#)

Greenham Common women's peace camp is the focus of Chapter Two. Set up in the late summer of nineteen-eighty-one in protest at the siting of ninety-six Cruise missiles with nuclear warheads at the United States Airforce (USAF) base as a deterrent against the Soviet Union, the peace camp was supported by Swedish artist Monica Sjoo and American Witch, ecofeminist and activist Starhawk. There are numerous books, papers, and articles on Greenham and the women who lived there for the best part of two decades. Among the volumes I found most compelling were Beth Junor's *Greenham Common Women's Peace Camp* (1995), *The Road to Greenham Common* by Jill Liddington (1980), and *Out of the Darkness: Greenham Voices 1981-2000* by Kate Kerrow and Rebecca Mordan (2021). Many of these have been written and published by the activists who made Greenham their home, giving a first-hand taste of day-to-day life in graphic detail along with their regular confrontation with the police, USAF base personnel, bailiffs, and the courts. While these narratives of life at the peace camp were useful background reading, there was little mention of

Goddess feminism. However, they provided a rich experiential account of events, which, while understandably and unavoidably partial, laid an important ethnographical foundation for my research. Once again, I relied on Melissa Raphael's excellent knowledge of Goddess feminism to provide background details to spirituality at Greenham, and this was found in *Introducing Thealogy* (1999) and *Thealogy and Embodiment* (1996), which emphasised the reality of the Goddess to those who experienced and worshipped her, underlining Robert A Orsi's theory of real presence.<sup>41</sup> However, the most informative book (and the one I used most frequently) was Sasha Roseneil's *Disarming Patriarchy: Feminism and Political Action at Greenham* (1995). Roseneil left school as a teenager to live at Greenham and her in-depth 'insider' knowledge of the peace camp and its inhabitants did a great deal to inform my own writing. Her views on spirituality, feminism, politics, patriarchy, and militarism added rich layers to my research.

In addition to the plethora of literature about Greenham, there is an abundance of scholarly texts and academic papers giving valuable information about Goddess feminism (with the emphasis on Second and Third Wave feminism), the continuing battle for women's rights and the fight against patriarchy from the nineteen-eighties onwards. The most enlightening of these include Margaret L Laware's invaluable *Circling the Missiles and Staining Them Red* (2004), *Spirituality and Social Change at Greenham Common Peace Camp* by Christina Welch (2010), and two articles by Shai Feraro – *Invoking Hecate at the Women's Peace Camp* (2013) and his case study of Monica Sjoo *God Giving Birth – Connecting British Wicca with Radical Feminism and Spirituality during the 1970s-1980s* (2016). Together with the testimonies of my informants, (see Appendices) I gathered a wealth of knowledge about feminism and the values and spiritual beliefs of those fighting for the survival of humanity, nature, and the Earth.

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<sup>41</sup> Robert A Orsi, 'When 2 + 2 = 5: pp. 34-43.

## Extinction Rebellion

Chapter Three investigates Goddess feminism among the climate change activists in XR and here I found a notable lacuna: while there are papers and books on climate change and about XR, I could find none with reference to spirituality, religion, or Goddess feminism. In his article 'Religion and climate change: varieties in viewpoints and practices', Randolph Haluza-Delay observes that little social research has focused specifically on the interaction of religious bodies and human-induced climate change, noting: "Nature-orientated spirituality...has little or no organised structure compared with the extensively organised Christian denominations."<sup>42</sup>

Among the more informative papers were Diana Stuart's 'Radical Hope: Truth, Virtue, and Hope for What is Left in Extinction Rebellion' (2020), which details not only the hopelessness of loss felt by activists but also an emerging new hope for saving what can still be saved; and 'The Regenerative Culture of Extinction Rebellion: Self-care, People care, Planet care' by Emily Westwell and Josh Bunting (2020), which explains that self-care in activist movements is important to prevent burn-out, concurring with the testimony given by one of my informants on XR's Regenerative Culture group. Among other academic writing on climate change activism were Laurence L Delina et al, 'Strengthening the climate action movement: strategies of behaviour' (2015); Peter North, 'The politics of climate change activism in the UK: a social movement' (2011); Brian Doherty, 'Environment and direction action in Manchester, Oxford and North Wales: A protest event analysis' (2007); Matthew Abrahams, 'The Buddhists of Extinction Rebellion' (2019) and Stephen Axon, 'Warning: Extinction Ahead! Theorizing the Spatial Disruption and place Contestation of Climate Justice Activism' (2019). None of these have been drawn upon in my work.

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<sup>42</sup> Randolph Haluza-Delay, 'Religion and climate change: varieties in viewpoints and practices' in *Wiley Interdisciplinary Reviews: Climate Change* 5:2, 2004).



However, the information about XR that I found most useful, has come from its own publication *This Is Not A Drill: An Extinction Rebellion Handbook* (2019), together with George McKay's *Senseless Acts of Beauty* (1996), which gives vivid insider accounts of various environmental movements throughout the UK. McKay shows that the legacy of the hippies of the nineteen-sixties and the punks of the nineteen-seventies have been transformed into today's 'cultures of resistance' – including direct action protests, networks, and movements of every kind. This book offers an important guide to understanding the wider counter-cultural world.

While *This Is Not A Drill* is a fruitful (albeit subjective) source of information about XR, once again there is no mention of Goddess feminism in its ranks. Therefore, I have relied heavily on the testimonies my informants regarding Goddess feminism among XR activists (see Appendices). The consensus was that Goddess feminism in XR has gone 'underground' and the implicit reason for this was 'patriarchy'. Maybe unsurprisingly, those who were most outspoken about patriarchy in XR were the women who agreed to be interviewed on the understanding that they would remain completely anonymous.

There are also writings on the wider context of feminism, activism and green spirituality that have informed and enriched my research. These include Laurel Zwissler's book *Religious, Feminist Activist* (2018) which investigates women who believe their activism is religiously motivated social justice. Her reports of activists' fights with the police on the one hand and community support on the other, were resonant of experiences among some of the XR activists I interviewed. A deep insight into 'Green' religion is given by Bron Taylor in *Dark Green Religion: Nature Spirituality and the Planetary Future* (2009), which considers the boundaries of different religions and offers an insight into how relating to nature can offer a spirituality previously only associated with established religions. Also informative was *For the Wild* (2017), where Sarah M Pike considers the way grief is

an overwhelming sense of sadness and loss, which she terms 'rites of grief and mourning' - which can be seen in activism at Greenham Common and in the XR grief marches.

The wellbeing of humanity and the Earth are at the heart of protests by the Goddess feminists of Greenham and XR. Having backed up my research of Goddess feminism across four decades by interviewing Goddess feminists who have taken an active part in both protest movements, I now go on to present the main body of the work featuring the voices of the Goddess feminists who crucially form the basis of my research. The following three chapters will consider the Rebirth of the Goddess and the rise of modern feminism; The Goddess at Greenham Common women's peace camp; and The Goddess among the feminist activists in XR.

## CHAPTER ONE – Rebirth of The Goddess

*“The Goddess encourages a woman to know her will, to believe her will is valid, and to believe her will can be achieved in the world. Three powers traditionally denied to her in patriarchy” – Carol P Christ in ‘Laughter of Aphrodite’* <sup>43</sup>

In this chapter I will outline my contention that worship of the Goddess, seemingly eliminated thousands of years ago by patriarchy and further suppressed by Christianity,<sup>44</sup> has re-emerged to give women not only the freedom to be themselves, but also to fight against the age-old culture based on a gender binary and hierarchy that gives privilege to the masculine, elevating all men over women.<sup>45</sup> I will consider the rise of modern feminism and the contemporary Goddess movement, which ushered in the revived vocation of priestess and the vivid experience of real presence. I will also introduce the importance of the Goddess to the women at Greenham Common women’s peace camp in the nineteen-eighties and examine to what extent this has also been the case for women who, four decades later, engaged in activism with Extinction Rebellion (XR). Both the peace camp and XR will be discussed comprehensively in later chapters.

### 1.1 History and culture

The rebirth of Goddess religion in the western cultures of Europe, America and Australasia saw hundreds of thousands of women (and an increasing number of men) brought up in the Abrahamic religions, re-discovering the language, symbols, and rituals of the Goddess, which appeared to have laid dormant since it was outlawed by Roman emperors in the fourth century AD. However, American priestess, witch, and activist Starhawk argues that Goddess religion simply went

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<sup>43</sup> Carol P Christ, *Laughter of Aphrodite: Reflections on a Journey to the Goddess* (New York: HarperCollins, 1988) p. 128.

<sup>44</sup> Bart D Ehrman, *The Triumph of Christianity: How a Forbidden Religion Swept the World* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2018), pp. 4-12.

<sup>45</sup> Carol Gilligan and Naomi Snider, *Why Does Patriarchy Persist?* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2018), p. 6.

underground. Some of the old traditions, particularly those connected with birth, death, and earth fertility rituals, were preserved, and continue to this day, sometimes without change, sometimes assimilated.<sup>46</sup> Nevertheless, posits Carol P Christ, the rebirth of the Goddess was one of the most unexpected developments of the late twentieth century:

*“The return of the Goddess inspires us to hope that we can heal the deep rifts between women and men, Man and nature, and between God and the world, that have shaped our western view of reality for too long.”<sup>47</sup>*

The contemporary Goddess movement is only one tradition to have emerged from the evolution of the modern Pagan movement in Britain which can be directly traced back to the mid-twentieth century (Gerald Brosseau Gardner is credited with founding British Wicca in the nineteen-forties), but it draws its spiritual heritage from far earlier sources. For thousands of years, the Goddess and other female deities were adored as healers, suppliers of wisdom and creators of the earth.<sup>48</sup> From the earliest times women have been witches, *wicce* - the ‘wise ones’ - priestesses, diviners, midwives, poets, healers, and singers of songs of power, asserts Starhawk:

*“Women-centred culture, based on the worship of the Great Goddess, underlies the beginnings of all civilisations. The old religion of witchcraft before Christianity, was an earth-centred, nature-orientated worship that venerated the Goddess as the source of life.”<sup>49</sup>*

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<sup>46</sup> Starhawk, ‘Witchcraft and Women’s Culture’ p. 261. See also Marija Gimbutas, *The Language of the Goddess* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1989), p. 318.

<sup>47</sup> Carol P Christ, *Rebirth of the Goddess*, Preface xiii.

<sup>48</sup> Sian Lee Reid and Shelley Tsivia Rabinovitch, ‘Witches, Wiccans and Neo-Pagans’ in *The New Oxford Handbook of New Religious Movements* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p 514.

<sup>49</sup> Starhawk, ‘Witchcraft and Women’s Culture’ in *Womanspirit Rising: A Feminist Reader in Religion*, ed. Carol P Christ and Judith Plastow (New York: HarperOne, 1992) pp. 260-261.

With the advent of Christianity, many people held to their old ways and the two faiths co-existed peacefully throughout the twelfth and thirteenth centuries with some following both religions. However, during the following centuries, those who worshipped the Goddess were perceived to be witches, and the Christian Church began a campaign of persecution, torture and death, taking the lives of an estimated nine million people, perhaps eighty percent of whom were women.<sup>50</sup> The Church adhered strictly to biblical texts, among them Exodus 22:18 '*Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live*'.<sup>51</sup> Christianity heralded a new language of female subordination with women becoming Other.<sup>52</sup> Religious rhetoric assumed that men formed the legitimate body of the community, and the age-old wisdom of women became associated with darkness and death.<sup>53</sup> As Goddess religion faded, knowledge of its heritage and history dimmed and was eventually forgotten, along with the ancient roles of women as leaders, teachers and healers, contends Starhawk. "Mother Goddess slept, leaving the world to the less than gentle rule of the God-Father."<sup>54</sup>

Goddess feminists believe the world is now emerging from thousands of years of patriarchal conditioning – a mindset and culture which resulted in women becoming marginalised and valued primarily for their ability to bear sons.<sup>55</sup> Starhawk claims women have now awakened to their ancient power, and in the process discovered the 'old religion', reclaimed the word 'Witch' and with it some of their lost culture. One of the most powerful symbols of the Goddess is the moon, which is linked to women's bodily cycles of monthly bleeding, fertility, and giving birth. It also reflects the three stages in women's lives – the new moon is the Maiden; the full moon is the Mature Woman;

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<sup>50</sup> Starhawk, 'Witchcraft and Women's Culture', p. 261.

<sup>51</sup> *The Bible*, St James Version.

<sup>52</sup> Rosemary Radford Ruther, 'Motherearth and the Megamachine: A Theology of Liberation in a Feminine, Somatic and Ecological Perspective', in *Womanspirit Rising: A Feminist Reader in Religion*, ed. Carol P Christ and Judith Plaskow (New York: HarperOne, 1992), pp. 46-48.

<sup>53</sup> Sallie McFague, *Metaphorical Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982), p. 159.

<sup>54</sup> Starhawk, 'Witchcraft and Women's Culture', p. 262.

<sup>55</sup> Tanishka, *Goddess Wisdom* (London: Hay House, 2017), p. 5.

and the Waning Moon the Crone – which help to better understand and gracefully accept the cycles of birth and death.<sup>56</sup> Melissa Raphael argues that the return of the Goddess is understood in quasi-eschatological terms as the resurrection of a divine presence that is not salvific in the classical sense of redeeming humanity from a divine punishment but is certainly a sign that life is open to regeneration.<sup>57</sup>

Masculine institutions and concepts of God had subdued the earth, posits Raphael. These concepts and institutions held women, nature, and the female divine captive to an ideology that enslaved and exhausted their reproductivity in His name. She argues that the name of God the Father had vandalised the face of the earth: it had been carved into rocks and those rocks had been turned into books about men for men. She points out that while not all women who celebrate the Goddess are radical feminists, their elective spiritual identity follows a radical feminists' trajectory. Radical feminism rejected liberal feminism's campaign for equal rights as forcing women to be women on men's terms.<sup>58</sup> To be 'imitation men' would only partially liberate women. A compromise with patriarchy would be more damaging to women's integrity than no liberation at all.<sup>59</sup> Raphael maintains that Goddess feminists were less concerned to establish a new religion on the back of an old one, than to retrieve a 'self', not a divinity, so old that it was effectively a new one. The Goddess movement provided a political reading to pre-history that gave women access to a new/old biophilic power.<sup>60</sup> The Goddess liberated women with a newly regained self-worth and freedom from

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<sup>56</sup> Starhawk, *The Spiral Dance: A Rebirth of the Ancient Religion of the Great Goddess* (New York: HarperOne, 1999), p. 53.

<sup>57</sup> Melissa Raphael, *Theology and Embodiment: The Post-Patriarchal Reconstruction of Female Sacrality* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press), p. 227.

<sup>58</sup> Melissa Raphael, *Religion, Feminism and Idoloclasm: Being and Becoming in the Women's Liberation Movement* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2021) p. 209.

<sup>59</sup> Shulamith Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution* (New York: Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux, 2003), p. 137.

<sup>60</sup> Melissa Raphael, *Religion, Feminism, and Idoloclasm*, p. 212.

dependence on the traditional masculine offices of the sacred.<sup>61</sup> It became increasingly obvious as I spoke to my informants that the Goddess had liberated them and given them the power to be themselves. They were free to determine their own lives.

The simplest and most basic meaning of the Goddess, explains Christ, is the acknowledgement of the legitimacy of female power as beneficent and independent:

*“Women are saying they will no longer look to men or male figures as saviours...This meaning of the Goddess stands in sharp contrast to the paradigms of female dependence on men that have predominated in Western religions and culture.”<sup>62</sup>*

Asphodel Long, feminist scholar and acknowledged Grandmother of the British Goddess movement, who died in two-thousand-and-five, maintained: “After the Goddess, no God, messiah, priest, theologian, father, or husband, could mediate or determine a woman’s idea of her own self.”<sup>63</sup>

The Goddess has the power to transform deeply held attitudes and beliefs, argues Christ. “Women who worship the Goddess say she has made them more comfortable in accepting their own power and the power of other women. She has made them feel confident about eventual feminist success and is a symbol that points to the rooting of feminism in the nature of being.”<sup>64</sup> Christ asserts: “The Goddess encourages a woman to know her will, to believe her will is valid, and to believe her will can be achieved in the world. Three powers traditionally denied to her in patriarchy.”<sup>65</sup>

Some religious feminists who find Goddess religion a unique experience, also acknowledge the innate pull of their traditional Judeo-Christian roots and are reluctant to ‘give up God’ entirely,

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<sup>61</sup> Melissa Raphael, *Religion, Feminism and Idoloclasm*, p. 212.

<sup>62</sup> Carol P Christ, ‘Why Women Need the Goddess: Phenomenological, Psychological and Political Reflections’ in *Womanspirit Rising: A Feminist Reader in Religion*, p. 277.

<sup>63</sup> Asphodel Long, ‘The Goddess Movement in Britain Today’ in *Feminist Theology*, 5 (1994), p, 15.

<sup>64</sup> Carol P Christ, *Laughter of Aphrodite* p. 157.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.* p. 128.

suggests Gordon Kaufman.<sup>66</sup> Nevertheless, post-Christian feminists believe that reformist feminist attempts to remain within the Christian or Jewish fold were politically and psychologically futile. Jane Caputi asserts: The Goddess is returning... and this unpreventable event is occurring despite the degree to which patriarchal sciences and religions have tried to prevent it'.<sup>67</sup>

Affirmation that the Goddess had, indeed, returned was underlined by many of my informants, who have a personal relationship with her, illustrating Orsi's theory of presence. Goddess priestess Kathy has absolutely no doubt that she was in service to the Goddess thousands of years ago, and that men and women are once again being called to serve her. "She is calling us to incarnate again, and we are responding." Kathy is adamant that the Goddess brings hope, peace and comfort to the increasing number of devotees who experience her presence. [See Appendices: Informant 4].

This knowledge of presence is encapsulated by Starhawk's affirmation of the life experience of many women when she says of the Goddess:

*"When I feel weak, she is someone who can help and protect me. When I feel strong, she is the symbol of my own power. At other times I feel her as the natural energy in my body and the world."*<sup>68</sup>

## 1.2 Thealogy v Theology

Systematic reflections on the Goddess are called Thealogy, denoting the female discourse on Thea (the Goddess) instead of Theo (God), distinguishing it from the traditional Christian and Jewish Theology.

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<sup>66</sup> Gordon Kaufman, *God the Problem* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972).

<sup>67</sup> Jane Caputi, *Gossips, Gorgons, and Crones: The Fates of the Earth* (Santa Fe: Bear & Co, 1993), p. 281.

<sup>68</sup> Carol P Christ, 'Why Women Need the Goddess', pp. 278-279. Christ is reporting a personal communication from Starhawk.



However, I would suggest that there are interesting divisions within Theology, bringing it in some ways closer to Theology. Orsi contends that while Catholics believe that Christ is present in the consecrated elements of the Mass (as well as in relics, statues, movements and gestures of bodies, oils, and water), Protestantism is a religion of absence, where God is not available by touch, taste, sound, or sight. Drained of presence, religious experience for Protestants is private and distinctly apart from other areas of life.<sup>69</sup> The divide between presence and absence, between the literal and the metaphorical, between the supernatural and the natural, defines the modern world, posits Orsi.<sup>70</sup> On the other hand, the Catholic experience of presence – of absolutely knowing that the Virgin Mary, or a saint is present and supporting them – can be seen in Theology and the experiences of Goddess feminists, who acknowledge the presence of the Goddess as their constant companion and comforter. Nevertheless, despite this similarity, the Abrahamic religions, from their early origins, have been male dominated.

With the institutionalisation of religious roles and functions, both sacred and secular authority came to rest with men, and most religious functions became a male prerogative almost everywhere, maintains Ursula King.<sup>71</sup> From the earliest days of Christianity male theologians adopted a defective anthropology, largely based on Aristotle's wrong understanding of women as being incomplete males, with woman seen as subordinate to man in the order of creation.<sup>72</sup> However, in the order of Christian redemption, the spiritual equivalence of man and woman has always been taught and affirmed as an article of faith. King quotes a New Testament passage in the Letter to the Galatians: *'There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor foe, there is neither male nor female; for*

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<sup>69</sup> Robert A Orsi, 'Abundant History: Marian Apparitions As Alternative Modernity' in *Historically Speaking*, (2008), p. 13. See also: Robert A Orsi, 'Belief' in *Key Terms in Material Religion*, ed S Brent Plate (London: Bloomsbury, 2015).

<sup>70</sup> Robert A Orsi, 'When 2 + 2 =5', p. 35.

<sup>71</sup> Ursula King, *Women and Spirituality: Voices of Protest and Promise* (Basingstoke: The MacMillan Press Ltd, 1993), p. 39.

<sup>72</sup> Aristotle, *Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp. 7-13.

*you are all one in Christ Jesus' (Gal 3:28)*. But she points out that this statement of equivalence must be set against many other biblical passages which express the subordination of women.<sup>73</sup> These include the Old Testament chapter which has been interpreted as blaming not only Eve but all women for Adam's Fall from Grace in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3), and many of the Epistles of St Paul which resulted in women having a subordinate position to men. Paul had harsh views on the subservience of women (see 1 Timothy 2: 9-14; 1 Corinthians 14:34-35) and notably Ephesians 5:22-23 and Colossians 3:18 where St Paul tells women: "*Wives submit to your husbands as it is fit in the Lord.*"<sup>74</sup>

The domination of men over women was the first form of domination accomplished in human history and the one which made all others possible, asserts Valerie Saiving. She contends that religious feminism is unanimous in arguing that androcentric studies of religion are skewed by the scholar's life-long acclimatisation to an academic culture in which only masculine methods, and the values which form them, are considered objective and normative. Goddess feminism has broken away from the old androcentric ways which still hold sway in Abrahamic traditions. In Theology, female reproductivity makes women divine without transcending them. The religious term 'Goddess' is often used to indicate that the source of female sacral energy is identical with, and transcendent to, the immanent in all that is alive.<sup>75</sup> This has heralded an age of presence, with the Goddess being present to all who experience her, in the same way the Virgin Mary or the saints are present to Catholics.

Christ refers to Naomi Goldenberg's claim that a simple, basic, and fundamental lie must be maintained for patriarchy to function – that 'the father is the only true parent and whatever the

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<sup>73</sup> Ursula King, *Women and Spirituality*, p. 47.

<sup>74</sup> *The Bible*, St James Version.

<sup>75</sup> Valerie Saiving, 'Androcentrism in Religious Studies' in *Journal of Religion*, 56 (1976), pp. 177-179.

father does is justified because he is the father'. Goldenberg argues that the lie of patriarchy is contrary to fact and experience. Everyone knows that it is the mother who gives birth. But the patriarchal lie is believed because it is 'performed, repeated, enacted, read, told, sung, and taught' again and again in so many contexts that we finally accept it as true.<sup>76</sup>

Therefore, rediscovery of the Goddess who looks at the divine through a feminine lens, has produced a vibrant Goddess Thealogy, contends King.<sup>77</sup> Christ postulates that this means rethinking the most-deeply held assumptions of our culture. Modern feminist criticism of patriarchal religion has argued that the only authority allowed to women has been the domestic and the maternal.<sup>78</sup> Goddess feminists believe the Goddess is a counterweight against thousands of years of cross-cultural male dominance.<sup>79</sup> The Goddess, revered as Great Mother, cannot be separated from motherhood, and the act of human motherhood is to mirror the cosmic generativity of the Goddess.<sup>80</sup> Thus, the rebirth of the Goddess reintroduces the presence of the divine into everyday life, much in the same way that the notion of the divine playing a part in human affairs was very much part of the pre-Christian understanding of the relationship between the gods and goddesses in Hellenistic and Roman life in the western world.

### 1.3 Breaking waves

Modern feminism began as a political economic and social struggle in the United States in the mid-eighteenth century to gain equality for women. Previously, some had sought to locate the roots of feminism in ancient Greece with Sappho (630-c570 BCE), or in the medieval world with St Hildegard

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<sup>76</sup> Carol P Christ, *Rebirth of the Goddess*, p.67. See also Naomi R Goldenberg, 'A Theory of Gender as a Central Hermeneutic in the Psychoanalysis of Religion' in *Hermeneutic Approaches to the Psychology of Religion*, ed. Jacob van Belzen (Amsterdam: Editions Rodopi, 1996).

<sup>77</sup> Ursula King, *The Search for Spirituality: Our global quest for meaning and fulfilment* (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2009), p. 134.

<sup>78</sup> Carol P Christ, *Rebirth of the Goddess*, Preface xiv-xvii.

<sup>79</sup> Cynthia Eller, *Living in the Lap of the Goddess: The Feminist Spirituality Movement in America* (Boston: Beacon Press, 19915), p. 282.

<sup>80</sup> Melissa Raphael, *Thealogy and Embodiment*, p. 56.

of Bingen (1098-1179) or Christine de Pisan (1364-1434). However, Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-1797) and Jane Austin (1775-1817) are now generally accepted by feminists as the foremothers of the modern women's movement, advocating for the dignity, intelligence, and basic human potential of the female sex. It was not until the late nineteenth century that the efforts for women's equal rights coalesced into a clearly identifiable and self-conscious series of movements.<sup>81</sup>

The First Wave of feminism materialised in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, emerging out of an environment of urban industrialism and liberal, socialist politics. The goal was to open opportunities for women and the focus was suffrage, notes Martha Rampton.<sup>82</sup> In Britain it was highlighted by the rise of the Suffragettes, who fought a long and bitter battle for women to have the vote. This was eventually granted in 1918 – but only women over thirty who owned property, wives of householders, occupiers of property with an annual rent of £5 or more, or graduates of British universities were recognised in the 1918 Representation of the People Act. It was another decade before the 1928 Equal Franchise Act gave the vote to all women over the age of twenty-one on equal terms with men.<sup>83</sup>

The Second Wave – and for this research the most important - began in the nineteen-sixties and unfolded in the context of the anti-war and civil rights movements in the United States. The New Left was on the rise and the voice of the Second Wave became increasingly radical. Sexuality and reproductive rights were dominant issues and there was an increasing call to guarantee social equality regardless of sex.<sup>84</sup> At the same time, Goddess feminism and feminist Witchcraft were

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<sup>81</sup> Martha Rampton 'Four Waves of Feminism' in *Pacific* magazine, issue Fall 2008. <https://www.pacificu.edu/magazine> [Accessed 15 December 2021].

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> Helen Pankhurst, *Deeds not Words*, p. 27.

<sup>84</sup> Martha Rampton 'Four Waves of Feminism' in *Pacific* magazine, issue Fall 2008. <https://www.pacificu.edu/magazine> [Accessed 15 December 2021].

developing and various lines of communication connected British Pagans with the radical feminist ideas that were flowing across the Atlantic.<sup>85</sup> Women based in Britain – like Swedish writer and painter Monica Sjoo – became involved in both radical feminism and Goddess religion, maintaining constant contact with their American counterparts, and acting as a conduit between the American movements and the modern Pagan religion of Wicca in Britain.<sup>86</sup>

Thus, the contemporary Goddess movement grew out of Second Wave feminism – its ideology shaping Greenham Common women’s peace camp. Goddess feminism is premised on the necessity of a collective moral confrontation with patriarchy and the planetary injustice and suffering it causes, contends Raphael.<sup>87</sup> It was, argues Starhawk, the opening of feminism to a spiritual dimension. Noting the three core principles of Goddess religion as ‘immanence, interconnection and community,’<sup>88</sup>she explained:

*“...all of life is sacred and interconnected. We see the Goddess as immanent in the earth’s cycles...each of us embodies the divine. Our ultimate spiritual authority is within, and we need no other person to interpret the sacred for us.”<sup>89</sup>*

This very much reflects Orsi’s contention of ‘religion as belief’ where humans in the company of each other and of their gods and special beings are present to each other.<sup>90</sup>

Sjoo visited Greenham Common several times in the early days of the women’s peace camp. Although there were arguably some Goddess feminists among the first groups to settle at the camp,

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<sup>85</sup> Shai Feraro, *‘God Giving Birth’ – Connecting British Wicca with Radical Feminism and Goddess Spirituality during the 1970s-1980s: A Case Study of Monica Sjoo* (equinoxonline: Equinox Publishing Ltd, 2014), p. 52 <http://doi:10.1558/pome.v15il-2.31> [Accessed 25 October 2021].

<sup>86</sup> Ibid. pp. 52-53.

<sup>87</sup> Melissa Raphael, ‘Truth in Flux: Goddess Feminism as a Late Modern Religion’ in *Religion*, Vol 26 (1996), p. 199. [Accessed 19 December 2021].

<sup>88</sup> Starhawk, *The Spiral Dance: A Rebirth of the Ancient Religion of the Great Goddess* (New York: HarperCollins, 1989), p. 22.

<sup>89</sup> Starhawk, *The Spiral Dance*, p. 6.

<sup>90</sup> Robert A Orsi, ‘Belief’, p. 21.

Sjoo brought worship of the Goddess with her and thus, the Goddess had a presence at Greenham from its earliest days. Sjoo attended the December 1982 Embrace the Base action – when the USAF Cruise missile base was (magically) encircled by link hands<sup>91</sup> - and her name and address were recorded on a mailing list maintained by Women at Greenham.<sup>92</sup> She also applauded the struggle of Greenham women in her writing for the *Pipes of Pan* (Pagans Against Nukes) newsletter.<sup>93</sup>

The Third Wave of Feminism began in the nineteen-nineties, informed by post-colonial and post-modern thinking – ‘grrls’ were strong and feisty, empowered by knowing they could have a push-up bra and a brain at the same time. The Fourth Wave began around two-thousand-and-twelve and is on-going. It continues to support the empowerment of women generally but also women of colour and trans women, seeking greater gender equality by focussing on the overlapping of intersectionality.<sup>94</sup> A detailed consideration of Third and Fourth Wave feminism is beyond the remit of this thesis, although it could be argued that the feminist activists of XR are part of the Fourth Wave as they attempt to build a new world that prioritises the needs of all marginalised species both human and non-human.

#### 1.4 The Priestess

The return of Goddess has ushered in the revived vocation of priestess, believed to have been suppressed since the middle of the second millennium BCE with the advent of Jewish monotheism.<sup>95</sup> To Goddess feminists, just thinking and willing the reality of the Goddess is enough to make her real. The line between the individual woman and the Goddess, both as the symbol and the divine power of femaleness, is not fixed, if it is there at all, maintains Raphael.<sup>96</sup> Goddess

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<sup>91</sup> Melissa Raphael, *Thealogy and Embodiment*, p. 230.

<sup>92</sup> Shai Feraro, ‘*God Giving Birth*’, p. 43. See also the camp’s mailing list, preserved at The Women’s Library/Greenham Common Women’s Peace Camp (Yellow Gate)/5/GCW/D/6.

<sup>93</sup> Monica Sjoo, ‘The Ancient Religion and the Nuclear Age’ in *Pipes of Pan* 16 (1984), p.10.

<sup>94</sup> Martha Rampton, ‘Four Waves of Feminism’ in *Pacific* magazine. [Accessed 6 January 2022].

<sup>95</sup> Melissa Raphael, *Thealogy and Embodiment*, pp. 226-227.

<sup>96</sup> Melissa Raphael, *Introducing Thealogy*, p. 55.

feminism is both individualistic and pragmatic. There are no rules. Each woman finds the Goddess in her own experience.<sup>97</sup>

Christ and other feminist philosophers and writers, including Mary Daly and Nelle Morton, understand the Goddess as a metaphor for the depth and divinity of the transformed feminist self in erotic or biophilic connection with everything that lives, signifying the inherent and integrated spiritual intellectual, emotional and physical capacities of the individual. The Goddess is present in every person and in all creatures and elements that possess or impart vital energy.<sup>98</sup> Raphael recalls that Daly takes the word 'Goddess' as that which can name 'active participation in the Powers of Be-ing'. The very word 'Goddess' has magical, transformatory, power. Each women makes the Goddess real by allowing the Goddess archetype to do its transforming work through her own liberated consciousness.<sup>99</sup> The priestess invokes the presence of the Goddess from her own self, and at that moment, she is the Goddess.<sup>100</sup>

Those brought up in the Anglo-Catholic faith, may well recognise that the priestess invoking the presence of the Goddess and thus becoming the Goddess, is as real to Goddess feminists as transubstantiation (the bread and wine becoming the body and blood of Christ) during the Eucharist is to Catholics. It is as real as belief in the Immaculate Conception, and the Virgin Mary's power to heal; or the conviction that anointment with holy oil mystically bestows the power to rule on a new monarch. God's presence is recognised and experienced among Catholics and some High Anglicans by viewing icons, touching statues and relics, telling rotary beads, prayer and reading the Bible, maintains Matthew Engelke.<sup>101</sup> In the same way, the presence of the Goddess may be recognised

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<sup>97</sup> Melissa Raphael, *Introducing Thealogy*, p. 55.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.* p. 56.

<sup>99</sup> Melissa Raphael, *Introducing Thealogy*, p. 55.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 55-56.

<sup>101</sup> Matthew Engelke, 'Material Religion' in *The Cambridge Companion to Religious Studies*, ed Robert A Orsi (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 213.

and experienced in dance, chants, drumming, flowers, shells, candles, and Goddess figurines, as well as ritual itself.<sup>102</sup>

The rituals of Goddess feminism begin with the priestess invoking the presence of the Goddess. A circle is cast to define a new space and new time. It is a space in which alternative realities meet, in which past and future are open, time becomes fluid, and the distinctions of socially defined roles no longer apply. Only the law of nature holds sway. Within the circle, the powers of the Goddess and the Old Gods are revealed. Casting a circle is an enacted meditation creating an energy form. Starhawk explains: "The casting of the circle is the formal beginning of the ritual, the complex cue that tells us to switch our awareness into deeper mode."<sup>103</sup> The creation of a new space frees women to become who they are, asserts Daly:

*"Entry into the new space... also involves entry into new time...The centre of the new time is on the boundary of patriarchal time... It is our lifetime. It is whenever we are living out of our own sense of reality, refusing to be possessed, conquered, and alienated by the linear, measured-out, quantitative time of the patriarchal system."*<sup>104</sup>

Goddess priestess Bliss, a 'devotee of the Goddess' told me:

*"I can embody the Goddess and I am dedicated as a priestess of the Goddess. I have several times made a pledge to devote my life, my talents, my offerings, in the service of the Goddess...it's healing for everyone, men and women, because everyone has suffered under patriarchy." [See Appendices, Informant 8].*

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<sup>102</sup> Melissa Raphael, *Introducing Thealogy*, p. 146.

<sup>103</sup> Starhawk, *The Spiral Dance*, p. 83.

<sup>104</sup> Mary Daly, *Beyond God the Father* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1973) p. 40.



## 1.5 Experience not belief

Robert Orsis's theory of 'real presence' ties in with the experiences of many Goddess feminists, who report a sense that they 'knew' the Goddess from childhood, even before they heard her name.

Among them are Christ, who writes in *Rebirth of the Goddess*:

*"Though I never heard the word Goddess spoken when I was a child, I felt her power in the eerie calls of the peacocks...as I fell asleep... in the waves that crashed over me as we played on the beach... in the oaks and scrub brush along hillside trails...in the liquid eyes of the black-tailed deer... in the pouring rain..."<sup>105</sup>*

For others, the re-emergence of Goddess religion has been a recognition of a vision of life they had always known deep within themselves.<sup>106</sup> Kathy, a Priestess of Avalon, recalls her life as a Goddess priestess thousands of years ago.

*"It is something I know I have done before. I was there when the Goddess Temple was thriving, and I was also there at the ending of the temples when they were destroyed. Part of my awareness is of the danger, the psychological danger of creating this again, because you'll get killed."<sup>107</sup>*

Kathy claims many women acknowledge this recognition – but are afraid to speak out. She is adamant that the Goddess is now calling women – and men – to wake up and notice the earth and her world. "She is calling us who were priestess and priests in the far past, and we are incarnating again and responding." [See Appendices: Informant 4].

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<sup>105</sup> Carol P Christ, *Rebirth of the Goddess*, p.1.

<sup>106</sup> Carol P Christ, *Rebirth of the Goddess*. Preface xiii. See also Appendices [Informant 4].

<sup>107</sup> See Appendices: Informant 4.

A vivid experience of an unseen 'felt presence' could be considered unusual and thus special, while others might view the experience as a hallucination, posits Ann Taves.<sup>108</sup> However, Robert Orsi rejects the argument that those who experience such abundant events - the presence of the human and the divine to each other - might view them as hallucinations. He contends that it is customary to say that people who have had experiences like this *believe* what happened was real. He insists that belief has nothing to do with it:

*"The challenge is to describe how the real finds presence, existence and power in space and time, how it becomes as real as guns and stone and bread... Those who experience such abundant events absolutely know they are real and not dreams, hallucinations, delusions, or other kinds of sensory error."*<sup>109</sup>

Orsi's contention illustrates Raphael's assertion that Goddess feminists prefer to talk about 'experience' rather than 'belief', for belief can imply a merely rational decision to affirm something. Theology is not an intellectual project but a process of religious self-discovery and expression that is situated in the body and in nature.<sup>110</sup>

The experience of real presence by Goddess feminists at Greenham could be compared to 'Solastalgia' - the overwhelming emotion of grief suffered by many climate activists (such as those in XR) who feel they are in perpetual mourning for the Earth and non-human animals.<sup>111</sup> For the Greenham women, Solastalgia was mourning for a world in imminent danger of self-destruction and the deaths of their children and grandchildren. The grief of Solastalgia reminded Goddess

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<sup>108</sup> Ann Taves, 'Special things of building blocks of religion' in *The Cambridge Companion to Religious Studies*, p 75.

<sup>109</sup> Robert A Orsi, 'When 2 + 2 = 5: Can we begin to think about unexplained religious experiences in ways that acknowledge their existence?' pp. 34-43.

<sup>110</sup> Melissa Raphael, *Theology and Embodiment*, p. 55.

<sup>111</sup> Sarah M Pike, *For the Wild: Ritual, Commitment in Radical Eco-Activism* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2007), pp. 126-129.

feminists of the demise of the Goddess at the hands of the Christian Church and man's implementation of patriarchy.

Nevertheless, I am mindful that each experience of presence is unique to the individual who experiences it. Can a collective experience such as Solastalgia, which is centred on affect emotion, be compared to real presence as experienced by a Goddess devotee? It is a moot point and one which could form the basis for future study. However, Solastalgia and 'climate sorrow' will be further explored in Chapter Three – The Goddess and Extinction Rebellion.

Writing in 1999, Melissa Raphael notes that students of Goddess feminism would not find contemporary temples built for the Goddess, as one would find them built for the divinities of other traditions:

*They are unlikely to feel the need for such a building because they are accustomed to making an altar or shrine to the Goddess in their own homes... she does not need to be invoked and meditated in specially sanctified spaces... there is no need of a formal boundary of brick or stone to separate the sacred from the profane.<sup>112</sup>*

More than two decades later Goddess feminists still have altars and invoke the Goddess in their own homes. However, during the past few years, temples honouring the divine feminine have sprung up in various towns across Britain including Warmley (Bristol), Stroud (Gloucestershire), Sheffield (Yorkshire), and Glastonbury (Somerset). It is also possible to contact Goddess feminists via pop-up temples on Facebook and other social media platforms. One of the newest Goddess temples is in Stroud, where founder and priestess Bliss supported a virtual temple on Facebook and gatherings at different venues in the town before settling into a permanent building and moving

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<sup>112</sup> Melissa Raphael, *Introducing Thealogy*, p18.

Goddess feminism confidently into the twenty-first century. As a priestess Bliss radiates the love of the Goddess into the world: “It’s about lifting others up... healing relationships, allowing is to shine our gifts and be authentically present.”

Nevertheless, while many women find support and comfort in the ‘formal boundary of brick and stone’ provided by a Goddess temple, I concur with Raphael’s belief that the Goddess is immanent in the natural environment and women’s bodies: she does not need to be invoked and meditated in specially sanctified spaces. The space that emerged for female empowerment at Greenham Common women’s peace camp combined with a sense of the spiritual to produce something that was arguably unique...something extraordinary...uniting the everyday with the mythic and the practical with the entertaining, contends Christina Welch.<sup>113</sup>

### 1.6 Transforming power

The return of the Goddess in western cultures during the late twentieth century was not embraced only by the New Age or Pagan movements. Many from the Abrahamic religions of Christianity and Judaism found the Goddess to be a compelling image of female power, challenging them to reformulate foundational theories about the nature of divinity and the origins of religion.<sup>114</sup>

There are many restrictions a woman must follow and go through in Christianity, Judaism, and other biblical religions because of the way these religions have structured the hierarchy, with men in control of everything and women being under them, argues Christ. She recounts that the God she met in church was, like her father and grandfather, wise and powerful, the ultimate judge in whose eyes she hoped to find favour. Studying theology at college convinced her there was something wrong with the traditional image of God - particularly the patriarchal views on women - and she

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<sup>113</sup> Christina Welch, ‘The Spirituality of, and at, Greenham Peace Camp’ in *Feminist Theology*, 18:2 (2010), p. 247 <https://doi.org/10.1177/0966735009348668> [Accessed 12 January 2022].

<sup>114</sup> Ibid. p. 247.

became increasingly alienated from God as Father, finding herself unable to attend church, sing hymns or pray. "Hunger for a female image of God was awakened in me by the women's movement. At a workshop led by Starhawk I felt the experience of my entire life affirmed...she [the Goddess] was the one I had always known."<sup>115</sup>

Another Christian transformed by the Goddess was Nelle Morton, who was active in the Presbyterian Church when she participated in a non-denominational worship service created by and for women. There she heard a woman speak the words 'Now SHE is a new creation'. At that moment, Morton says she was transformed:

*"It was if an intimate, infinite, and transcending power had enfolded me. That is the first time I experienced a female deity...It was also the first time I realised how deeply I had internalised the maleness of the patriarchal God and that in doing so I had reneged on my own woman identity."*

Only in experiencing the Goddess did Morton recognise that the image she had of God was male and how deeply she had been wounded by it.<sup>116</sup>

Several of the Greenham women told me they 'met' the Goddess when they joined the peace camp. Mollie, who was brought up in a very patriarchal way, remembers hearing a lot about 'the other Eve' – Lilith – and the plays presented about her by Goddess feminists at Greenham. In Jewish legend, Lilith was Adam's first wife, before Eve. She felt herself to be Adam's equal because both came from the earth, but Adam refused to accept her equality. Lilith, determined to retain her independence and dignity, and choosing loneliness over subservience, flew away from Adam and the Garden of Eden. After her escape, Jewish tradition characterised Lilith as a demon – the

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<sup>115</sup> Carol P. Christ, *Rebirth of the Goddess*, pp. 1-3.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.* p. 5.

beginning of the Biblical culture that 'woman is the source of sin and evil'.<sup>117</sup> Greenham was where Mollie first heard about Lilith and through her, the Goddess:

*"They had this wonderful play about Lilith. And it introduced to me the idea that there had been a matriarchal time in this world before patriarchy took over... that it was a possibility for me to be my own person. My view of man had been this very patriarchal character. [See Appendices: Informant 2].*

Toma also discovered Goddess feminism at Greenham, finding it to be an all-consuming experience. She lived at Yellow Gate where she said 'the Goddess was the centre of everything.

*"The Goddess was the centre of everything - there were women from across the world, and many of them brought their folklore and mythology. It was all about the Goddess. We felt empowered." [See Appendices: Informant 3].*

Goddess religion is also practised by some of those in XR, however, it would seem these younger Goddess feminists are less overt, maybe more careful, than the women at Greenham. Nevertheless, Claire, another of my informants is adamant that some of the strongest Goddesses she knows have been leaders in XR. [See Appendices: Informant 1].

Another of my informants (who asked to remain anonymous), who was at Greenham and is now in XR, agrees with Claire that some of the strongest Goddesses she knows are in the climate change movement, stressing that there is 'a big spiritual side' to XR. "It is really important to bear in mind that we are doing this for the planet and the Goddess, who I see as interchangeable." This Goddess feminist said she had not known many Goddess feminists at the peace camp:

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<sup>117</sup> Carol Christ, *Rebirth of the Goddess*, p. 67.

*"I was very young, just 20 when I was at Greenham, and I found the Goddess feminists there a bit preachy... a bit judgemental. But maybe that's because we were all a wild party lot at Blue Gate. I think Goddess spirituality has deepened a lot since then."* [See Appendices: Informant 6].

A former Greenham woman who is now very involved with XR maintains that Goddess feminism is less obvious among today's climate change activists than it was at the peace camp. This, she suggests, is because Greenham was only for women in a place where they could really explore Goddess feminism:

*"I had some very powerful experiences at Greenham connected with that sense of sacred presence. XR is so much bigger... It wasn't evident that Goddess spirituality was being brought to the fore."* [See Appendices: Informant 7].

### 1.7 Academic scepticism

However, not everyone is enthralled by the Goddess. There are those who believe that religious heritage is being reinterpreted or overturned by the view that the common enemy is patriarchal religion. The notion of a Mother Goddess has been dismissed as nothing more than a 'remarkable fable', and many scholars are uncomfortable with an interpretation of religion and culture that challenges long-held beliefs.<sup>118</sup> Writing in the *New York Times*, commentator Mark Silk asserts that some feminists concluded that the Judeo-Christian tradition was so implacably anti-women that the only recourse was to reinvent the Goddess.<sup>119</sup> Nevertheless, Christ notes that the desire to secure and preserve male dominance is not named as the motivation for resistance to Goddess history in either ancient or modern works.<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> Carol P Christ, *Rebirth of the Goddess*, p. 70.

<sup>119</sup> Mark Silk, 'Is God a Feminist', *The New York Times*, 1982, Archives, p007011 [Accessed 2 March 2021].

<sup>120</sup> Carol P Christ, *Rebirth of the Goddess*, p. 70.

The debate about the Goddess has continued among scholars for many years, points out Christ. In his definitive book *Greek Religion*,<sup>121</sup> Walter Burkett states: “The Mother Goddess interpretation has come to be regarded with increasing scepticism.” Several female scholars agree with him, assets Christ. The vehemence with which this debate is being carried on (especially among women) proves that classicist Sarah B Pomeroy<sup>122</sup> was correct when she wrote that “the roles of females both divine and human in prehistory has become an emotional issue with political implications as well as a topic of scholarly debate.<sup>123</sup> However, it could be argued that the comments of Burkett et al come with a certain amount of bias. Although some academics may regard Mother Goddess with increasing scepticism, for my informants and thousands of others, the Goddess is real. She was alive and flourishing at Greenham Common women’s peace camp from the nineteen-eighties until the turn of the century, when the final group of women left. However, a number of the Greenham women, now activists with XR, have differing views on Goddess feminism, and these will be explored in Chapter Three.

Goddess talk may not be to everyone’s taste, but it is a powerful affirmation of the religious meaning of the female reproductive process, women’s emotional life and moral and rational agency – none of which can be affirmed when women are the object of religious discourse and not its subject, posits Raphael. She adds: “In Thealogy women are affirmed as the subject of their own religious experience, no longer the object of male religious, cultural and aesthetic discourse, and law.<sup>124</sup>

In Chapter Two I will explore the back story of the Greenham Common women’s peace camp and the part Goddess feminism played in both the day-to-day praxis and the ideology behind it.

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<sup>121</sup> Walter Burkett, *Greek Religion* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985), pp. 11-12.

<sup>122</sup> Sarah B Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Women and Slaves* (New York, Schocken, 1975), p. 15.-

<sup>123</sup> Carol P Christ, *Rebirth of the Goddess*, p. 71.

<sup>124</sup> Melissa Raphael, *Introducing Thealogy*, p. 165.



## CHAPTER TWO: The Goddess at Greenham Common

*“Greenham was where my politics, sexuality and spirituality came together and fused. It was there I first knew the Goddess.”* – Maggie Parks, co-editor of British-based Goddess magazine ‘Behind the Flames’<sup>125</sup>

In Chapter One I explored the rebirth of Goddess religion in the western cultures of Europe, American and Australasia – described by Carol P Christ as ‘one of the most unexpected developments of the twentieth century’.<sup>126</sup> I considered the rise of modern feminism, and the contemporary Goddess movement, which ushered in the revived vocation of priestess and the vivid experience of real presence. I also introduced the importance of the Goddess to women, both at Greenham Common women’s peace camp in the nineteen-eighties and those engaged in activism with Extinction Rebellion (XR) four decades later.

In this chapter I will focus on the Goddess at Greenham, exploring its history and the part Goddess feminism played in its praxis and ideology, arguing that they had a significant influence on its make-up and protests. I will also consider the importance of grief as an emotional affect and suggest that real presence was a lived reality for the women who experienced and worshipped the Goddess. The Goddess in XR will be explored in Chapter Three.

### 2.1 A moment in time

On 26 August 1981, thirty-six women and children (and a few men) set out from Cardiff to walk to Greenham Common in Berkshire, in protest at plans to locate ninety-six Cruise missiles with nuclear warheads at the United States Airforce base as a deterrent against the Soviet Union.<sup>127</sup> The ten-day trek marked one historically specific moment, in one particular place in the world, when women

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<sup>125</sup> Joanna Kakissis, ‘How a Small English Town Spurred the Group That’s Reshaping Global Climate Protests’ in *NPR*, 7 October 2017. <https://www.npr.org> [Accessed 8 April 2021]

<sup>126</sup> Carol P Christ, *Rebirth of the Goddess*, p. xii.

<sup>127</sup> Christina Welch, ‘The Spirituality of, and at, Greenham Common Peace Camp’, p.21.

acted together to confront patriarchy and to challenge militarism.<sup>128</sup> The walkers were sponsored by 'Women for Life on Earth', a network founded in nineteen-eighty and co-ordinated by American expatriate Stephanie Leland,<sup>129</sup> and at Greenham they were welcomed by a large contingent from Newbury Campaign Against the Cruise.<sup>130</sup> The walkers demanded a televised debate on the nuclear issue between themselves and the British government. Four women chained themselves to the fence around the base to underline their demand. But Margaret Thatcher's Conservative government, deciding the women were merely 'an eccentric pinprick' ignored them, and no debate took place. Consequently, the women stayed, and Greenham Common peace camp was born. It became the biggest female-led protest since women's suffrage in the early twentieth century.<sup>131</sup> At its height, more than 70,000 women were involved at Greenham and their demonstrations eventually resulted in media attention across the globe. Jill Liddington asserts:

*"Greenham was the most powerful symbol of a popular refusal to accept nuclear weapons – anywhere. Greenham's magic was centrifugal, inspiring other camps, other campaigns, and a fresh new style of non-violent protest linking personal gender politics and global power politics."*<sup>132</sup>

The idea of a semi-permanent women's peace camp around a nuclear missile base would have been unthinkable before the nineteen-eighties, posits Liddington. Until Greenham, a women's peace movement comprised a cluster of small campaigning groups. During the wilderness years after the

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<sup>128</sup> Sasha Roseneil, *Disarming Patriarchy*, p. 1.

<sup>129</sup> Shai Feraro, 'Invoking Hecate at the Women's Peace Camp: The Presence of Goddess Spirituality and Dianic Witchcraft at Greenham Common in the 1980s' in *Magic, Ritual and Witchcraft*, 11:2 (2016), pp. 226-248. <https://doi:10.1353/mrw.2016.0016> [Accessed 30 January 2022].

<sup>130</sup> Jill Liddington, *The Road to Greenham Common: Feminism and Anti-Militarism in Britain since 1820* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1989). P. 231.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid*, p. 1.

<sup>132</sup> Jill Liddington, *The Road to Greenham Common*, p. 1.

decline of The Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) in the nineteen-sixties, only a brave handful of determined peace rebels kept the faith.<sup>133</sup>

## 2.2 Women-only

While Greenham Common peace camp is known throughout the world for its anti-nuclear objectives, it is arguably better known for its feminism and its 'women-only' rule.<sup>134</sup> Although called a 'women's peace camp', a small number of men were involved from the beginning. However, in February nineteen-eighty-two the men were asked to leave, and the camp became a women-only space.<sup>135</sup> This was an epiphanic moment for the Greenham women, contends Sasha Roseneil, who left school to live at Greenham in nineteen-eighty-three.<sup>136</sup> It created a shift in the dominant politics of the camp from the maternalism of the early days, to the much stronger feminist politics of anarchist, lesbian, radical, socialist, and eco-hues.<sup>137</sup>

Greenham also represented the coming of age of Second Wave feminism, especially eco-feminism with its emphasis on spirituality.<sup>138</sup> Female deities were important to Second Wave feminists, posits Linda Woodhead. Particularly significant was the Goddess as a figure of opposition to the normative Christian God with regard to female empowerment.<sup>139</sup> A developing sense of women's collective power, experienced by some as 'an intuitive feeling of an indefinable energy' stirred among the

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<sup>133</sup> Jill Liddington, *The Road to Greenham Common*, pp. 2-3.

<sup>134</sup> Monica Patricia Shaw, 'Women in protest and beyond: Greenham Common and mining support groups', PhD thesis, Durham University (1993), Durham E-Thesis Online: <https://www.ethesis.dur.ac.uk/5651/> [Accessed 10 May 2022].

<sup>135</sup> Shai Feraro, 'Invoking Hecate at the Women's Peace Camp', pp. 226-248.

<sup>136</sup> After spending a year at Greenham, Sasha Roseneil studied Sociology at the London School of Economics before becoming Lecturer in Sociology and Co-ordinator of Women's Studies at the University of Leeds, and, subsequently Executive Dean of the Faculty of Social and Historical Sciences at University College London, where she is now Professor of Interdisciplinary Social Science.

<sup>137</sup> Sasha Roseneil, *Common Women, Uncommon Practices: The Queer Feminism of Greenham* (London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2001), p. 156.

<sup>138</sup> Christina Welch, *The Spirituality of, and at, Greenham Peace Camp*, p. 245.

<sup>139</sup> Linda Woodhead 'Feminism and the Sociology of Religion: From Gender-blindness to Gendered Difference' in the *Blackwell Companion to the Sociology of Religion*, ed: Richard K Fenn, (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003) pp. 67-84.

women at Greenham.<sup>140</sup> This ‘indefinable energy’ links to Robert Orsi’s ‘abundant events’ - a cultural experience of déjà vu or uncanny awareness of something outside and independent to us, yet still familiar<sup>141</sup> - demonstrating that Goddess feminists at Greenham experienced the presence of the Goddess in the same way as those who worshipped her in the times before patriarchy. Kathy, who is adamant that she was a priestess in the far past and has been called by the Goddess to incarnate again, claims that many women have the same feeling. [See Appendices: Informant 4].

Only Green Gate – where many of the Goddess feminists resided - was entirely women-only; the other encampments all admitted male visitors during the hours of daylight with supportive men running creches during large scale operations.<sup>142</sup> There were also some Goddess feminists at Yellow Gate, including two of my informants, both identifying as anarchists, who wanted not only to make a stand against patriarchy, but also to practise Goddess spirituality in a more radical way. “We were young, working class and wild anarchists,” Toma recalled. “The Goddess was the centre of everything we did, and we all felt empowered by her.” [See Appendices: Informant 3].

The women-only rule, which became one of Greenham’s guiding principles,<sup>143</sup> was powered by a strong belief that men dominated space verbally and physically, leaving little room for women to participate equally.<sup>144</sup> Thus, the peace camp was transformed into a feminist space of public action and spiritual self-discovery for women who sought to challenge the course of nuclear strategy, military policy, and wider systems of patriarchal control, posits Margaret L Leware.<sup>145</sup> As Roseneil

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<sup>140</sup> S Leland ‘Greenham Women are Everywhere’ in *Feminist Action*, ed Joy Holland (London: Battle Axe Books, 1984), p. 113.

<sup>141</sup> Robert A Orsi, ‘When 2 + 2 = 5’, pp. 34-43.

<sup>142</sup> Shai Feraro, ‘Invoking Hecate at the Women’s Peace Camp’, pp. 226-248.

<sup>143</sup> Sasha Roseneil, *Disarming Patriarchy*, pp. 39-40.

<sup>144</sup> Kate Kerrow and Rebecca Mordan, *Out of the Darkness: Greenham Voices 1981-2000* (Cheltenham: The History Press, 2021), p. 37.

<sup>145</sup> Margaret L. Leware, ‘Circling the missiles and staining them red: Feminist Rhetorical Invention and Strategies of Resistance at the Women’s Peace Camp at Greenham Common’ in *NSWA Journal*, 16:3 (2004) John Hopkins University Press, pp. 18-41. <https://www.jstore.org/stable/4317078> [Accessed 28 February 2022].

notes, Greenham was not feminist *because* it was women-only but became women-only as it was becoming feminist, an important distinction.<sup>146</sup>

Leware claims that the peace camp was essentially a community of women living at the gates of a military base, not as prostitutes, but as infiltrators.<sup>147</sup> Toma was among those who cut through the perimeter fence, infiltrating the base to deface planes and other military property. “We did mad things like painting a blackbird on one of the big planes by the light of a full moon.” [See Appendices: Informant 3].

The space that emerged at Greenham for female empowerment combined with a sense of spirituality to produce something that was arguably unique; something extraordinary that united the everyday with the mythic, and the practical with the entertaining, posits Welch.<sup>148</sup> As Raphael contended, it was a feminist sacred space at the very heart of patriarchal power.<sup>149</sup>

I argue that being women-only was key to Greenham’s success and longevity. Much of the activism was only possible because it was carried out by women and thus the women achieved far more on their own than they could if they had been accompanied by men.

The impact of the women-only rule on Goddess feminism and spirituality at Greenham is largely undocumented. My informants offered no clear insights, apart from the fact that it allowed them to pursue Goddess spirituality in their own way without male input or interference. There is an argument for further research into spirituality generally at Greenham, not just worship of the Goddess.

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<sup>146</sup> Sasha Roseneil, *Disarming Patriarchy*, p.63.

<sup>147</sup> Margaret L Leware, ‘Circling the missiles and staining them red’, p. 24.

<sup>148</sup> Christina Welch, *The Spirituality of, and at, Greenham Common Peace Camp*.

<sup>149</sup> Melissa Raphael, *Theology and Embodiment*, p. 23.

### 2.3 Newbury neighbours

Although the peace camp had champions across the globe, there was not quite the same empathy closer to home. As the years progressed many Newbury residents found the campers to be a great nuisance. Their very existence polarised a watching world. To some they were inspiring heroines, who braved all weathers, increasingly harsh conditions, and prison, to challenge seemingly unsurmountable odds for the good of life on earth. To others they were...scruffy...deviant miscreants.<sup>150</sup> This negative perception of the peace camp was fostered by the media with whom the Greenham women had a strained relationship. While they needed to get their message out to a wider world, the women soon discovered that by leaving their husbands at home, creating a woman-only space, and becoming increasingly direct and disobedient in their actions, the Press was only interested in grabbing a sensational image or angle to sell their stories. Camper Hazel Pegg claimed they were represented in the media as ‘a load of filthy lesbians bringing their children up in squalor’ and that the camp had been ‘infiltrated by the Russians as part of a communist plot.’<sup>151</sup>

Laura Ashley and Beth Olsen contend that research has shown that media coverage of groups whose goals differ from mainstream norms tend to highlight deviance and question legitimacy. “Not only does news coverage diminish both the contributions and effectiveness of protest groups it also exaggerates the threat they pose to society.”<sup>152</sup> This negative depiction was a bid to weaken feminism by suggesting that feminists [such as the Greenham Common women] were different from ‘normal’ women and were in violation of social norms.<sup>153</sup>

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<sup>150</sup> Kate Kerrow and Rebecca Mordan, *Out of the Darkness*, pp. 91-92.

<sup>151</sup> Kate Kerrow and Rebecca Mordan, *Out of the Darkness*, p. 131.

<sup>152</sup> Laura Ashley and Beth Olsen, ‘Constructing Reality: Print Media’s Framing of the Women’s Movement, 1966-1986’ in *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly*, 75/2 (Summer 1998), pp.263-277. <https://journals-sage-pub-com.glos.idm.oclc.org> [Accessed 11 May 2022].

<sup>153</sup> Carolyn Bronstein, ‘Representing the Third Wave: Mainstream Print Media Framing of a New Feminist Movement’ in *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly*, 82/4 (Winter 2005), pp. 783-803. <https://journals-sage-pub-com.glos.idm.oclc.org> [Accessed 11 May 2022].

Newbury's MP Michael McNair-Wilson continually complained in Parliamentary debates about the 'so-called peace women'. In July 1983 he argued:

*"These women, with their ultra-feminist views, their lack of concern for local people, their highhandedness, and their public behaviour, have lost public support. "They have become an unmitigated and expensive nuisance, tying down police manpower, and we want them to go."*<sup>154</sup>

Nevertheless, the MP for Aberdeen North, Robert Hughes, predicted the women would be there for some time, whether Parliament liked it or not, pointing out that the strength of democracy was that peaceful and lawful – although perhaps unorthodox - demonstrations should not only be tolerated but encouraged.<sup>155</sup>

However, there is a touch of desperation in Sir Michael's comment:

*"Most other protests last for twenty-four or forty-eight hours, after which people depart. The women at Greenham Common have taken up residence on land that is not theirs and have turned the demonstration into something different from anything we have seen before."*<sup>156</sup>

## 2.4 Rainbow gates

For the first sixteen months, Greenham had just one gate – Main Gate – the only one in daily use by the military. Peace camp numbers fluctuated from a low of five to over fifty, until the success of Embrace the Base and Silos actions during December nineteen-eighty-two and New Year nineteen-eighty-three generated enormous media coverage, resulting in an influx of visitors and

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<sup>154</sup> Michael McNair-Wilson, *Hansard*, Vol 46, 25 July 1983. <https://hansard.parliament.uk> [Accessed 5 October 2021].

<sup>155</sup> Robert Hughes, *Hansard*, vol 46, 25 July 1983. <https://hansard.parliament.uk> [Accessed 5 October 2021].

<sup>156</sup> Michael McNair-Wilson, *Hansard*, volume 46, Monday, 25 July 1983. [Accessed 5 October 2021].

journalists.<sup>157</sup> Subsequently, life became tense for the Greenham women, who were joined by an increasing number of campers bringing tents and benders. As the land became more crowded, in January nineteen-eighty-three a group of women moved their basic possessions into the woods by the gate later to be known as Green Gate, which was quieter.<sup>158</sup> As previously noted, this camp was strictly women-only and consequently free from male visitors and the Press. A women-only camp tended to attract those who preferred to live with women, and Green Gate reportedly became 'seriously lesbian', but was also perceived to be New Age and mystical and was home to many of Greenham's Goddess feminists, observes Shai Feraro. Some of the women identified as Witches, and there was evidence of early Goddess rituals at the new camp as the women proceeded to 'cast healing spells over the mistreated common'.<sup>159</sup>

As Greenham evolved, encampments sprang up at the other gates, which were given names using the colours of the rainbow. This made it possible for the women to live in small groups, making daily life easier and bonds stronger.<sup>160</sup> The Greenham women included long-term campers who ultimately identified themselves as 'residents', and those who visited or lived there on a short-term basis.<sup>161</sup>

Constructing typologies and characteristics for the various gates and those who lived there was a popular past time among the women. While usually 'tongue in cheek', there were firm perceptions that Blue was young, lesbian and working class; Violet was a mixed gate of heterosexual women and lesbians; Orange was composed of older, more middle-class women, many of them Quakers –

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<sup>157</sup> Sasha Roseneil, *Disarming Patriarchy*, p. 75.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.* *Disarming Patriarchy*, pp. 75-76.

<sup>159</sup> Shai Feraro, 'The Arenas: Glastonbury, Greenham Common, Summer Festivals and London' in *Women and Gender Issues in British Paganism, 1945-1990* (Palgrave Historical Studies in Witchcraft and Magic, 2020), p. 84. [Accessed 8 February 2022] [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-020-46695-4\\_4](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-020-46695-4_4)

<sup>160</sup> Sasha Roseneil, *Disarming Patriarchy*, pp. 75-77.

<sup>161</sup> Margaret Leware, 'Circling the missiles and staining them red,' p. 21.



although it had its own altar to the Goddess.<sup>162</sup> Yellow Gate was home to the ‘old-timers’ and was seen as the centre of power while also including some Goddess feminists and witches, and Green Gate, was ‘cosmic’, spiritual, and popular with Goddess feminists.<sup>163</sup>

From the comments of some of my informants, it seems there were women living at several of the gates who did not fit into the general classifications.<sup>164</sup> I also found there were often contradictions, with one woman’s memory being different from another’s. For instance, Goddess feminist Toma was based at Yellow Gate, where she said the Goddess was very much the centre of everything:

*“The Goddess was at the centre of the culture and ethos, language and speaking...we spent a lot of time researching witches and witchcraft, also Shamanism. For us at Yellow Gate it was all about the Goddess.” [See Appendices: Informant 3].*

However, another woman I interviewed (who chose to be anonymous) claimed that Yellow Gate ‘was not particularly spiritual’:

*“I turned up at Yellow Gate, the main gate, and it was not a particularly spiritual gate. It was a hard place to be politically... with abuse from passers-by and from inside the base. We were very much on the front line.” [See Appendices: Informant 7].*

Another informant (also anonymous) said she ‘rocked up’ at Blue Gate because it was the first gate she came to. “I later discovered Green Gate, where a lot of Goddesses were so I got sort of sucked in. But to be honest I was very young and more of an anarchist than a Goddess.” [See Appendices: Informant 6].

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<sup>162</sup> Shai Feraro, ‘The Arenas: Glastonbury, Greenham Common, Summer Festivals and London’ p. 85

<sup>163</sup> Sasha Rosenail, *Disarming Patriarchy*, pp. 80-81.

Liddington, however, recalls that the peace camp grew increasingly mystical and spiritual – which, she claimed, was almost as controversial as the women-only decision. The pragmatism of the original Welsh women was overtaken by talk of witches and goddesses and being nice to trees:

*“At first sight, such mumbo-jumbo might seem irrelevant to stopping Cruise missiles. But extraordinary times call for extraordinary responses; and ritual, symbols and incantations soon assumed a vital role in sustaining such an unlikely being as a women’s peace camp outside a nuclear base.”<sup>165</sup>*

## 2.5 Codes and symbols

A ‘symbol’ can be many things, asserts Clifford Geertz. It can be used for anything that signals something - like dark clouds being a precursor of rain; or a red flag meaning danger. However, at Greenham, symbols were used in an oblique and figurative manner to express that which could not be stated in a direct and literal one – concrete embodiments of ideas, attitudes, judgements, longings, or beliefs.<sup>166</sup>

Among the extraordinary responses used by the Greenham women were tangible formulations of notions, abstractions from experience fixed in perceptible forms giving extrinsic sources of information.<sup>167</sup> Thus, they used feminist coding strategies that posed a challenge to, and effectively undermined, the masculine symbols of the military in ways not readily evident to the predominately male military personnel, posits Leware.<sup>168</sup> By using varied symbols as metaphors of power, and using their bodies to maintain a presence at the base, the Greenham women reclaimed a physical and symbolic space which produced a rich and evolving field of feminist

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<sup>165</sup> Jill Liddington, *The Road to Greenham Common*, p. 236.

<sup>166</sup> Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (London: Fontana Press, 1993), p. 91.

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.* p. 92.

<sup>168</sup> Margaret L Leware, ‘Circling the missiles and staining them red’, p. 19.

strategies of resistance. Through varied symbolic means, therefore, the women continually appropriated the space of the base by stepping outside of, and rhetorically challenging, the normative boundaries of 'womanhood'.<sup>169</sup>

The Greenham women had a certain look – but they would remove their mud-spattered boots, trousers and jackets and don more feminine attire to infiltrate the base. By becoming more acceptably feminine they became less noticeable, and women in dresses and skirts would enter the base and sit watching television in a recreation room before leaving by the front gate, where they were finally identified as peace women. Thus, they not only symbolically opened up the base, but transformed the patriarchal narrative of defence and war into an alternative narrative of women, community, and connection.<sup>170</sup>

Weaving webs was an important part of the Goddess feminists' armoury with women covering themselves in long strands of interwoven string to baffle policemen and bailiffs.<sup>171</sup> The webs symbolised the connections of community and the women's resilience – an interpretation of the ancient Spider Goddess, weaving tirelessly the web of life.<sup>172</sup> "We sang our songs and weaved our webs," a Goddess feminist told me. [See Appendices: Informant 7]. Mary Daly asserts that weaving is a way of repairing women's split, torn, fragmented consciousness, and typifies how spiritual feminism weaves together biology, cosmology, and politics into one mythical, metaphorical, and practical discourse that also narrates a complete history of female sacrality.<sup>173</sup> The ever-present fire at each of the camp gates became an implicitly coded symbol

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<sup>169</sup> Margaret LeWare, 'Circling the missiles and staining them red', p. 38.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid. p. 32.

<sup>171</sup> The webs represented creativity, strength, growth, and interconnectivity, showing that although each in individual strand was weak and fragile, when interwoven it was strong, beautiful, and efficient. See LeWare, 'Circling the missiles and staining them red', p. 18-41

<sup>172</sup> Barbara Harford and Sarah Hopkins, *Greenham Common: Women at the Wire* (London: Women's Press, 1984), p. 92.

<sup>173</sup> Mary Daly, *Gyn-Ecology: The Metaphysics of Radical Feminism* (London: The Women's Press, 1991), pp. 390-423. See also Melissa Raphael, *Theology and Embodiment*, pp. 148-149.

of power, while menstrual symbols were another way the patriarchal order was threatened and undermined.<sup>174</sup>

Symbols never have one meaning, maintains Raphael, but women using menstrual blood cloths to tie together the gates at Greenham seem to have symbolised binding together the fabric of a world that the missiles within the installations were threatening to blow apart.<sup>175</sup> The blood on the cloths ‘profaned’ and thereby diffused male sacral powers of destruction. The tied and bloodied locks ‘stunned and repulsed’ the men on the base, who refused to touch them, and the cloths were eventually removed by cutting. Thus, asserts Raphael, the symbolic cloths took captive the power of the site and its weapons of mass destruction.<sup>176</sup>

One of the Goddess feminists I interviewed told me about the phenomenological experience of some of the women living in groups at Greenham all menstruating together. The woman who lived for a year at Yellow Gate said: “It happened quite a lot. Our menstrual cycles would shift so a bunch of us would be bleeding at the same time.” [See Appendices: Informant 6]. Although she was the only one of my informants who could recall the syncing of menstrual cycles, the experience doubtless bound the women closer together, giving a stronger sense of identity and sisterhood.

## 2.6 The Goddess and the Glastonbury vibe

From the very beginning, Greenham Common attracted Goddess feminists, women who were committed to Goddess spirituality and matriarchy – maybe encouraged by the support of Swedish writer and painter Monica Sjoo, who lived in Britain, and helped to facilitate the flow of Goddess spirituality and radical feminist ideas from the United States. Sjoo’s support for the peace camp,

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<sup>174</sup> Louise Lander, *Images of Bleeding: Menstruation as Ideology* (New York: Orlando Press, 1988), p.9.

<sup>175</sup> Melissa Raphael *Theology and Embodiment*, p.149

<sup>176</sup> *Ibid.*

which she visited several times, ensured that worship of the Goddess had a presence at the camp almost from its inception.<sup>177</sup> Shortly after the camp was established, Greenham activists and their supporters processed to the nearby town of Newbury, carrying a large Goddess puppet with long red hair and rainbow robes.<sup>178</sup>

According to a woman who visited the peace camp during the early nineteen-eighties, 'Goddess spirituality... was certainly present at Greenham'.<sup>179</sup> At the end of December nineteen-eighty-one, a circle ritual was held by some women in a tipi, and on New Year's Eve, nineteen-eighty-two five women walked the nine miles of the perimeter of the base 'widershins' (anti-clockwise) to celebrate the turning of the seasons and the returning of a new year. As they circled the base, the women called in celebration to the trees and the earth. In March, to mark the Spring Equinox, the peace camp held an Equinox Festival of Life which was attended by many thousands and followed by a blockade of the base. It was said that the rituals were 'fairly light-hearted'...which probably aided the participation of those Greenham women, who did not identify with Witchcraft or Goddess feminism on a religious level.<sup>180</sup>

The importance of Goddess feminism was further emphasised by Sarah Green who, when summonsed to court in May 1982 for resisting eviction from the Common, refused to take the oath on the Bible in the accepted form, stating: "I'll swear on the Goddess but not on the god."<sup>181</sup>

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<sup>177</sup> Shai Feraro, 'God Giving Birth' – Connecting British Wicca with Radical Feminism and Goddess Spirituality during the 1970s-1980s: A Case Study of Monica Sjoon in *The Pomegranate*, 15:2-1 (2013) p. 52.

<https://doi:10.1558/pome.v15i1-2.31> [Accessed 26 January 2022].

<sup>178</sup> Jill Liddington, *The Road to Greenham Common*, p. 236.

<sup>179</sup> Shai Feraro, 'The Arena: Glastonbury, Greenham Common, Summer Festivals and London', p.84.

<sup>180</sup> *Ibid.* p. 84.

<sup>181</sup> Barbara Harford and Sarah Hopkins, *Greenham Common: Women at the Wire* (London: The Women's Press, 1984), p. 50.

Christina Welch recalls that figures of the Goddess were regularly taken into the Newbury courthouse by Greenham women in support of those arrested during protests.<sup>182</sup>

Goddess feminists at Greenham Common had strong connections with Glastonbury and its alternative New Age Goddess communities.<sup>183</sup> Although Glastonbury is almost a hundred miles away from the peace camp, many women travelled there for the 'Wimmin's International Summer Event' (WISE) at Worthy Farm in August nineteen-eighty-two. Glastonbury occupies a unique position in the spiritual and spatial imagination of a range of religious believers and it is surrounded by myriad claims, including those by Christians, Druids and Celtic Pagans.<sup>184</sup> However, Marion Bowman postulates that while Glastonbury is spiritually diverse, for many people it is above all a centre of Goddess spirituality and a significant sacred site of Goddess worship.<sup>185</sup> It is, therefore, likely that many of the Greenham women were already familiar with the spiritual vibe that emanates from the rural Somerset town, and it seems that Goddess feminists sought to recreate the 'feel' of Glastonbury and its 'vital mystical aura' at Greenham.<sup>186</sup>

Glastonbury was probably the enchanted Avalon, claim Monica Sjoog and Barbara Mor in *The Great Cosmic Mother*, their classic exploration of the Goddess throughout time.<sup>187</sup> Glastonbury Tor was a magnetic centre for the absorption and refraction of generative energies, and lands 'flowing with milk and honey' eulogised in the Bible as the original Eden, are considered to have been lands of the Neolithic Goddess.<sup>188</sup>

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<sup>182</sup> Christina Welch 'The Spirituality of, and at, Greenham Common Peace Camp'.

<sup>183</sup> Shai Feraro, 'God Giving Birth', pp. 31-60.

<sup>184</sup> Marion Bowman, 'Restoring/Restorying Arthur and Bridget: Vernacular Religion and Contemporary Spirituality in Glastonbury' in *Vernacular Religion in Everyday Life: Expressions of Belief*, ed. Marion Bowman and Ulo Valk (Bristol: Equinox Publishing Ltd, 2012), p. 329.

<sup>185</sup> *Ibid.* p. 339.

<sup>186</sup> Shai Feraro, 'The Arenas: Glastonbury, Greenham Common, Summer Festivals, and London', pp. 74-75.

<sup>187</sup> Monica Sjoog and Barbara Mor, *The Great Cosmic Mother: Rediscovering the Religion of the Earth* (New York: HarperCollins, 1991).

<sup>188</sup> *Ibid.* p. 107.

The Greenham women also visited important Neolithic sites nearer to the peace camp, such as Avebury, built by the pre-Celtic people circa 2600 BCE and the sacred centre of megalithic culture in Britain and Silbury Hill, known as ‘the pregnant womb of the Goddess’ because of its shape.<sup>189</sup> The visits to Silbury Hill were particularly important to the Greenham Goddess feminists. Evelyn Silver described Silbury as ‘A very magical place...evidence it is there as the womb of the Great Goddess. We always nipped up Silbury Hill when in need of a spiritual boost.’<sup>190</sup> During the pagan festivals of Beltane or Lammass, the women would carry out rituals, and chant and sleep under the stars at Silbury. They were sometimes joined by Monica Sjoo, who lived in Bristol, and American Witch, ecofeminist, and activist Starhawk<sup>191</sup> Sjoo observed that to sleep within such a Goddess-shape was a ritual act.<sup>192</sup>

Talking to my informants, I quickly realised that the Goddess was very real to those who experienced and worshipped her. This utter belief and unquestionable faith in their personal relationship with the Goddess and their experience of an unseen ‘felt presence’, which they absolutely knew were not dreams or delusions, is a clear illustration of Orsi’s manifestation of real presence. The relationship between the Goddess and her devotees is simultaneously irrational and real, in the way that Catholics absolutely believe their bond with the Virgin Mary and the saints is real.<sup>193</sup> In *The Presence of the Real*, Martin Wood notes that such ‘abundant events’ are beyond the conceptual range of the modern rational and Western world view in terms of epistemology and historiography.<sup>194</sup> However, such experiences are nothing out of the ordinary for those who

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<sup>189</sup> Monica Sjoo and Barbara Mor, *The Great Cosmic Mother*, pp. 133-135.

<sup>190</sup> John Donoghey, ‘An interview with Evelyn Silver – Loughborough’s Link to Greenham Common’ in Loughborough History and Heritage (2015), <https://lboro-history-heritage.org>. [Accessed 07 April 2021].

<sup>191</sup> Shai Feraro, ‘Invoking Hecate at the Women’s Peace Camp’, pp. 226-248.

<sup>192</sup> Monica Sjoo and Barbara Mor, *The Great Cosmic Mother*, p. 106.

<sup>193</sup> Robert A Orsi, ‘When 2 + 2 + 5’, pp. 34-43.

<sup>194</sup> Martin Wood, ‘The Presence and the Real: Jalaramkatha and the Experience of the Transcendent’ in *International Journal of Hindu Studies*, 26 (2022), pp. 113-135.

experience them: they are anticipated, longed for, and even expected.<sup>195</sup> Indeed, this is underlined by Toma, now an art therapist, who recalled going to look at some of the art installations the women had placed on Silbury Hill, accompanied by Barbara Mor (co-author with Monica Sjoo of *The Great Cosmic Mother*). They were joined by Starhawk, whose book *The Spiral Dance* was one of the main inspirations behind the Goddess movement.<sup>196</sup> Toma, who was at Greenham between nineteen-eighty-two and nineteen-eighty-four, had no doubts about her relationship with the Goddess: “She was who we were, our ethos and our religion. In the camp we frequently used a Ouija board and had spirit guides to help us.” She also recalled that one of the most amazing things to happen occurred during a big summer storm when there was thunder and lightning:

*“The lightning struck the Greenham Control Tower and Newbury Courthouse, where women were taken to be charged with various public order offences. “That seemed very prophetic.” [See Appendices: Informant 3].*

Kathy, another informant, known today as a key proponent of Goddess feminism in Glastonbury, wrote sacred dramas which were performed at Greenham. “Sacred drama is about keeping the Goddess alive in the world so people can experience her in performance, explained Kathy, who recruited actors for her dramas in Glastonbury:<sup>197</sup>

*“It was always a hippy town and there were a lot of people who were not working, who were young, who were artists, willing to put their time in...nobody was getting paid. [See Appendices: Informant 4].*

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<sup>195</sup> Martin Wood, ‘The Presence and the Real: Jalaramkatha and the Experience of the Transcendent’ in *International Journal of Hindu Studies*, 26 (2022), pp. 113-135.

<sup>196</sup> See Starhawk, *The Spiral Dance* (New York: HarperCollins, 1999).

<sup>197</sup> It is interesting to note that another of my informants, Mollie, explains how seeing these dramas at Greenham introduced her to Goddess feminism. [See Appendices: Informant 2].



While my informant Mollie first learned about the Goddess through Kathy's drama about Lilith - Adam's first wife called 'the other Eve,'<sup>198</sup> - not all the plays were just in the realms of myth. One of Kathy's dramas addressed the issue of a liaison between a Greenham peace camp woman and a man from the other side of the fence that resulted in a child. Kathy places the relationship in a spiritual realm by drawing on the myth of the Sumerian Goddess of love and war, Inanna, who falls for and is betrayed by her lover Dumuzi.<sup>199</sup> This was mirrored in real life when a baby was born at the peace camp in the early nineteen-eighties. Sarah Green gave birth to her son Jay (registered as Jay Greenham) in a bender at Yellow Gate. Toma, also a Yellow Gate camper, became pregnant in nineteen-eighty-four while at Greenham, after being given sperm by a friend:

*"My girlfriend and I decided we wanted a baby and the spirit guide told us when to inseminate. I expected one little baby, which I could take around with me – I had triplets."*

Toma and her girlfriend left the camp and found a house to rent locally before moving to a Goddess community in Ireland. [See Appendices: Informant 3].

## 2.7 You Can't Kill the Spirit

Singing and chanting was an important part of the peace camp experience and over the years a Greenham song book evolved. Arguably Greenham's most notable chant was *You Can't Kill the Spirit...she is like a mountain, old and strong, she goes on and on...*<sup>200</sup> It was a particular favourite among Goddess feminists and features in the 1984 novel *The Growing Pains of Adrian Mole*, by Sue Townsend.<sup>201</sup> Singing together, was one of the ways the women emphasised their devotion to the

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<sup>198</sup> See Appendices: Informant 2. See also Chapter One: Rebirth of the Goddess,

<sup>199</sup> Christina Welch. 'The Spirituality of, and at, Greenham Common Peace Camp', pp. 230-248.

<sup>200</sup> This song was written by Naomi Littlebear Morena, a feminist North American Indian musician. See also Christian Welch, 'The Spirituality of, and at, Greenham Peace Camp'.

<sup>201</sup> Sue Townsend, *The Growing Pains of Adrian Mole* (London: Methuen, 1984).

Goddess and their belief that she would help them to 'go on and on'. It is further evidence of Orsi's theory of real presence and the unshakeable belief that the Goddess was present and existing among them, drawing deeply on the conscious and unconscious and giving them a new experience of the past.<sup>202</sup>

Singing was a big thing at Greenham, particularly among Goddess feminists, recalls Mollie, who is now an activist with XR. Indeed, most of my Goddess feminist informants recall actions where someone started to sing, or wail, softly at first, with everyone else gradually joining in. [See Appendices: Informant 2].

One of the most evocative stories about singing at Greenham came from Goddess priestess Kathy, who visited the peace camp many times between nineteen-eighty and nineteen-eighty-four:

*"One evening, at twilight, and we were standing in the woods outside the fence. On the inside the fence were all the weapons and the soldiers and the policemen and outside were a bunch of women standing with candles. We sang You Can't Kill the Spirit... Singing that song liberated me in that moment to think of the Goddess and to understand the divine as 'She'." [See Appendices: Informant 4]*

Singing is also fondly remembered by another informant, who recalls having some amazing spiritual experiences:

*"We sang our songs and weaved our webs, and it all went very deep. When they installed generators so they could light us up more clearly, we spent a long time singing spells in an attempt to stop the generators." (See Appendices: Informant 7)*

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<sup>202</sup> Robert A Orsi, 'When 2 + 2 = 5, pp. 34-43. See also Chapter One: *Rebirth of the Goddess*.

The Goddess was also present and very real to the women serving prison sentences at Greenham. Recalling that singing was an important way of expressing both emotion and devotion to the Goddess, one of my informants said that singing and chanting was what she remembered most about being imprisoned for criminal damage and non-payment of fines in the nineteen-eighties. “The women quickly discovered that cell acoustics were great for chanting. I still do it now. When arrested [with XR] I do a bit of chanting in the cell”. [See Appendices: Informant 6].

Another equally important way of expressing emotion among Goddess feminists at Greenham was keening. This lament used in funeral rites to express grief was resuscitated at Greenham and transformed into an expression of grief at the potential devastation of nuclear war.<sup>203</sup> Grief (as an emotional affect) is a central influence in conversation and commitment to activism and is an expression of deeply felt kinship bonds, maintains American activist Sarah J Pike.<sup>204</sup>

Affect can be understood as the propulsive elements of thought, sensation, feeling, and action that are not necessarily captured by language or ‘consciousness’. It fires action, stimulates movement, and is transmitted from one activist to another during mass demonstrations.<sup>205</sup> Goddess feminists at Greenham poured their grief into singing and keening to express anguish at the potential devastation of nuclear war and desecration of the planet. They also used their bodies as powerful and disruptive blockades - employing affect as a ‘non-violent weapon’.<sup>206</sup>

Leware maintains that the Greenham women challenged the real and symbolic boundary markers that the USAF base represented. By surrounding and infiltrating the base, the women used their

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<sup>203</sup> Margaret L Laware, ‘Circling the missiles and staining them red,’ pp. 33-34.

<sup>204</sup> Sarah J Pike, *For the Wild: Ritual and Commitment in Radical Eco-Activism* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2007), p. 197.

<sup>205</sup> Donovan O. Shafer, *Religious Affects: Animality, Evolution and Power*, p. 24.

<sup>206</sup> Margaret L. Laware, ‘Circling the missiles and staining them red’, p. 51.

own bodies as threats to the military space and male symbolism. Through blockading actions, their bodies demonstrated a different conception of womanhood – a message of power, determination, and resilience.<sup>207</sup> As Roseneil explains, these actions used women’s bodies in ways that ‘transgressed dominant notions of women’s corporeality...women’s bodies were refigured, individually and *en masse*, as powerful disruptive and autonomous.’<sup>208</sup>

Forty years after Goddess feminists used singing, keening, and their bodies in the fight against patriarchal authoritarian forces at Greenham, Goddess feminists in XR are using similar tactics in a bid to force governments across the world to act as planet Earth is overcome by climate change.

This will be discussed further in Chapter Three.

## 2.8 Politics and praxis

The Goddess played an important part in both the day-to-day praxis and ideology behind Greenham Common Women’s Peace Camp throughout the nineteen-eighties.<sup>209</sup> The importance of Greenham as a melting pot for feminist politics and Pagan spiritualities was underlined by Maggie Parks, who was co-editor of *Behind the Flames*, a British-based Goddess spirituality magazine:

*“Greenham was where ‘my politics, sexuality and spirituality came together and fused. It was there I first knew the Goddess...I became convinced that the only real hope for the world is a radical feminism vision based on respect and love of our mother Earth, and the Goddess in all of us.’<sup>210</sup>*

The establishment of a separate woman space – as a communal organisation rather than for the temporary purpose of a direct action – is sometimes advocated as a political act through which

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<sup>207</sup> Margaret L. Leware, ‘Circling the missiles and staining them red’, p. 32.

<sup>208</sup> Sasha Rosenail, *Disarming Patriarchy*, p. 104.

<sup>209</sup> Shai Feraro, ‘Invoking Hecate at the Women’s Peace Camp’, pp. 226-248.

<sup>210</sup> Joanna Kakissis, ‘How a Small English Town Spurred the Group That’s Reshaping Global Climate Protests’.

women can freely define and develop their own identity, asserts Raphael.<sup>211</sup> By their sheer bodily occupation of space, women embodying the energy of the Goddess reclaimed and changed the energetics and use of a place perceived to have been profaned.<sup>212</sup> Spiritual feminist presence is non-violent, prophetic, and sacralising and as such, protects a space – usually a piece of land – from the desecration of ‘development’ or military use. The linking of hands to encircle Greenham Common during the Circle the Base actions in December nineteen-eighty-two was an example of feminist consecration. Raphael suggests that Greenham was not only a new form of political action, but that the dynamics of this action were also a new manifestation of female sacrality. A female sacral space (literally a no-man’s land) was established at the very heart of patriarchal power.<sup>213</sup>

The Greenham women’s non-conformity and playing with social mores meant that there was no hierarchy, no formal leaders, or spokespeople, nor any strict organisation at the camp. Lack of leadership and authority was a deliberate attempt to overturn patriarchal way of living, and gave all women a voice, while enabling each woman to act according to her own conscience.<sup>214</sup>

It was a principle of Greenham that the realm of the ‘non-rational’, which is traditionally suppressed or excluded from consideration in politics, should be included as a source of adequate knowledge in decision-making and in daily life. Thus, an integral part of discussions...was attention to the feelings of the women involved... and some women invoked a language of Goddess feminism, spirituality, and magic. This revaluing of the non-rational was a self-conscious attack on the Western philosophical dualisms of reason/emotion, mind/body, male/female...which systematically devalue the side of the dualism, which is constructed as female, maintains Roseneil.<sup>215</sup> Some women were

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<sup>211</sup> Melissa Raphael, *Theology and Embodiment*, p. 233.

<sup>212</sup> Ibid. p. 230.

<sup>213</sup> Melissa Raphael, *Theology and Embodiment*, p.233.

<sup>214</sup> Christina Welch, ‘The Spirituality of, and at, Greenham Common Peace Camp’, pp. 230-248.

<sup>215</sup> Sasha Roseneil, *Disarming Patriarchy*, p. 69.

also influenced by Goddess feminist/matriarchal spirituality and carried out rituals at Greenham. Others rejected this interest in spirituality, and among some there was much ridiculing of 'cosmic' practices and ideas.<sup>216</sup> However, it should be remembered that the peace camp meant different things to different women. There was no singular Greenham experience.<sup>217</sup>

Beth Junor, who camped at Yellow Gate in the mid-nineteen-eighties, stresses that the Greenham women were pushed to their very limits by daily harassment, continually fighting the convoys and dealing with the police and military violence.<sup>218</sup> Despite daily difficulties, the empowerment and sisterhood of women and 'right to life' approach of Goddess feminists and eco-feminism was common at Greenham.<sup>219</sup> All the peace camp women, Goddess feminist or not, understood – in the spiritual sense – the land, not only the physical place but also the empowering space it represented.<sup>220</sup> The peace camp was a new manifestation of female sacrality, emphasised Raphael. "Here the feminist sacral will exposed patriarchal colonisation of the mind and land".<sup>221</sup> Junor maintained that spirituality at the camp grew out of the women living with the elements. "You can't be that close to the Earth herself without recognising that there is a oneness to everything." Recognising this oneness gave the women strength and highlighted the weakness of the patriarchal mindset.<sup>222</sup>

## 2.9 Finally...peace

The last Cruise missiles left Greenham Common in nineteen-ninety-one – four years after America and the Soviet Union signed the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty. A small group of women stayed on at Yellow Gate, asserting that Greenham was still common land and taking their fight all

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<sup>216</sup> Sasha Roseneil, *Disarming Patriarchy*, p. 69.

<sup>217</sup> Shai Feraro, 'Invoking Hecate at the Women's Peace Camp', pp. 226-248.

<sup>219</sup> Christina Welch, 'Spirituality and Social Change at Greenham Common Peace Camp', pp. 230-248.

<sup>220</sup> Melissa Raphael, *Theology and Embodiment*, p. 233.

<sup>221</sup> Ibid.

<sup>222</sup> Beth Junor, *Greenham Common Women's Peace Camp*, p. 299.

the way to the House of Lords. At the turn of the century, West Berkshire County Council took ownership of the land, and it became a wildlife and conservation area.<sup>223</sup> Subsequently, the council granted planning permission for a Peace Garden to be sited at Yellow Gate, where the original protest had begun almost two decades previously. The women hoped that the garden would create an opportunity to heal the breaches that developed between the protestors and the community of nearby Newbury. The garden incorporates a sculpture by Michael Marriott depicting flames symbolising the all-important campfire, surrounded by seven standing stones from Wales - representing the Women for Life on Earth group, who set up the camp – and a stone and steel structure proclaiming ‘Women’s Peace Camp 1981-2000’ and the words ‘You can’t kill the Spirit’.<sup>224</sup> There is also a simple garden for Helen Thomas, the only woman mentioned at the site. She died in a collision with a police horsebox while she was waiting to cross a road near the camp in August nineteen-eighty-nine.<sup>225</sup>

### 2.10 But battles continue...

Looking back at Greenham Common women’s peace camp, the view is a seething mass of hopes, fears, struggles and dreams. But beneath it all were three overarching common aims: to see the back of nuclear missiles housed at the Greenham USAF base; to see parts of Greenham Common illegally held by the military returned to the people of the UK; and to end patriarchy. The fact that the women saw two of the aims fulfilled marks their campaign out as a protest success story, contend Kerrow and Mordan.<sup>226</sup> The fight against patriarchy continues.<sup>227</sup>

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<sup>223</sup> Kate Kerrow and Rebecca Mordan, *Out of the Darkness*, p. 234.

<sup>224</sup> Charlie Masters, *Newbury Weekly News*, 2 September 2021. <https://newburytoday.co.uk> [Accessed 28 September 2021].

<sup>225</sup> Charlie Masters, *Newbury Weekly News*, 2 September 2021, pp. 3-5. [Accessed 28 September 2021]. <https://newburytoday.co.uk>

<sup>226</sup> Kate Kerrow and Rebecca Mordan, *Out of the Darkness*, p. 237.

<sup>227</sup> *Ibid.* p. 237.

For the Goddess feminists, the end of Greenham was just the beginning of their personal journeys. The contemporary Goddess movement, which had grown out of Second Wave feminism in the nineteen-sixties, had almost run its course when its ideology shaped the women's peace camp. By the time the last Cruise missiles left Greenham in nineteen-ninety-one, the Third Wave of feminism – embracing diversity and individualism in women seeking to redefine what it meant to be a feminist - held sway<sup>228</sup>.

Many of my informants who were at Greenham are now fighting twenty-first century battles. Many of them - like Mollie, Bell and several women who wish to be anonymous - are involved as activists with XR. One of them told me that having been sent to prison twice while at Greenham, she is happily rebelling with XR - but with age comes caution. She cannot now risk a prison sentence because she is responsible for looking after her mother. "And if I can't look after my real mother, how can I aspire to look after the Goddess, mother of us all? [See Appendices: Informant 6].

Toma works as an art therapist for people with mental health issues and says she also uses art for the spiritual health of younger Goddess feminists:

*"A lot of what was inherited from Greenham is still being passed on... we are passing on ways of being, ways of teaching the culture. Teaching younger women how to relate to female power nationally, Greenham Goddesses have become involved in politics." [See Appendices: Informant 2]*

Kathy, who put on the sacred dramas at Greenham is a much-revered priestess at Glastonbury and created the annual Goddess Conference in nineteen-ninety-six so she could expand her performances. She says there are signs Goddess feminism is 'rising-up' again:

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<sup>228</sup> 'Feminism' in *Britannica*, <https://britannica.com> [Accessed 14 February 2022].



*“There was Greenham, now there is XR, and the older Goddess feminists are the support team in the background, helping to hold back new resistance. It all comes to the same thing in the end – fighting for the Earth and humanity.” [See Appendices: Informant 4].*

The personal journeys women took after Greenham represent the legacy of the camp and show how the women determinedly took the political, social, and cultural discoveries made at Greenham into the wider world.<sup>229</sup>

In Chapter Three I will fast-forward two decades to discover whether Goddess feminism holds a similar place in the lives of female activists fighting climate change with XR as it did at Greenham Common women’s peace camp.

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<sup>229</sup> Kate Kerrow and Rebecca Mordan, *Out of the Darkness*, p.237.

## CHAPTER THREE: The Goddess in Extinction Rebellion

*“It’s time. This is our last chance to do anything about the global climate and ecological emergency.*

*Now or never, we need to be radical. We need to rise up. And we need to rebel.”* – ‘This Is Not A Drill:

An Extinction Rebellion Handbook’<sup>230</sup>

Chapter Two focused on the history, praxis, and ideology of Greenham Common women’s peace camp during the late twentieth century and the part played by Goddess feminism in shaping non-violent action to challenge the course of nuclear strategy, military policy, and patriarchal control. Chapter Three advances four decades to explore Goddess feminism in Extinction Rebellion (XR) and investigates whether the values and spiritual beliefs in relation to the Goddess which formed the foundation of feminist activism at Greenham, are still evident. I will consider also whether real presence and grief as an emotional affect were lived realities for the Goddess feminists in XR as they were among those at Greenham. Finally, after considering the testimonies provided by my informants, I will question whether the fight against patriarchy continues to be an on-going battle for feminists in the twenty-first century

Because XR is in its infancy there is a dearth of informative literature, except for XR’s own handbook *This Is Not a Drill*. The basis of my research for this chapter is, therefore, my informant’s interviews backed up with some academic papers and newspaper reports. One of the most informative papers was *Activism for End Times: Millenarian Belief in an Age of Climate Emergency*, which assessed the contribution made by XR and the Schools Strike for Climate, to succeed in shifting the political rhetoric from talking about ‘climate change’ to that of ‘climate emergency’.<sup>231</sup>

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<sup>230</sup> *This Is Not A Drill*, statement, back cover.

<sup>231</sup> Stefan Scrimshire, ‘Activism for End Times: Millennium Belief in an Age of Climate Emergency’ in *Political Theology*, 20: 6, (2019), pp. 518-536. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1462317X.2019.1637993> [Accessed 25 February 2022].

It should be noted that while I have discovered numerous books and papers on climate change, there were few with specific reference to Extinction Rebellion and none I could find regarding Goddess feminism in XR. As Randolph Haluza-DeLay observes, little social research has focused specifically on the interaction of religious bodies and human-induced climate change, with most of the current scholarship on the topic being on the theological, pastoral, or normative, and specific to particular faiths: “Nature oriented spirituality, which appears to be on the rise has little, or no organised structure compared with the extensively organised Christian denominations.”<sup>232</sup>

I hope, therefore, that this research is contributing to a growing body of work that examines the relationship between climate change and religion/spirituality with particular emphasis on Goddess feminism.

In addition to seasoned XR campaigners - several of whom were also at Greenham - I have spoken to a Goddess feminist identifying as a Hedge Witch,<sup>233</sup> an Eco-feminist, who is not a member of XR but supports its ideology, and a teenage girl, who claims that Generation Z (those aged ten to twenty-five) have little knowledge of Goddess feminism, although they are aware of climate change, XR protests and, particularly, Greta Thunberg, the teenage Swedish activist who, as a fifteen-old schoolgirl, began school climate strikes to pressure the Swedish government to meet carbon emissions targets.

### 3.1 Climate emergency

There has been increasing public concern about impending climate breakdown over the past few decades, with various activities and campaigns coming to the fore in the United States of America.<sup>234</sup>

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<sup>232</sup> Randolph Haluza-DeLay, ‘Religion, and climate change: varieties in viewpoints and practices’, *Wiley Interdisciplinary Reviews: Climate Change* 5, no. 2, (2014) pp. 261-279.

<sup>233</sup> A Hedge Witch is a solitary operator, who worships the Goddess and believes solitary witchcraft is a fulfilling lifestyle in its own right. See Beth Rae, *Hedge Witch: A Guide to Solitary Witchcraft* (London: Robert Hale, 1990).

<sup>234</sup> Diana Stuart, ‘Radical Hope: Truth, Virtue, and Hope for What is Left in Extinction Rebellion’ in *Journal of Agriculture and Environmental Ethics* (2020), vol 33, pp. 487-504 <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10806-020-09835-y> [Accessed 16 February 2022].

However, the climate movement in the United Kingdom became more vocal in two-thousand-and-eighteen when XR was launched in Stroud, Gloucestershire. A global environmental movement using non-violent civil disobedience, XR was founded by Roger Hallam, Gail Bradbrook, Simon Bramwell, and other activists from the campaign group Rising Up! following high-profile reports on climate change and biodiversity loss, including one from the United Nations International Panel on Climate Change calling for ‘urgent, systemic change to avoid catastrophe’.<sup>235</sup> Also underpinning the launch of XR was the 2018 Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report which found that human activities were estimated to have caused approximately 1.0 degrees C of global warming above industrial levels...with global warming likely to reach 1.5 degrees C between 2030 and 2052 if it continues to increase at the current rate. Limiting global warming to 1.5 degrees C would require “rapid and far-reaching transitions in land, energy, industry, buildings, transport, and cities”.<sup>236</sup>

Environmental protestor, author, and Eco-feminist Vandana Shiva argues the signs are loud and clear. The life of this planet, and our own future, is under severe threat:

*“We are living through the sixth mass extinction, driven by the limitless greed of the one percent, their blindness to the ecological limits the Earth sets and the limits set by social justice and human rights. There is no planet B.”<sup>237</sup>*

XR claims that because governments have failed to take meaningful action on climate change and biodiversity loss, people should rebel until governments respond. To pressure governments to meet their demands, XR’s strategy involves civil disobedience and disrupting ‘business as usual’.<sup>238</sup>

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<sup>235</sup> Diana Stuart, ‘Radical Hope: Truth, Virtue, and Hope for What is Left in Extinction Rebellion’.

<sup>236</sup> IPCC, 2018: ‘Summary for Policymakers’ in *Global Warming of 1.5 Degrees C*, <https://www.ipcc.ch> [Accessed 30 April 2022].

<sup>237</sup> Vandana Shiva, ‘Foreword’ in *This Is Not A Drill*, p. 5.

<sup>238</sup> Diana Stuart, ‘Radical Hope: Truth, Virtue, and Hope for What is Left in Extinction Rebellion’.

As XR was planning to unleash a wave of protests and acts of civil disobedience on an unsuspecting public, a warning signal about climate change came from Thunberg in Sweden, whose small campaign sparked media coverage and had a global effect, inspiring thousands of young people across the world to organise their own strikes. By December twenty-eighteen more than twenty thousand students in twenty-four countries had joined Thunberg's 'Fridays for Future' campaign by skipping school to protest. A year later she received the first of three Nobel Peace Prize nominations for climate activism.<sup>239</sup>

Back in the United Kingdom in October twenty-eighteen, XR was in the throes its first action – occupying the London offices of Greenpeace - followed by its first major protest in Parliament Square at the end of that month. Just weeks later, over six thousand activists shut down five major London bridges, and the following April activists occupied various sites in central London, turning them into camps with a carnival atmosphere. In addition to the London rebellions, local XR groups across the country staged regular protests and actions over subsequent years.<sup>240</sup> Because XR is a loosely networked, decentralised, grassroots movement with largely autonomous local groups, anyone can act in the name of XR providing they respect the group's 'principles and values', which include non-violence, every local group can organise actions and events independently.<sup>241</sup>

Compared to the number actions and rebellions throughout the country, there have been relatively few charges brought against activists since a Supreme Court ruling that obstruction could be a legitimate and lawful form of protest. The Ziegler judgment, handed down in June twenty-twenty-

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<sup>239</sup> Daniel Kraemer, 'Greta Thunberg: Who is the climate campaigner and what are her aims?' in *BBC News*, 5 November 2021, <https://bbc.co.uk> [Accessed 5 February 2022]

<sup>240</sup> Diana Stuart, 'Radical Hope: Truth, Virtue, and Hope for What Is Left in Extinction Rebellion'.

<sup>241</sup> Nicole Kobie, 'How Extinction Rebellion evolved its tactics for its London protests' in *Wired*, 7 October 2019. <https://www.wired.co.uk/article/extinction-rebellion-london-protest?> [Accessed 5 February 2022]

one ruled that ‘protests could be a lawful excuse to block roads... even if the protest is considered disruptive’. Britain’s most senior judges backed a group of protestors who blockaded the road to the Defence and Security Equipment International arms fair in twenty-seventeen. The judges ruled: “There should be a certain degree of tolerance to disruption to ordinary life, including disruption of traffic, caused by the exercise of the right to freedom of expression or freedom of peaceful assembly.”<sup>242</sup>

Following that ruling, charges against one of my informants were dropped. The woman (who chose to be anonymous) told me that the right to sit in the road as a protest, had led to the issuing of injunctions. “So, you don’t get done for sitting in the road, you get done for breaking the injunction,” she said. [See Appendices: Informant 6].

Another informant, Claire, emphasised that the main thrust of XR was to cause disruption to the system so it could no longer function normally, thus forcing those in power to adjust. Founder Roger Hallam believed that arrestable action was the way to go, she maintained:

*“Roger was encouraging people to do things that would get them put away. That’s what creates big headlines, and you get the whole martyr thing. That’s when public opinion can begin to shift.”*

Claire added that those cases that had gone to a jury trial had been found not guilty: “There is a bigger law in place here, there’s a moral duty to protect things. We are trying to highlight [climate emergency] a much bigger crime against humanity.” [See Appendices: Informant 1].

Moral duty is the reason activists participate in XR, because they believe it is the right thing to do regardless of the outcome, postulates Diana Stuart. They continue because it is morally

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<sup>242</sup> Lizzie Dearden, ‘Supreme Court blocks protesters and rules blocking roads can be ‘lawful’ way to demonstrate’, in *The Independent*, 25 June 2021, <https://independent.co.uk> [Accessed 17 February 2022].

unacceptable to give up. They have an active hope for the future where all humans will learn to live within ecological limits. It is not focused on outcomes, but on a commitment to action.<sup>243</sup>

### 3.2 Regenerative Culture

An important group within XR nationally is Regenerative Culture (known as ReGen), which ensures activists take care of themselves and others, creating a resilient community prepared for an unstable and more difficult future. ReGen encourages self-care as the bedrock from which all other acts of care and consideration stem, centring on emotion and physical wellbeing, which in part has a strategic purpose to ensure longevity of the movement by preventing burnout.<sup>244</sup> It also supports those arrested during XR rebellions and runs grief and gratitude circles to mourn and celebrate life.<sup>245</sup>

Regenerative Culture would seem to be a natural home for Goddess feminists in XR. However, those in service to the Goddess are not easy to find within the movement, and it could be suggested that these women are less overt, more careful, than those who practised Goddess religion at Greenham. Despite this, Claire, who was head of ReGen for a year – before leaving to rededicate herself to the Goddess and the sacred feminine – told me that while she did not know a group explicitly for those who were in service to the Goddess, some of the women who were dreamers in the Visioning Circle were Goddess feminists, while some of the strongest Goddess feminist leaders she knew were in XR. [See Appendices: Informant 1].

A Goddess feminist (wishing to be anonymous) agreed with Claire, saying: “Some of the strongest Goddesses I know have led stuff with XR. Gail (Bradbrook) who helped found it is pretty Goddessy,

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<sup>243</sup> Diana Stuart, ‘Radical Hope: Truth, Virtue, and Hope for What Is Left in Extinction Rebellion’.

<sup>244</sup> Emily Westwell and Josh Bunting, *The Regenerative Culture of Extinction Rebellion: Self-care, People care, Planet care*, School of Social, Political and Global Studies, Keele University, and School of Social Studies, University of Manchester (2020).

<https://eprints.keele.ac.uk/7939/1/XR%20REgen%20Profile%20neil%20edits%20%29%281%29.pdf> [Accessed 16 February 2022]

<sup>245</sup> Diana Stuart, ‘Radical Hope: Truth, Virtue and Hope for What is Left in Extinction Rebellion’.

but there is a whole spiritual bunch in XR.” She added that she thought being in service to the Goddess helped activists to remember why they were doing what they were doing and helped them not to get sucked into the ‘us and them’. [See Appendices: Informant 6].

Another (anonymous) informant also thought Goddess feminism was less obvious in XR than it was at Greenham. She suggested the main reason for this was that Greenham was a woman-only space where women could really explore spirituality. “I had some very powerful experiences there connected with that sense of sacred presence. The problem is XR is so much bigger than Greenham; it is absolutely huge.” [See Appendices: Informant 7].

However, it should be remembered that recognising and experiencing the presence of the Goddess varies in different times and places. Those who worship the Goddess believe that she is present everywhere, although each person has their own personal experience of her. This can be compared to Orsi’s contention that Christ is not only present in the Eucharist but also in ‘the dirt’. Presence, he claims, is the norm of human existence.<sup>246</sup>

Matthew Engelke contends that the nature of lived experiences, including lived religion, depends on the peculiarities of time and place and the exigencies of tradition.<sup>247</sup> Because lived experiences always have a material dimension, through which ‘the religious’ is manifest and defined, how the gods (or Goddess), the spirits, or one’s ancestors can be recognised as being present occurs in a wide variety of ways.<sup>248</sup>

The informant who suggested that having a woman-only space was an advantage for exploration of the Goddess at Greenham, told me she had joined an XR inter-faith group with members from Christianity, Buddhism, Judaism, and Islam. Although she found that the presence of the Goddess

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<sup>246</sup> Robert A Orsi, *History and Presence* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2016), pp. 5-6.

<sup>247</sup> Matthew Engelke ‘Material Religion’, pp. 212-213.

<sup>248</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 212-213.



was not obvious, she added: “But you don’t know what is in people’s hearts.” Not everyone articulates their feelings, and I would suggest that because of the perceived problem of patriarchy, affect in XR has changed direction and become less evident. Thus, it could be argued that the Goddess does have a presence in XR, but, maybe with a different dynamic that is less obvious to the onlooker. My informant also maintained that although ReGen was not overtly to do with the Goddess, there was a whole thread going back to Greenham:

*“The thing about XR is that we are completely and utterly concerned with what’s happening in the natural world, and that takes you straight into Goddess spirituality...so it is very powerful”*

Nevertheless, she complained that her local XR group had been taken over by people who had forgotten about ReGen. People were talking about action without any kind of spiritual preparation:

*“It’s become very masculine dominated, and they are out there doing things with almost no space to think about why they are doing it. The love is there – but they are not stopping to be empowered by it.” [See Appendices: Informant 7].*

However, another of my anonymous informants was really impressed that many XR groups did opening and closing ceremonies [organised by Goddess feminists] before rebellions with the opening ceremony also being ‘an action’.

*“There’s that holding, so the feminine power is being tapped into and appreciated. We need to bring balance back into the world – and rebalancing is a real Goddess thing.”*  
*[See Appendices: Informant 6].*

Bliss, a priestess who is in service to the Goddess at Stroud Goddess Temple, pointed out the similarity between Goddess feminists in XR and those at Greenham – circles of women empowering and raising awareness for one another:

*“I don’t think that at its core, the vision of XR is that different from Greenham Common because these things are happening in circles, among women, in the presence of the divine feminine.” [See Appendices: Informant 8]*

### 3.3 Grief and mourning

Robert Orsi defines religion as ‘a network of relationships between heaven and earth involving humans of all ages and many different sacred figures together.’<sup>249</sup> Quoting the Dutch scholar Petrus Tiele (*On the Elements of the Science of Religion, 1897*), Orsi argues that the basic human religious impulse is the same in all times and in all places. The impulse is ‘an original, unconscious, innate sense of infinity’, defining religion as ‘those manifestations of the human mind in words, deeds customs, and institutions which testify to man’s belief in the superhuman...’ adding ‘the expression of this impulse varies from culture to culture and age to age’.<sup>250</sup>

Thus, Goddess feminists and activists in XR assert their religion and spirituality through protest against the devastation of climate change, joining those across the world who are engulfed by pessimism and distress, prompting questions about death, the end of civilisation and emotional responses to the end of nature.<sup>251</sup> The new situation in which the world finds itself has been named ‘Solastalgia’ by Glenn A Albrecht, who claims it has become one of the defining emotions of the twenty-first century. Humans have got Earth relationships badly wrong, posits Albrecht.<sup>252</sup>

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<sup>249</sup> Robert A Orsi, *Between Heaven and Earth: The Religious Worlds People Make and the Scholars Who Study Them* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), p. 2.

<sup>250</sup> Robert A Orsi, ‘When 2 + 2 = 5’, p. 40.

<sup>251</sup> Glenn A Albrecht, *Earth Emotions: New Words for a New World* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2019), Preface x.

<sup>252</sup> *Ibid.* p 94.

Solastalgia is the lived experience of distressing, negative environmental change ‘the homesickness you have while still at home’.<sup>253</sup> The phenomenon of Solastalgia (based on the words ‘solace’ – giving comfort, and ‘algos’ – the Greek word for pain) is referred to by American academic Sarah J Pike as ‘the rites of grief and mourning.’<sup>254</sup> It is not unusual for environmental protesters, activists, and those in service to the Goddess to reference grief for loss – or anticipated future loss - which in turn motivates individual and collective activism.

Grief is an emotion that needs no articulation and is particular to each individual while being shared and experienced by all it affects, maintains Donovan O Schaefer.<sup>255</sup> As an emotion, affect is as important to the Goddess feminists in XR as it was at Greenham. The grief caused by Solastalgia is still experienced by Goddess feminists who are mourning the loss of non-human species and fear of the death of life on planet Earth. Activists are impelled to act despite their grief.

In the Extinction Rebellion handbook, *This Is Not A Drill*, Susie Orbach speaks of ‘climate sorrow’ suggesting such feelings are an important part of political activity, making activists more robust, more effective and compelling. “We need to accept our own feelings of grief and fear and provoke conversations that touch the hearts of others.”<sup>256</sup>

As stated in Chapter Two, grief fires action, stimulates movement and is transmitted from one activist to another during mass actions. Economies of grief are strongly manifest by the climate activists of XR. Protesters see the XR sigil and it symbolises their grief. The symbol is also used as a sign of the action undertaken and thus it becomes a talisman. Similarly, at Greenham Common peace camp, the women used various banners to signify their protest, many featuring the CND

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253 Glenn A Albrecht, *Earth Emotions*, Preface x.

254 Sarah M Pike, *For the Wild*, p. 196-199.

255 Donovan O Schaefer, *Religious Affects: Animality, Evolution and Power*, pp. 9-10.

256 Susie Orbach, ‘Climate Sorrow’ in *This is Not A Drill*, p. 68.

(Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament) logo, and pagan and Goddess symbols from the natural and spiritual world.<sup>257</sup> Goddess feminists protesting with XR use similar banners today.

Affect is the constant movement between coming together and falling apart that constitutes any mode of being, maintains Jenna Supp-Montgomerie. There is a distinction between emotion, which is a state of feeling, and affect - the waves of energy that move through and among bodies in constant ebb and flow. "Affect calls us into being, marks our dissolution, links us, and separates us. Affect can offer or undermine a sense of self. While emotion might be thought of as internal to a body, affect is the territory in-between."<sup>258</sup>

In XR's Regenerative Culture, Goddess feminist Claire was constantly dealing with grief – for the world, for the land, and for the climate - but also grief among activists who needed help because they were tired and stressed and going into burn-out. The grief of XR activists led to the movement's first Grief March through London in October twenty-nineteen.

The event was organised by the 'grief holders' – Goddess feminists, the 'real elders' who were held by spirit and brought in real presence, maintained Claire. She said she was just holding the space when "all these awesome women came in, old souls coming in their various forms" who worked together to organise the march. "There were thousands of people walking through London. It was disruptive." [See Appendices: Informant 1]. Since that first march organised by XR's 'old souls', there has been a Grief March through London each year. At Cop 26 in Glasgow last year, XR conducted a funeral service – the ultimate outpouring of grief.

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<sup>257</sup> Charlotte Dew, *Women for Peace: Banners from Greenham Common* (London: Four Corners Books, 2021), [www.fourcornersbooks.co.uk](http://www.fourcornersbooks.co.uk) [Accessed 24 February 2022]. See also Kate Kerrow and Rebecca Morgan, *Out of the Darkness: Greenham Voices 1981-2000* (Cheltenham: The History Press, 2021), pp. 161-164.

<sup>258</sup> Jenna Supp-Montgomerie, 'Affect and the Study of Religion' in *Religious Compass*, 9/10 (2015), pp. 335-345. <https://10.1111/rec3.12166> [Accessed 28 November 2021]

Claire explained that the grief marches, organised by the elders who were held by the spirit of the Goddess, were telling activists that it was all right to be sad, all right to grieve. “They were saying you can be angry, but you must realise that it comes from grief... that was the wonderful thing about XR, it was very held by spirit.”

Claire added that she was helped by the presence of the Goddess while she was working with XR:

*“I don’t know how I pulled out of the bag what I pulled out of the bag. There was such a divine power coming through me, it felt like there was so much flow. All I had to do was to stay with it, remain open and receive.” [See Appendices: Informant 1].*

Claire’s experience chimes with Orsi’s assertion that divine power is a powerful source of solace, hope, and companionship.<sup>259</sup> Instinctively knowing the Goddess was present gave Claire the energy to stay strong in often difficult circumstances.

Another of my informants who agrees with Orsi that divine power is a source of solace, is Stella, a Hedgewitch, who uses a lonely hilltop near her home to converse with the Goddess. “It is very windy up there, like the breath of the Goddess breathing on you.” Close by is a prehistoric long barrow and Stella also goes and talks to the ancestors and leaves an offering – usually a pebble or a stone. [See Appendices: Informant 9].

The flip side of the XR grief marches was the March for Nature, held in London’s Trafalgar Square in September twenty-twenty-one. This rebellion was a celebration of all life on earth. Like most XR actions, both the grief and nature marches featured chanting and marching to music, including salsa, reggae, and punk-jazz bands, accompanied by XR drummers, their movement adding an element of affect to the demonstrations, with the semantics of grief being triggered by the affect

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<sup>259</sup> Robert A Orsi, *History and Presence*, p. 2.

of grief, and the affect of grief becoming collectively embodied during the march. Everyone moved in the same way, to the same rhythm, affected by the music and the drums. Such affectivity is not an option but compulsory, argues philosopher Lisa Guenther. She maintains that bodies are radically dependent on their affective relationships and are better understood as addictions, as thick passions for bodies, objects, and relationships.<sup>260</sup>

It is interesting to note that although those on the XR grief marches were 'mourning' the impending loss of the earth through climate change, the protesters were impelled to act in a different way to those suffering the type of grief which causes depression, sadness, and sorrow, and which can render people inactive. There are many similarities between grief as an affect in XR and among feminist activists at Greenham Common women's peace camp four decades earlier. In XR they march to music and drums, while at Greenham the women sang, keened, and chanted as they protested. In XR and at Greenham activists have deployed their bodies as powerful blockades, using affect as a 'non-violent weapon'.

Climate change causes intense feelings of grief as people suffer climate-related losses to valued species, ecosystems, and landscapes. Ashlee Cunsolo and Neville R Ellis argue that grief is a natural and legitimate response to ecological loss and one that may become worse as climate impacts worsen.<sup>261</sup> This sense of grief can be ameliorated in some ways by the Goddess, who gave comfort to many of the Greenham women for whom she assumed a vital role of sustaining them, with the spirituality, rituals, symbols, and incantations also providing hope, strength, and motivation.<sup>262</sup> The Goddess as a source of support and comfort can also be seen among the Goddess feminists in XR. An informant, who was at Greenham and is now in XR, said that being in service to the Goddess

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<sup>260</sup> Donovan O Shaefer, *Religious Affects*, pp 14-15.

<sup>261</sup> Ashlee Cunsolo and Neville R. Ellis, 'Ecological grief as a mental health response to climate-change related loss' in *Nature Climate Change* 8 (2018), pp. 275-281.

<sup>262</sup> Jill Liddington, *The Road to Greenham Common*, p. 236.

definitely helped when campaigning for the planet – “she [the Goddess] helps you to remember why you are doing what you are doing... and keening is great for keeping your spirits up and building energy.” [See Appendices: Informant 6].

The grief experienced by XR activists who fear an imminent ecological crisis that will destroy the earth, mirrors that of the Greenham women fighting to save the earth from atomic annihilation. Is this evidence of history repeating itself? Have previous threats to the Earth and its inhabitants been forgotten? Goddess priestess Kathy argues it is possible, because we still live in a patriarchal world and things fought for in Second Wave feminism have been discounted by the younger generation:

*“Between generations there are resistances...They [the younger generation] forget and they don’t know, and we are still in patriarchy...it’s a long journey. I just try to keep educating people.” [See Appendices: Informant 4].*

The words of philosopher and writer George Santayana (1863-1932) - “Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it”<sup>263</sup> – are, I would suggest, a chilling reminder of how quickly humankind forgets.

### 3.4 Inheriting the Goddess

All my informants agree with Claire, who insists that many of those in XR are aware that they are standing on the shoulders of the Greenham women, and all the feminist activists who have gone before, to make protest possible. There is an understanding that so many women from all walks of life had put their lives on the line so that feminist activists in the twenty-first century could protest – and for the most part, protest legally. However, she suggested that protest organisations were like plants – they grow, have a life cycle and then at some time must compost and reform as something else:

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<sup>263</sup> George Santayana, *The Life, and Reason of Common Sense*, p. 284.

*“Quite often an organisation gets swamped by patriarchy and people move out of it and they form other things, and so it goes on, almost like cross-fertilisation.” [See Appendices: Informant 1].*

Goddess feminist Toma who was at Greenham (but not in XR) argues that many young women today relate to the Greenham women, with a lot of what was inherited from Greenham being passed on to younger generations:

*“By telling stories [of rebellion] we are giving lineage and a culture. Greenham Goddesses have become involved in politics, teaching younger women how to relate to female power...you can see the connections from Greenham.” [See Appendices: Informant 3].*

Bell, a nature-based soul mentor, helps many people in their twenties and thirties, while her daughter set up XR Youth for the under-eighteens. She claims that the presence of the Goddess for young people is more under the radar, under the guise of ecocentrism. [See Appendices: Informant 5]. Nevertheless, many young Goddess feminists do take part in singing, keening, and dancing during XR marches and actions – a way of acknowledging their allegiance to the Goddess and XR.

One of my interviewees (anonymous) who was at Greenham, compared life in XR with that among the peace camp women. She did not think that Goddess feminists had changed much over the past forty years and posited the view that in some ways Goddess feminism had been passed down the generations, adding that she knew a generation of young hippy women who worshipped the Goddess. [See Appendices: Informant 6].

Nevertheless, for those in service to the Goddess in the twenty-first century, there is still work to do. Goddess feminists continue to face discrimination among the uninformed. Bliss recounted that



when she was looking for a base for Stroud Goddess Temple she came up against a lot of ‘patriarchal programming’ which led people to judge her harshly. Even to mention the word ‘Goddess’ could appear threatening. So many Goddesses had been turned into demons: “I felt as though the welcome mat had been withdrawn from us several times.” [See Appendices: Informant 8]

Many of my informants believe that women in the twenty-first century have learnt from the past, and sacrifices made by past generations have been remembered: they are aware of their feminist inheritance. However, conscious that almost all these women are between the ages of forty and late seventies, and I needed to seek the views of someone younger.

Antonia is seventeen, a performing arts student in Bristol. She had heard of the Suffragettes and Greenham Common women’s peace camp and was aware of XR but knew nothing about Goddess feminism. She told me XR was ‘quite active’ in Bristol, there was a lot of XR graffiti around and she knew people who had been to some of the protests. However, Antonia claimed that most teenagers knew about the climate crisis because of the young Swedish activist Greta Thunberg:

*“It’s all over my Instagram feed and I follow Greta...she has clearly made an impact. Everyone knows who she is. Many young people love her and really support her.” [See Appendices: Informant 10].*

To some Thunberg, who came from obscurity and ignited a global movement, appears otherworldly. It has been claimed by some that she resembles Joan of Arc, the fifteenth century visionary who was later canonised as a saint; to others, she is offering ‘a prophetic voice to shake us out of our complacency’. However, Ellen Boucher argues these tropes are misleading because they risk distorting her message – that humankind is causing global warming. Boucher further suggests that depictions of Thunberg as a

prophet are fodder for climate change opponents who dismiss her ‘doomsday activism’ and portray her supporters as ‘brainwashed cult followers’.<sup>264</sup>

Although she thought activism – and women being activists – was important, XR it did not really impact on Antonia’s life, apart from the occasional frustration when roads were blocked. While admitting XR probably did have a grasp on her age group because most had heard of the movement, Goddess feminism had not reached any of the young people Antonia knew. “I really don’t know anything about the Goddess.”

Antonia’s indifference to the Goddess is indicative of the secular milieu in which we live, when religious practice is no longer a social expectation and young people are choosing secular rather than religious options. Time which would previously have been spent in worship is now increasingly used as leisure time.<sup>265</sup> Referring to the ‘me-society’, Jorg Stoiz et al contend there are tendencies towards secular drift where sleeping or playing sports is more attractive than religion; with religious practice seen as a private and optional characteristic of identity.<sup>266</sup>

This indifference could change, however. Young people in general tend to care about the planet, nature, and non-human animals. Antonia (and many of her friends) are vegan, and support animal rights and the environment. Antonia admitted that the XR protests grabbed the attention of young people but claimed that although they liked the idea of XR and activism, they often could not be bothered to take part. As the environmental crisis deepens and Generation Z get older, it is likely there will be a growing awareness of the plight of the planet and the need to do something about it.

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<sup>264</sup> Ellen Boucher, The dangers of depicting Greta Thunberg as a prophet’ in *The Conversation* (2021) <https://www.theconversation.com> [Accessed 24 February 2022].

<sup>265</sup> Jorg Stolz, Judith Konemann, Malory Schneuwly Purdie, Thomas Englberger and Michael Kruggeler, *(Un)believing in Modern Society: Religion, Spirituality and Religious-Secular Competition* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016), pp. 8-31.

<sup>266</sup> Ibid.

Antonia suggested that XR had a difficult task. “It’s hard to get your voice heard and I don’t think the Government listens. So, you do have to be annoying, you do have to be in the way, you do have to be loud - or else people just don’t hear it. But you can only protest for so long before people stop listening.” And Goddess feminism? “That stuff hasn’t reached us yet.” [See Appendices: Informant 10].

Despite Antonia’s contention that the young know little of the Goddess, the responses of my older informants suggest that the Goddess is present and underpinning activism in XR as she did at Greenham.

On the other hand, I would suggest that it was perhaps easier to experience real presence of the Goddess at Greenham, where a women-only space allowed abundant events to flourish. Encouraged by Swedish writer and painter Monica Sjöo and American Witch and activist Starhawk, the women at the peace camp were able to connect to the network that emanated from the times before patriarchy. Orsi argues that an abundant event serves as a focusing lens for the intricacies of relationships in a particular area at a particular time, providing meaning for all the hopes, desires, and fears circulating among a group of people.<sup>267</sup> That could be claimed to be the case with Goddess feminists in XR, who are bringing their experiences of the Goddess into the real world rather than attempting to fence them off.

However, it must be stressed that the spiritual thrust of XR is very much ecumenical, with Goddess spirituality being just one aspect of its rich mosaic. From its inception, XR has involved people of all faiths and none, with activists including Buddhists, Muslims, atheists, and most of the Christian denominations, especially Quakers, and those in service to the Goddess, protesting together.

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<sup>267</sup> Robert A Orsi, ‘Abundant History: Marian Apparitions as Alternative Modernity’, pp. 14-15.

In its handbook, XR states ‘it becomes not only our right but our sacred duty to rebel’ – pointing to the movement’s overarching higher purpose, the salvation of human existence and life on the planet in the face of perceived mass extinction. Despite the use of the word ‘sacred’ and the involvement of so many people with religious commitment, there is no suggestion that XR is itself a religion nor that members believe they belong to a religious movement called XR, posits Martin Wood. The acts of rebellion undertaken by XR activists engage all the senses, with music, costume, performance, imagery, symbolism, emotion, food, community, risk, and specific location. If these actions are compared with what we might consider to be religious practices, then we could be forgiven for thinking that climate change activism is a sacred or religious act in this context, he contends.<sup>268</sup> Nevertheless, Wood maintains that XR, as a social movement, has engaged with affective religious aspects that engender strong emotional responses in an attempt to bring about wider change and that these aspects inform and give shape to certain ways of speaking and acting that characterise XR.<sup>269</sup>

If rebellion is a ‘sacred duty’ for members of XR, it may seem surprising that there is little evidence that the Goddess is as overtly powerful and present in the movement as she was at Greenham. Even though the XR handbook is full of inclusive words underlining ‘diverse species’ and ‘diverse cultures’,<sup>270</sup> several of my informants claimed that patriarchy was a problem within XR, resulting in Goddess feminists tending to ‘fly below the radar’. Stella suggested that XR had been infiltrated by those who wanted action but had no time for the spiritual. [See Appendices: Informant 9].

Goddess feminism flourished in female-only Greenham, where women were encouraged explore and practice their spirituality. Four decades later, life in XR is very different, with women feeling less

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<sup>268</sup> Martin Wood, *Sacred Planet, Sacred Acts: Extinction Rebellion’s Climate Change Activism as Material Religion*. Unpublished (2019)

<sup>269</sup> Ibid.

<sup>270</sup> Vandana Shiva, *This Is Not A Drill*, p. 7.

secure and less confident when surrounded by those (and I include unsympathetic women as well as patriarchal men) who do not share their spiritual values. Thus, a number of the Goddess feminists I spoke to were careful not to flaunt their spirituality in places where 'a Goddess may be turned into a demon'. [See Appendices: Informant 8].

## REFLECTION

*“There is no clear window into the inner life of a person, for any window is always filtered through the glaze of language, signs, and the process of signification. And language – both written and in spoken forms – inherently unstable. Hence there can never be a clear, unambiguous statement of anything, including an intention or a meaning.” – Jacques Derrida<sup>271</sup>*

The study of Goddess feminism across four decades, and with divergent groups of women, has been extremely challenging. I decided to use a reflexive ethnographic approach to my research, together with the collection of qualitative data through field notes. Thus, I was able to interview Goddess feminists from the nineteen-eighties to the twenty-twenties to see if I could spot any recurring patterns, without using statistical analysis.

An on-going interest in Greenham Common women’s peace camp, both historically and personally, the climate-change protests undertaken by Extinction Rebellion (XR), and a fascination with Goddess feminism across the years, prompted my decision to undertake this ethnographic research. I was mindful that I was approaching interviews with a personal history as a feminist with an interest in socio-political protest. However, I was confident that my background, maturity, and the life I have led would inform my research and original methodology and allow me to interpret my informant interviews in the light of my own experience.

Before conducting any field work, I consulted various academic writings, principally Charlotte Aul Davies (*Reflexive Ethnography*, 2008) and John Van Maanen (*Tales of the Field*, 2011) and their expertise formed the backbone of my research. When the going got tough, I frequently referred to this academic duo, although it was to Jacques Derrida, I most frequently turned in times of difficulty.

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<sup>271</sup> Jacques Derrida, ‘Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences’ in *The Structuralist Controversy: The Language of Criticism and the Sciences of Man*, eds Richard Macksey and Eugenio Donato (Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, 1972), p. 250.

His reminder that there is no clear window into the inner life of a person, that any view is always filtered through the glaze of language and signs,<sup>272</sup> resonated with me – particularly when interviewing the feisty, formidable Goddess feminists who were my informants for this research.

The women who invoked the Goddess and sang, keened, and took over Greenham Common to fight patriarchy and save the world from nuclear disaster, have now re-invented themselves as feisty, formidable Goddess feminists who are invoking the Goddess, fighting patriarchy, and saving the world from climate catastrophe with Extinction Rebellion (XR). Most of the women I interviewed had been at Greenham and were now protesting with XR. Same women, different cause. Many of my informants, now aged sixty-plus, are still rebels. They may be forty years older than when they were blockading the gates at Greenham, but they continue live as if they were in their twenties. A few still live an itinerant lifestyle, relying on the hospitality of friends and family; some continue to be arrested and charged – and occasionally imprisoned – because of their activism.

They acknowledge that they tend to have an easier time with police and courts because they are mainly middle-class, older women, and white. It is not a privilege they abuse. As Bell said: “I am happy to use it in the service of the Goddess.”<sup>273</sup> I admit to being in awe of these women who are still putting personal freedom on the line at every XR rebellion.

Nevertheless, I believe that the biggest fight of all is against patriarchy. Speaking to my informants who are in XR, it appears that the age-old culture that elevates all men over women is as strong as it ever was. Women who thought they had beaten patriarchy when they kicked the men out of Greenham, were wrong. The dominant ideology of patriarchy, which these women have spent their lives fighting, continues. It is interesting to note that at Greenham, were there was a strict ‘no men’

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<sup>272</sup> Jacques Derrida, ‘Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences’.

<sup>273</sup> See Appendices: Informant 5.

policy Goddess feminism flourished, while in XR, where men and women protest together, Goddess feminism has to some extent gone 'underground'.

Conversations with my informants centred mainly on their lives at Greenham or in XR. It was only when reviewing those interviews that I realised that patriarchy was still a day-to-day occurrence for many women. If I was starting those interviews again, in the light of this experience, I would be asking different, more pertinent questions.

In Methodology I posed the question for whom am I conducting this research? At the completion of this thesis, I finally understand that it is aimed at all women – Goddess feminist or not – who continue to suffer patriarchy. I hope that my research will make them aware of their feminist heritage, of all those courageous women who have gone before, and encourage them to throw off the patriarchal yoke and be themselves, instead of accepting the rules of an androcentric society that has oppressed women for thousands of years.



## CONCLUSION

*“These are times of unravelling, dissolving, transformation. Don’t expect to be the same person as before you took part in this journey...It is time to trust what is happening and be willing to be changed”* – Gail Bradbrook, Extinction Rebellion founder member.<sup>274</sup>

The overarching aim of this thesis was to expand the historical knowledge and dimension of activism in the British feminist movement during the past forty years, and to discover whether the same the values and spiritual beliefs that formed the foundation of feminist activism at Greenham Common women’s peace camp in the nineteen-eighties were still evident among the twenty-first century feminists fighting climate change with Extinction Rebellion (XR)? Was history repeating itself?

In Chapter One I outlined my contention that worship of the Goddess, had re-emerged after thousands of years of suppression, to give women, not only the freedom to be themselves, but also to fight patriarchy. I also examined the rise of modern feminism and considered the contemporary Goddess movement, and the experience of real presence and the emotion of grief in relation to affect among the feminist activists at Greenham and in XR.

Chapter Two explored the back story of the women’s peace camp at Greenham and focussed on the part Goddess feminism played in both the day-to-day praxis and the ideology behind it. I considered the importance of grief as an emotional affect and suggested that real presence was a lived reality for the Goddess feminists who experienced it.

Chapter Three investigated Goddess feminism in XR and considered whether the values and spiritual beliefs in relation to the Goddess, which formed the foundation of much feminist activism at Greenham, were still evident. I further considered whether real presence and grief as an

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<sup>274</sup> Gail Bradbrook, ‘What Is Your Place In These Times?’ in *This Is Not A Drill: An Extinction Rebellion Handbook*, p. 185.

emotional affect were lived realities for the XR Goddess feminists. Finally, I questioned whether the fight against patriarchy continues to be an on-going battle for feminists in the twenty-first century.

A rigorous review of current academic writing, combined with data obtained from interviews with ten informants, leads me to contend that my research has not achieved the anticipated conclusion. I had hoped to find that the values and spiritual beliefs in relation to the Goddess would be the same four decades later, and that history was repeating itself. However, while there is evidence of Goddess feminism among XR activists, it has a different character – a more individual feel – than the spirituality at Greenham.

Initially I presumed it was the result of ‘different days, different ways’ – that four decades would obviously have made a difference to how Goddess spirituality was conducted among twenty-first century feminists. In some ways my hypothesis is valid – history has repeated itself. Saving the earth and humankind from the ravages of nuclear destruction or the devastating threat of climate emergency was the rationale for activists at Greenham and in XR. In both cases their activism was sparked by the disdain and arrogance of the overwhelmingly patriarchal establishment in Westminster and its refusal to listen to or acknowledge problems. Margaret Thatcher’s Conservative government decided the Greenham women were merely ‘an eccentric pinprick’ and ignored them.<sup>275</sup> Likewise, the current government’s contempt for climate activists was made clear at the Conservative Party Conference in October 2021 when Prime Minister Boris Johnson branded the XR spin-off, Insulate Britain, as ‘irresponsible crusties’ and ‘a profound nuisance’.<sup>276</sup>

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<sup>275</sup> Jill Liddington, *The Road to Greenham Common: Feminism and Anti-Militarism in Britain since 1820* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1989), p.1.

<sup>276</sup> Chiara Giordano, ‘Boris Johnson brands Insulate Britain ‘irresponsible crusties’ for blocking motorways’ in *Independent*, 5 October 2021.

However, I suggest that the similarity between the two groups ends there and argue that the twenty-first century Goddess feminists in XR live in a world diametrically opposed to the one inhabited by the Greenham women. Apart from sharing a spiritual belief, the women have disparate lives and experiences. Therefore, values and spiritual beliefs must diverge.

The Goddess feminists at Greenham Common lived and protested within a relatively small area. Their camps were set up around the nine-mile perimeter fence enclosing the thousand-acre site of the United States Air Force base.<sup>277</sup> Greenham was a loosely structured network of individuals and groups, with women randomly coming and going.<sup>278</sup> While the women moved between the various settlements, they lived within the confines of the camp. Communication with the outside world was reduced to the nearest payphone, occasional letters, and visitors, many of them journalists.<sup>279</sup> There were no mobile phones or internet, and information circulated within the camp via newsletters, leaflets, advertising boards, and word of mouth.

Four decades later, communication and the flow of information among activists have undergone a radical change, with the internet, mobile phones, and social media making organisation a great deal easier. Activists can be gathered at short notice with many protesters travelling throughout the United Kingdom to attend rebellions and marches.

I have reflected that at Greenham, where there was a strict 'no men' policy, Goddess feminism flourished, while in XR, where men and women protest side-by-side, patriarchy is a problem causing some Goddess feminists to go 'underground'. At least one of my informants admitted to 'flying a bit below the radar'. However, it could be suggested that the close-knit women-only community at

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<sup>277</sup> Beth Junor, *Greenham Common Women's Peace Camp*, pp. ix-xi.

<sup>278</sup> Sasha Roseneil, *Disarming Patriarchy*, pp.100-101.

<sup>279</sup> Jean Stead, The Greenham Common Peace Camp and its legacy in *The Guardian*, 5 September 2006 <https://theguardian.com> [Accessed 10 March 2022]

Greenham made it easier for Goddess feminism to flourish, giving women the time and space to explore spirituality. One of my informants posited the view that because XR was a much bigger organisation than Greenham, Goddess feminism among XR activists was often imperceptible. Several of the women I interviewed spoke of patriarchy in XR, saying the organisation had become very male dominated, while one was adamant: “Actually, in reality, XR is pretty patriarchal.” [See Appendices: Informant 5].

Both religion and politics, historically intermeshed, have been dominated by systems that empower men and oppress women and this is reflected by the way we treat nature and humankind.<sup>280</sup> Speaking to the Goddess feminists in XR, it appears that patriarchy is as strong as it ever was. The Greenham women who thought they had beaten patriarchy when they declared a ‘women-only’ space, were wrong. The dominant ideology of patriarchy, which feminists have spent their lives fighting, continues.

Throughout my extensive reading and research for this thesis I have been reminded how much more there is to learn. I would like to delve deeper into Goddess feminism among the female activists in XR and determine to what extent they are affected by patriarchy and whether they can see an end to its control.

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<sup>280</sup> Mirabai Starr, *Wild Mercy* (Boulder: Sounds True, 2019), p. 39.

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## APPENDICES

Informant 1 – Claire, London, 40-45 years old

**(18 July 2021)**

**CT:** Is there Goddess feminism in Extinction Rebellion?

**Claire:** I wouldn't say there was Goddess feminism explicitly. I guess it depends on how you're defining that. There are certainly some very powerful women in XR. The most obvious one to name would be Gail Bradbury, who is one of the founders. She is definitely one of the female leaders, although XR was set up to be leaderless.

**CT:** No leaders?

**Claire:** Not originally. XR set to be a non-hierarchical organisation and almost operate like an apology. So, lots of different circles to do lots of different things and they each had their own agency to create what they felt they wanted to do. Encouraging everyone's grief and the way they wanted to turn that into action. Providing some core objectives and messages and knitted everyone together as a community.

**CT:** Did everybody - everybody who was in XR – agree somehow to do this or was it just certain people who did the activism. If you are a member of XR was it taken for granted that you would go on protests?

**Claire:** Well, the main thrust of XR was to cause disruption to the system so the system could no longer function normally and the people in power would have to make adjustments. They would have to listen. They couldn't just continue business as normal. We hoped we would bring on board enough people to create that critical mass and cause enough disruption to the system. Arrestable action was the way that people would go. But we obviously set ourselves up to be welcoming of everyone because there were lots of people who were not in a position to be arrested for lots of different reasons be it their job or... obviously going to prison is a big thing. We were criticised for the big push, particularly [the push] by Roger Hallam, encouraging people to do things that would get them put away. When you get put in prison that's what creates the big headlines, and you get the whole martyr thing. When you get enough people in prison, that's when public opinion can start to shift. Which is why the police, deliberately, haven't put any of us in prison.

**CT:** Well, those that have had trials have got off.

**Claire:** But that's a bit different. That's when they've gone to Crown Court and had a jury and even though they have been guilty according to British Law, the jury have gone on to found them not guilty because there's actually a bigger law in place here, there's actually a moral duty to protect things. So yes, the acts that we did may have been illegal, but we are trying to highlight something that's a much, much bigger crime against humanity, and the juries have understood that, and the cases have been kicked out.

**CT:** Within XR there are lots of different sections, like a vegan group for example. Is there a Goddess group of any sort?

**Claire:** Not that I know of... there were Earth Spirituality groups, like the Visioning Circle, the ones that were the dreamers, dreaming into ideas about how we should be as an organisation; how we

can bring forward the new paradigm. There was always this tension within XR between fighting the government, being very masculine and banging on the door, and others who were saying, 'well, let us just be the change we want to be. Let's start working to prepare people for the increasing climate event which is about to start impacting the community. Let's not waste time banging on a door which is clearly not willing to open. Let's do to both things.' I suppose you could say that is the feminine and the masculine. Right from the start there was this tension, this antagonism – a dance between the male and the female. There were very much the action people, and the dreamers.

**CT:** And I suppose the masculine were not always men. They could be very strong women? The interesting thing for me is that in XR there are both men and women. Whereas at Greenham, they kicked all the men out, so there were just women. So, it's an interesting difference that in XR you are working together. But you still have those two sides.

**Claire:** True. But there was an Anti-Patriarchy Circle set up in XR. Again, lots of groups set up in recognition that all the mal functions in society like racism, patriarchy, and the consequences of all of those things like capitalism and consumerism, is what has led the earth to be as damaged as it is. Recognising our past, our colonial past and the impact that has had on all of us. Right from the start, it was written into the [XR] principles, that self-help were to be at the centre of all of it. Until you realise the ways you are subconsciously perpetuating - patriarchy, racism, misogyny - then nothing is ever going to change. You can read books, but unless you've made that change in yourself, it's never going to have any power, spiritually, energetically, socially, emotionally. And that, unfortunately is what is going to slow down everything. Roger was there saying 'I appreciate this self-work has to be done but we don't have time for that, we have got literally ten years before the earth starts to collapse. So yes, self-work is crucial, but it can't be at the expense of keeping everyone in emergency mode'. Once again that's the male, the emergency, the action...

I was in the middle of these two because I understood them very well and I was co-ordinating Regenerative Culture, which was about how to bring in a regenerative culture within an activist organisation.

Activist organisations are always burnt out before their time because the people within them have burnt out. They are doing these amazing things, with all their passion, all of their life forms, many of them not earning any money, living hand to mouth, which is already reducing their personal resilience. And then they get arrested, and so people have different opinions about how to go about doing things. When people are low on personal energy, the infighting starts. People aren't allowing themselves proper cycles of recovery and just going from one action to the next and then the next, and then all the triggers and all the wounding comes out because you're just on your last legs really and there is not enough people to come in and take over.

The founders were experienced activists who had seen this happen over time and wanted to create something different by bringing in the feminine more strongly and more consciously. So, let's set up an organisation which is complete regenerative; like we can regenerate and therefore it's much more sustainable and we can be a much more formidable – in terms of fighting - or being what we want to be.

So, my circle was responsible for that culture, which explained it's ok to rest, it's ok to be sad, ok to grieve. You can be angry but must recognise that it comes from grief... realise what you are holding in your body when you do that work. Don't fall into that cycle of anger or conflict, trying to dominate something or trying to get your way because those are the woundings that have led us to this place collectively. We must work together differently and support each other rather than trying to drive forward with this individualistic mind-set that we've all been told is the way to be: like for God's sake don't rely on anyone else, try to be as self-sufficient as you possibly can if you're not then you're weak. So, it was about trying to turn the tables and going, no, the strength is relying on other people, learning how to receive help and modelling that so you can bring other people along with you.

**CT:** Were there any rituals that you used? Did you ever use Reiki for instance, which I thought might have been quite useful? What about the Earth Spirituality group?

**Claire:** They were much more about doing the sacred activity

**CT:** So, what would they do?

**Claire:** So, they would do actions; instead of demonising oil and petrol, plastics, and the oil companies, it was a recognition that everything has a vibration, so plastic is made of oil and oil is part of nature, so doing healing from that direction as well.

Some of them have become a bit pissed off because over time it has all moved away from that beautiful place of yin and yang and went more towards the yang, so all the yin holders just moved away. But kept their work going but more on the periphery. Land healing and the Grief March, which was organised by women in my Regeneration Circle. That was the beautiful thing about XR, it was very held by spirit. I was just holding a space, really and then all these women came in. One of them organised the Grief Circle.

**CT:** Grief for the world? Grief for the climate?

**Claire:** All of that yes. And the women who came into that were just awesome. Awesome women. They were the grief holders, the real elders. The real old souls coming in their various forms and working together, and they organised the Grief March which marched through London.

**CT:** So, what did the patriarchal type people think of the Grief March. Were they OK with it?

**Claire:** Some of them thought it was a bit airy-fairy. But there were different types of those people too. You need all these different types of people in an organisation, so it's not wrong to be that type of person. There were varying degrees of people that got it or not. The Grief March was considered an XR action, thousands of people walking through London, and it was disruptive.

**CT:** All this must have taken a toll on you – physically and emotionally?

**Claire:** I don't know how I pulled out of the bag what I pulled out of the bag. There was such a divine power coming through me, it felt like there was so much flow. All I had to do was stay with it, remain open and receive.

**CT:** How did you recharge your batteries?

**Claire:** You have people you can talk to. In Regenerative Culture, one of the things encouraged for the people who were co-ordinating was to set up support around them so they could reach out if they needed to. And there were people who would let you know if you were falling into your own patriarchal conditioning because you're stressed or you're tired, because it's then that all these things come out. A lot of people go into burn out and they can't see it coming. So, they just fall over, but on their way down, they can do quite a lot of wounding of other people, groups, and relationships as they go.

**CT:** Do you think some of the women in XR appreciate that if it was not for women like the Suffragettes, the Greenham women or whoever, they wouldn't be able to do what they are doing? What I call Feminist Inheritance. Is that really appreciated?

**Claire:** Absolutely. Again, at the beginning Roger would say all these activist organisations have failed: 'Greenpeace, look at them now, they have just become part of the system where at the beginning they were different.' But when the feminine came in to readjust that message, it was very much, 'no we stand on the shoulders of everyone who has gone before us.' We realise that all those organisations, if you think of them as a plant, they grow, and everything has a life cycle and at some time that plant has to compost and reform as something else. Quite often, because patriarchy is completely dominant, you can't fight it. At some time, an organisation is going to get swamped by patriarchy and people move out of it and they reform other things, almost like cross fertilisation.

One final thing: I was doing a nature-based leadership course that XR paid for me to do and my personal journey through all of that was my realisation that I had to restart... I had to relearn and connect with the sacred feminine and that means the Goddess, because of the power that had been called on me to bring back to this planet, and until I connected with that myself, I can't do that in a meaningful way; and that's why I ended up stepping back because I need to go and do my work now, and when I'm ready I need to come back. So that patriarchy doesn't drown me and burn me out. Because it's too important. And the sacred feminine is far more important than patriarchy. We need to reconnect with it so we can channel it.

**NOTE:** Claire spent a year as co-ordinator of Regenerative Culture within XR before standing down from that position. She is now dedicating herself to reconnecting with the Goddess and the sacred feminine before going back to work with XR.

#### **Question to Claire via WhatsApp, 9 October 2021**

**CT:** How do you view the fact that XR members have joined the newly set up Insulate Britain?

**Claire:** Many established activists kind of shunned XR when it first came out because of the positions it took on things. For example, openness with the police. Some of those now in XR prefer the more hard-line stance taken by Insulate Britain.

#### **Question to Claire via WhatsApp, 26 November 2021**

**CT:** Can you explain to me how dreaming works in XR when they are dreaming in an action?

**Claire:** To dream into something means to use your imagination more than your mental processes. To just let yourself daydream about the action or be ‘wondering’ about it for a week while you do other things.

In the context of a group dreaming into something, they would think about why they wanted to do that specific action, where is best to do it, which date, what kind of imagery/artwork/costume to work with, how to communicate it all in a beautiful and meaningful way, linking to the Earth of regenerative culture or telling the truth (all of which are XR Principles).

Dreaming into something leaves space for spirit or the sacred to come through, for emotions that need to be held...for creativity and playfulness. It’s the feminine version of ‘brainstorming’. When I say emotions that need to be held, I mean in the collective or in our society as a whole, in addition to those of the individuals carrying out the action.

Often actions can be a means of expressing something in the collective (e.g. grief) which is why a lot of XR actions look miserable. Grief themes in action usually include beauty as well, as the sacred activists hold the position that you can’t truly experience the beauty of life until you have learned how to truly grieve as an integral process of living.

But not all XR actions are designed from this place. It depends on who is designing them.

[Informant 2 – Mollie, Gloucestershire, 70 years old](#)  
**(12 August 2021)**

**CT:** I’ve always been interested in Extinction Rebellion, and I lived in Stroud, where it was very important.

**M:** It went quiet for a while, but it’s got going again. We were there, last weekend when there was a thing for people who were going to London. Actually, I think it’s all been extra quiet because they did this direct action, a whole gang of them and they were the centre of things for a long time. And there is this whole thing of deep adaptation, as well. It can get you and bring you down so you can’t come up. I think you have to be very careful around it.

**CT:** How does that happen – deep adaptation?

**M:** Well, you face the ultimate truth and it’s very difficult to be optimistic. I think it depends what sort of person you are. Some people look back at the past and live through that bit, some people live in the present, and some people look to the future and worry about the future. And if you worry about the future, it can be very difficult to live at the moment.

**CT:** You were at Greenham?

**M:** I went there, I didn’t live there. A week was the longest I was there.

**CT:** What was it like?

**M:** When you have small children you lose heaps of confidence. There’s not a young mother anywhere that has loads of confidence in herself. At that time, I was conducting the village choir, so I couldn’t go to Greenham on the day when they all held hands around the base. I went a day later, with a friend, and stayed overnight and we were there first thing in the morning when we



stopped all the lorries. So, I was absolutely thrown in the deep end. To me all these big strong women at Greenham made me feel totally inadequate. I've been a protestor all my life, I'd done Aldermaston and all that, but I was really daunted by these women. They were very welcoming, but I was a mother with young children, and they were women who wanted to take on the world. I felt really, all the time I went to Greenham there were women who were a lot stronger than me. They were quite feisty women who were at that stage where they could conquer the world.

**CT:** Did you go many times?

**M:** Yes, we had a thing called Women for Life on Earth and there were a gang of us locally who were in that. My husband at the time pointed out there was this march going from Cardiff to Greenham and would I like to join it. There were men as well as women. I couldn't have gone to Greenham as much as I did if it hadn't been for my husband. He did look after the kids. But then got the notion that I would take the kids with me.

**CT:** How old were your children then?

**M:** The eldest boy was 13, and the other two a few years younger. So that was the kind of era I went. Joe had a rough time with the police, they really tried to put him off the whole thing, whereas the younger ones were left alone.

**CT:** Did you get involved in the action?

**M:** As soon as I went. We were dragged off the road and then we went straight back on again. My two friends and I were pictured on the front of the *New Statesman*. And then it kept happening, going back on the road and getting dragged off again. It was hard work. We blocked the gate, and the police came up and pinched us [around the face] and I still don't know how they did it, but it just made you get up. It was like an automatic thing you couldn't control. And after that I didn't have the courage to go back on the road again, but my two friends went back. We all had long hair and as those lorries went by them on the road it looked as if they were running over their hair. So, I was introduced at the deep end.

It was rough camping in benders and things like that, and there was a shit pit, so you tended to get yourself constipated before you got there so you didn't have to use the pit. But those who stayed longer just had to get the hang of it really. It was all right, it was just not what we were used to.

**CT:** Did you know of any Goddess feminism at Greenham?

**M:** There was the other Eve – Lilith – she was the one we heard a lot about while I was there. That's where I learnt about the Goddess. They had these wonderful shadow puppets, this wonderful play about her. And it also introduced the idea that there had been a matriarchal time in this world before patriarchy took over. It did introduce me to that thinking that it was a possibility. I was brought up like everyone else in a very patriarchal way and you never really shed that thinking. I think my husband was probably less patriarchal than I was. I'm only thinking this out loud now... but I think I had been brought up in a very patriarchal family and my view of what man would be was this patriarchal character. So, I almost put him into the position of being a very patriarchal parent when it didn't really fit him. But at that time of your life, you have so little confidence, and we hadn't got careers waiting for us in the wings, so to prove our worth in the

world we had to do everything to show how important we are. Nowadays my children do things very differently with mothers and fathers sharing all responsibilities.

**CT:** So, we have come a long way?

**M:** In some ways, but because it is such a strong patriarchal society, it is out there, so it ends up with women trying to do that role they were doing and everything else as well. Now it has reached the point where financially, it is difficult for a woman to stay at home. You can't be a stay-at-home mother even if you want to. We should have choices.

**CT:** Do you think your Greenham experiences have translated to XR in some way? How did you get involved in XR?

**M:** My partner really, I think I would have been on the edge, I don't think I would have got as involved as I am if it wasn't for him. He feels passionately about it. I had left activism for quite a bit before now and I've always done a lot less than he's done. But the arts community is quite a passionate community. [Mollie is a stained-glass artist with a workshop in the garden]. I've done a lot to being that community together. I try not to let XR take over. I function much better as a person when I have my work takes a pole position in my life.

**CT:** So, have you been caught up with activism with XR?

**M:** Yes. The first major thing I did was the Spring Rebellion in 2019. My partner walked from Stroud to London, it took nine days, and by the time they got there they were a cohesive group. I joined them for the last day of walking to London. They decided to camp in Hyde Park, and I said there was no way we would be allowed. So, they said let's sit down and discuss it. So, we sat in a circle by a main road and had a discussion and then carried on walking to Hyde Park. I was sure we would be turned out in the middle of the night. But no, we stayed there until morning and in the morning, they said: 'Put all your stuff in the pile over there'. So, there was this great big pile of stuff just under a bit of tarpaulin and off we went to take Waterloo Bridge. We were all in the grounds of this church, the people there were really helpful, and there was a lot of people getting hold of trees. And we were told, 'now we are going to take Waterloo Bridge and the people with trees go first'. And the police just stopped the traffic and let us go on the bridge. Absolutely extraordinary. We made the bridge into a garden, the whole bridge. I wasn't really concerned. I felt 'if I know this is the right time then I'll sit in the road'. A bit like Greenham. So, it was from time to time. But we didn't have much to lose, so I wasn't that fussed about it. My partner was a probation officer and at that point he was a legal observer, so he couldn't participate. Eventually, he threw off his position because he wanted to get into it properly. So, I've not actually been arrested.

**CT:** I was told that the police arrest people but never go further because it gives them more publicity. Whereas XR want arrests to give them more publicity.

**M:** My partner is with a group of people who are determined they get arrested.... It is interesting for him because he was a probation officer and has been on the other side of the wall. He got arrested... [I felt Mollie obviously did not want to pursue this strand of conversation]

At the end of that day, we went back to Marble Arch, our tent was up it was just a wonderful atmosphere of love – both the bridge and that. Everywhere you went it was all about love.

Greenham was about caring. I think there was a lot of anger and 'enemy' stuff at Greenham, and I didn't feel it with XR. We loved the whole world. They also loved the police, which I think they have decided is a bad idea now. Nevertheless, it was a good atmosphere with the police because we are not violent in any way. So, they have quite a nice time too. They were always pleased to look after us. It was a big move on... core of it was about love. A lot of it has been taken from Gandhi. Gandhi and Martin Luther King. And it really did infiltrate XR to a big extent.

However, XR is a bit patriarchal, a lot of men, a lot of male voices. Whereas at Greenham, the women cleared out that problem and got rid of the men. Then you build your own hierarchy without men.

**CT:** I guess at Greenham there were very strong women who were almost like men?

**M:** It is interesting about strong women. Margaret Thatcher felt she had to be more like a man than a man, and Theresa May also. That's what happens when you get into that patriarchal society, it can happen that you have got to be more patriarchal than men.

**CT:** And do you meet many younger people who are in XR?

**M:** They really appreciate older people and value us in our lives. They call us the elders. The atmosphere under which we were brought up might explain some of the things they have picked up and want to change. Why they have got those attitudes and where they have come from and need to move on.

**CT:** I am so interested that you were at Greenham and in XR.

**M:** At the XR Spring Rebellion, if ever I started singing – I sing because I was at Greenham for God's sake, everyone sang there – I would have people coming up to me and saying: 'Were you at Greenham?' And all the singers at that point were all the same age and we were all at Greenham.

**CT:** What did you sing? There is a Greenham song book I believe.

[Mollie sings a Greenham song *Stand Up and Make Your Choice*]

**M:** There are loads of Greenham songs which I've taught to people over the years. But I must say I found XR very hard work at involving music, they seem really shy of joining in. There has been some lovely singing at XR sometimes, and I've learned new songs from XR, but it is difficult to teach people songs that they can all join in with - maybe because young people are used to singing solo and not used to singing in groups as we are at our age. The kind of music we have now has changed and its not easy to just join in.

**CT:** Is there anything else you think might be useful, either about Greenham or XR?

**M:** I think the recent Wye Pilgrimage is interesting. We were all XR people who did it. We didn't want it to be activism. We just wanted the point out the problems. I think there may be some direct action coming shortly. People were so shocked about the River Wye and joined in. I think the support we got was because it was led by women. There were two of us, and we did offer a different energy; so open. Whatever happened, happened. We just let it blossom.

**CT:** Did you get any response from those in power from your pilgrimage?

**M:** Some of the MPs responded. It has had a lot of results from other sources. It is extraordinary that those in power can't see what is happening. I think we should blockade Eton because that's where they learn. Eton is the most extreme patriarchy in England, where they learn to have no feelings. They are taken away from their mothers at seven or something and they are taught to think in this way. And you look at the Cabinet and they are all the same, all from that background. It seems that they have got all out of touch with the Earth – that we are the earth, we are the water, that's what we are made of. But it's money and power all the time. They go together.

Informant 3 – Toma, female, Southern Ireland, 60-70 years old

**(14 September 2021)**

**CT:** How did you become involved with the Greenham Common women's peace camp?

**T:** I was in my late teens - and had been heavily involved with CND and the Ban the Bomb marches since I was 15. I knew about the plan to put US missiles at Greenham – CND was very vocal about it - and then I heard about the women walking from Wales. A friend and I decided to go to Greenham to see what was happening. It was mad. My friend left after a while, but I stayed for two years.

**CT:** Where did you stay. Were you mainly based at one of the gates?

**T:** I was at Yellow Gate. There were people from across the world there. A lot of alternative cultures. The Goddess was very much the centre of things.

**CT:** So, were you a Goddess beforehand, or was it at Greenham you became involved?

**T:** It was really at Greenham. The Goddess was at the centre of everything, the culture and ethos, language and speaking. Because there were women from across the world, from many different cultures, there was a lot of alternative culture. Many of them brought their particular folklore and mythology and we spent a lot of time researching witches and witchcraft. And also Shamanism. But I really only know about the situation at Yellow Gate. I think things might have been different elsewhere.

At Yellow Gate we were all involved with each other, if you know what I mean. There were a lot of strong characters. Most of us were young, working class and wild anarchists. There were no leaders. We felt we always had power. We did mad things like painting a blackbird on one of the big planes by the light of a full moon.

We felt empowered. We were involved with the demonstrations along with the rest of the camp, the women from the other gates, but for us at Yellow Gate, it was all about the Goddess.

The feminist writer Barbar Mor was there I went with her to see various pieces of artwork – there were a lot of creative skills around - and Starhawk turned up and did her ritual priestess bit and Magik. We went to Silbury Hill a few times together.

One of the most amazing things was during a big summer storm. There was thunder and lightning, and the lightning struck the Greenham Control Tower and Newbury Courthouse, the place Greenham women were taken to be charged with various public order offences. That seemed very prophetic to us.

**CT:** Did you feel the Goddess was very real for you. Very much in evidence?

**T:** She was who we were, our ethos and our religion. We continued to follow the dream. We listened to what was happening, what the world was saying about us on Radio 4. We used a Ouija board a lot and had spirit guides to help us.

**CT:** You said you stayed at Greenham for two years. Did you leave because you'd had enough?

**T:** I had to go because I was pregnant. I found a house to rent. My girlfriend and I decided we wanted a baby and the spirit guide told us when to inseminate. I expected one little baby, which I could take around with me. I had triplets. We moved to a Goddess community, a Shamanic community in Ireland. I wasn't the only one. Another woman I know of gave birth to a boy at the camp.

**CT:** What we are talking about happened 40 years ago. Do you think that ethos, the Goddess, has been passed down the generations to you women today?

**T:** Over the years I have been very involved with using art for the mental health of the community and for the spiritual health of younger Goddesses. A lot of what was inherited from Greenham has been passed on. Is still being passed on. There are ways of teaching the culture. Stories of rebellion are being passed down. There is a continuation from Greenham, and we are passing on ways of being, ways of teaching the culture. By telling stories we are giving lineage and a culture. Teaching younger women how to relate to female power nationally, Greenham Goddesses have become involved in politics. You can see the little connections from Greenham and being involved in the camp. Many young women today are definitely connected with the Greenham women.

[Informant 4 – Kathy, Glastonbury, 60 years old](#)

**(9 October 2021)**

**CT:** I understand you are a priestess of Avalon?

**K:** Yes, I am a priestess of the Goddess.

**CT:** And you were at Greenham?

**K:** I didn't live there but I went there many times.

**CT:** I am really interested to hear about Goddess spirituality at Greenham.

**K:** When I was there in the early eighties, I was in my middle thirties. At that time, we had a strong women's group in Glastonbury. In those days we were just learning about Goddess, I was just starting to read books about her. One time when I went to Greenham, there was an evening when it was twilight, and we were standing in the woods outside the fence. On the inside of the fence were the weapons and the soldiers and the policemen and outside was a bunch of women standing with candles and we sang this song, *You Can't Kill the Spirit, She is Like a Mountain, Old and Strong, She Goes On and On*. I'd always been a spiritual seeker but it had always been in the masculine. It had always been all right for the Earth to be female but Spirit was always masculine. But I remember that singing that song liberated me in that moment to think of Goddess and to understand the divine as 'She'. So, it really came from actions and from singing that song.

**CT:** It just went on from there for you?

**K:** Yes. Two women who lived locally went to live at Greenham and they left their families and left their children and I wanted to honour them in some kind of way, so I decided to write a play that was a telling of the story of Demeter and Persephone and paralleling that with what was happening at Greenham, where the underworld was Greenham and the whole industrial military complex, which Greenham personified. [In ancient Greek mythology, Demeter and Persephone tells the story of the deep connection a mother shares with her daughter...representing the fading innocence as a young woman charts her way into maturity to force her destiny to the dismay of her fiercely protective mother]. And that was the first sacred drama I wrote and created. Over the next 13 years, sometimes with other people, sometimes on my own, I wrote four sacred dramas every year that brought Goddess alive again in Glastonbury. They were a reworking of these ancient patriarchal myths and bringing Goddess alive in them. The second drama I wrote was based on the myth of Inanna, Queen of Heaven and again her underworld journey paralleled with what was happening at Greenham and it was like reworking these myths because of the experiences of being at Greenham. It set me off on a whole journey of working in sacred drama. [Many of the myths about Inanna involve her taking over the domains of other deities]

Sacred drama is about keeping Goddess alive in the world so people can experience her in a performance, and I wanted them to be longer than they were, they lasted about three-and-a-half hours. I thought it would be great if it was a day long or several days long. So, I created the annual Goddess Conference in 1996 to create a sacred drama three, five and finally nine days long.

**CT:** How did you find enough performers for the dramas?

**K:** Glastonbury was always a hippy town and there were a lot of people who were not working, who were young, who were artists, willing to put their time in. These sacred dramas could have fifty people in them. Nobody was getting paid. We just did it. It was what we did as a community. They were very powerful and exciting, so people wanted to be in them.

**CT:** Are they still going on today?

**K:** Occasionally. The conference gradually became the vehicle for that. I haven't done one for a while, but it became the foundation for everything, and it was an exploration of Goddess that came from what happened at Greenham.

**CT:** Are there young girls today still knowing and worshipping the Goddess?

**K:** At the Goddess Temple [at Glastonbury] we run lots of priestess trainings and every year there are twenty to thirty people who want to do Priestess of Avalon training... we have taught hundreds of women and a few men to become priestesses and priests of Goddess. People are really interested – especially now because of Covid, so many people are reassessing how they are living and what they want to do in their lives. More people from Britain, come to the Goddess Temple. I am there every week as a Melissa, opening the temple and holding the temple for people to come in. During the last year or so it's been British people who are coming, whereas before there were lots of big groups from abroad who would come.

**CT:** Do you do Zoom with people from abroad?

**K:** Because of Covid we had to go completely online, and we've created this worldwide network now. We would never have done this without Covid. Now we have a virtual online Goddess Temple as well as the physical places we have. It's huge. People are joining in from the other side of the world in the middle of the night. It's an amazing thing that this is happening at the same time as all this awful stuff is happening.

**CT:** Do you think worship of the Goddess has been passed on down through the generations? Mothers telling daughters?

**K:** Because we live in a patriarchal world there are waves of resistance. Just as there are between mothers and daughters, there are resistances that go on. Like 'I'm not going to be involved with that because you're involved in that'. With my own daughter, for a long time she didn't want to know anything about anything that I did. Although she came to Greenham with me – in my belly and in a pushchair – it's all there inside of her. Then at one point in her life everything changed, and she wanted to know. Now she is a part of our Goddess community, she runs Goddess House, which is a healing and educational centre [Glastonbury has the Goddess Temple, Goddess Hall and Goddess House]. I don't think it's a steady progression. Between generations there are resistances and, all the things that we fought for in Second Wave feminism has been discounted by the younger generation. They forget and they don't know, and we are still in patriarchy...it's a long journey. I just try to keep educating people.

**CT:** Will Goddess spirituality continue to go on and get stronger?

**K:** Thousands of people now want to know the Goddess. And it is because of her - she is calling to women and men to wake up and notice and look at the Earth and at her world. She is calling us, and we are incarnating again, because I think, according to your belief systems, she is calling, and we are responding. Those of us who were priestesses in the far past, a long time ago, she is calling us to incarnate again and do this work and we are responding.

**CT:** So, you have got this in you. It's something you've done before and which you remember?

**K:** Yes, and part of that is I know - and it's only because I'm older - I know something I have done before. I was there when the Goddess Temple was thriving five, six, seven thousand years ago, I was also there at the ending of the temples when the temples were destroyed. Part of my awareness is of the danger, the psychological danger of creating this again because you'll get killed.

And I see lots of women who feel that. Not consciously, but they are afraid. They are afraid to say what they really think; they are afraid to live their lives. All of that.

**CT:** But women are breaking away more, aren't they?

**K:** Absolutely. There are signs we are rising up again. There was Greenham and now there is XR, which is the modern-day thing because it's a rising for the Earth. Now the older feminists are their support team in the background helping to hold back new resistance.

**CT:** It all comes back to the same thing in the end. Fighting for the Earth and humanity.

**K:** That's absolutely it.

Informant 5 – Bell, West Wales, 50-60 years old

**(10 November 2021)**

**CT:** You are in XR?

**B:** Yes, but I'm flying a bit below the radar nowadays. I'm in XR central and XR local. In West Wales there are a gathering of people who are very much more eccentric because of the whole 'back to the land' stuff. But I'm not sure that's a cultural thing. I was in Regenerative Cultures (in national XR) for a long time, well I still am on the outskirts. I call myself the Witch at the Edge of the Village. I just keep my finger on the pulse of it and I am more at odds, as I deepen into my own practice, with the oppositional nature that happens in XR which is quite patriarchal.

**CT:** So, what exactly is the opposition nature?

**B:** Well, it's like us against them, I suppose, and I just feel it's us against the government, us against... there was from the beginning a really strong influence of not doing that and it's kind of in the principles, of moving towards we accept everything about everyone. Actually, in reality, XR is pretty patriarchal.

My ex, Roger Hallam set it up so I'm a bit biased. I know him and I also know quite a bit about how the Greeks were in the shadow of their founders. Roger for all his best intentions is... doing fuck all about the whole sense of urgency, the crisis management which is by nature is not feminine. We were called on by XR to organise a mass trespass at Stonehenge and I was invited in, and I was interested because it was dreamt in, an affinity group had dreamt it in, and the women were to lead the ceremony. So, what happened was, two men ran with it, and they were like well, ceremony is when the women get dressed up in nice clothes and do ceremony stuff and everything else isn't ceremony. And I was like "No, ceremony is when you say yes to the mystery, actually. So, this whole thing is a ceremony. The moment this came in from the dreaming that's a ceremony. Everything is sacred." That is the paradigm we're in, this separation of ceremony/not ceremony sacred/not sacred, and for me this is part of the Goddess femininity. It's all the same thing, there's no separation. So, I was getting more and more blocked with it, and I called all the women to speak and said: "Look I just think the feminine needs more foreplay. The patriarchy just goes for it and like runs at it and goes with this energy and that's what is going on and we need to call it. If we really want to do this thing at these very sacred stones, we can't be doing it like this." Then all of us called it and it just distilled a lot of the discomfort all the women were having. The men, really good guys, they got it. And we did something else, which was a dreaming, which was feeding into, rather than... there was quite a lot of ego involved to get media coverage. It was a ceremony designed for media, so performative. There was too much attention on how it would look to the media and for me, I wasn't in it for that. It didn't matter if only three people turned up, because there was more. But they weren't getting that, they kind of think it was all symbolic. But I said no, when we talk to the land, we are actually in the conversation as indigenous people were and when we're calling on the Goddess, or Great Mystery – for me it's the Dark Feminine, that's who I am in service to – they are there. It's not a metaphor it's not a symbol, it's not a performance. That's the reality. It's a whole consciousness. So that was an example of where it was and the action didn't happen in the way it was meant to because me and a bunch of about eight other women said no, it isn't ok. And the men knew enough not to gainsay that.



**CT:** What happened then, when you said 'No, enough'?

**B:** Because it was really close to the action happening and there were still people going, we sent out a message saying come, but it's not going to be a mass trespass; it's not this oppositional thing that we are going to trespass. It was more like when an oak tree pushes up a pavement, it's not rebelling against modernity, it's following its true nature. And that's peace and we need to act like that. The more we struggle with modernity, with the dominant culture, the more energy we give it. We're just a workout for it. We're building its muscle. For me the rebellions were not what were achieved but how they happened, which was where the feminine came in and Goddess, and it was very clever... I know a lot of the women involved who are – witches for want of a better word - and all these centuries of hiding it were, you know, it was still being powerful and potent, like the way they held the space and the way they could speak about calling in without using the language which triggers all the Christians, and it was just clever and why it was potent. I might do a grounding before a direct action and people, who might not have done anything like that before, came up to me afterwards saying 'that really made it something else for me' and I had used very simple plain none whoo language; it was just about the body and why we were all there and how.

**CT:** What started you on activism?

**B:** Being raised in a fundamentally Christian cult. Where women have to keep their mouths shut and their heads covered, which didn't sit well with me. My mother who is still in it is bent well out of shape because of it, and my sister.

**CT:** But you escaped

**B:** I did. I know people who are still in it, even though they have physically left. They still say they know they have given up their future, given up their future place in the kingdom because they left. I'm really glad acid wiped my motherboard, I think. I self-medicated on drugs – it's not something I would recommend but that's what happened. It's still in me. I still find it. I was a therapist, I say I am more of a navigator now, and with all that I still find the twisted bits clinging to me. So, I think coming out of that...

**CT:** What age were you then Bell?

**B:** I was 19, it was when I went to university. Well, the year before that I rebelled and worked in a pub which was obviously not approved of, but I would still go to church on Sunday and played the organ and things like that. So, I was living two lives. And then I had drugs psychosis and then I was taken to North Wales and got involved in Greenpeace activism and permaculture.

So, need to say something about activism. For me there is pro-activism and re-activism. The support stuff where you are holding a line, like HS2, XR, blocking and doing that, that is re-activism. We are stopping further damage. Pro-activism is where you are creating something different. So, I would say my involvement with permaculture was a form of activism. Home-educating my children was activism and rewilding acres of land here is activism, as well as supergluing myself naked at the Houses of Parliament.

**CT:** I read about that. That was brave.

**B:** That was fun. That was real therapy. People say it was a brave thing to do, but it wasn't. At the time I would have found it braver to be in a room with a couple of people that I was really struggling with than just doing that. Just because it was just what I really needed to do, I just found it hilarious. I'm a middle-class white woman and I was the 'knocker blocker' which meant I was an older woman with a bit more authority and my job was to dance in front of the security guards to distract them. And they just didn't know where to touch me. I was like 'you don't have my consent to touch my body, young man'. And while that was going on the others superglued on and then I ran and superglued on. I'm white middle-class and I got very well treated by the police, every time I got arrested. It's privilege and I know it and I'm very happy to use it in the service of the Goddess.

**CT:** But that's not the same for everybody, presumably?

**B:** One of my foster sons is Afro-Caribbean. Totally different experience of the world. I've watched him growing up with my kids who are white and it's always his money that is checked at the supermarket checkout. The others get smiles, he doesn't. It's awful. He doesn't notice it thankfully. I asked him if he thought he had ever experienced racism and he said: No. don't think so. But I think he is very white in his thinking; he thinks he's white. He's not a lot of cultural engagement with his parents. He's lived with me since he was 13.

**CT:** What about Insulate Britain?

**B:** Way too oppositional. Roger (co-founder of XR and founder of Insulate Britain) is too oppositional. I empathise with his frustration (over XR) and his pain is real, I know that, but at the same time it's the same blame and shame paradigm that's not going to get us out of this shit. This catastrophe we are hurtling into is a crisis of relationship as far as I can see and so, relating in the same old way of winner/loser is not going to get us out of it. And everything we do matters. Roger believes ends justify means and I say Never. How we do stuff is equally as important as what we do. So, he's like it doesn't matter if you exploit this person here to get that there, although he wouldn't be that consciously manipulative. You have to learn to say no to him or you will burn out and that was when I was with him. You really have to know your boundaries around that man because he is a workaholic, and he expects that of everyone else and he is really good at guilt-tripping people. It's in his shadow and that's why he gets away with it because it is so unconscious for him. I am very well verse in manipulation myself and I see his shadow because I have it. Insulate Britain - we've had some chats about it and he wanted me to be involved because I am quite good at rebel-rousing. They were getting a luke-warm response and he felt that if I came on board, I would be getting people with me. Partly because I was going through this change myself about where I put my energies and getting very clear about the non-oppositional peace. I am very grateful on some level for Insulate Britain's persistence, but I really don't think there is very much going on in there at all. I know in local groups, the level of re-gen, which is where this stuff blossom, the Dark Feminine or the Goddess particularly I would say it's really – there was a big split in XR Re-gen over this between people who thought that re-gen was what you do at actions and like group dynamics, not the touchy-feely stuff. And two people who were really unskilful caused this great schism and there is Visionary Cultures now and XR Re-gen, who are this little clique who are very ineffective and don't really do anything ... maybe they do more, but I don't know. They let me remain like the Witch on the Edge of their Village for a while, but I noticed just

recently that they have managed to unjoin me to their thread and I thought oh well, ok interesting. I didn't say a word, I just watched, so maybe they had a spring clean.

**CT:** What about young people protesting in XR?

**B:** I know a lot of 20s to 30s people and my daughter set up XR Youth for under 18s. I still know mostly 20- to 30-year-olds and they are so hungry for some kind of meaningful... this is all so initiatory, all this stuff and that's my work, that's what I do, I grow humans up not physically but psychologically. I am a nature-based soul mentor. I have to be clear on boundaries because they are so hungry for that, and I could end up doing lots of unpaid work. I am so fond of them all, and I know they don't have a lot of cash. I have just set up a project on our land here that hopefully will get me a lot of cash so I can give them mentoring for free. I would say the presence of the Goddess for them is more under the radar under the guise of ecocentrism. They come at it with a very political, ideological thing and yet they are yearning for something that is more embodied. Human centism is a form of speciesism – an ism like sexism or racism – they are on board with that, yet there is another part of them that is howling for something a bit more with soil on its roots. People like me can speak, without it being in a language which scares them. If I spoke about circles and casting a circle that would scare them... but if I say it's important, we are grateful for all the building blocks of our environment, like air, fire water, and of course life which moves within all things which is ether. It's all there. And at some point, when I have their trust, that's where I slip in that it is like the Dark Feminine. I call it massaging. You need soul guides, and the initiation is to become soul centric and to listen to the mystery and for the mystery is the Dark Feminine.

**CT:** That's so interesting. When I was watching the reporting of COP26 on the television, there were all these young people, hundreds of them, but all undirected I felt. Do you think that?

**B:** Yes, I do. And there's a real confusion because they have all got on to the idea of Elders and that we need Elders. And I said I reckon you do, and if I started with Eldering you, the way I think Elders should be, you wouldn't want it. When you are asking me to be an Elder you are asking me to affirm you, and Elders don't do that, they actually challenge you. They are like a soul guide they are trying to draw you onto the rocks of your ego, so that you crack open. They are not there to make you feel good, they can be quite difficult, grumpy people. Traditional Elders are not easy people. The young are very unguided, and they want a voice and it's not their job to sort this out. They haven't been here long enough. You've got the fire, but the plans need to be made by Elders – not Olders – my parents are Olders not Elders. I am older than them, and I'm not being arrogant saying that. There are certain bits where they have definitely got the run on me, but most of times in terms of awareness they don't reflect. It's not in their religion. They don't understand my work at all because it is all about reflecting. They don't understand about looking to the past. They don't get it.

[Informant 6 – Anonymous, female, Wales, 55-60 years old](#)  
**(18 November 2021)**

**CT:** Were you at Greenham?

**Anon:** Yes, from 1983-1984.

**CT:** Were you a Goddess feminist at that time?

**Anon:** I didn't really know about the Goddess when I first went to Greenham. I rocked up at Blue Gate – it was the first one I came to. Later I found Green Gate where a lot of Goddesses were, so I got sort of got sucked in. But to be honest I was very young and more of an anarchist than a Goddess.

**CT:** So, were you quite political?

**Anon:** Well, I came from a very political family. Political and religious. My mother was a communist. You tend to believe what your parents believe and you either go along with it or you go against it. Very early on I identified as an anarchist, but I really took to heart the feminist/political thing because I saw lot of left wing politicians and political people not behaving very well to each other or to their families or whatever, so I really believed the person is political, and I think that small scale sort of thing is quite Goddessy anyway.

**CT:** And you are now in XR?

**Anon:** Yes, I am. They don't have a paid-up membership, but I have been quite active over the past couple of years with XR.

**CT:** And have you noticed Goddesses in XR?

**Anon:** Yes. Definitely. Some of the strongest Goddesses I know have led stuff with XR. Gayle who helped found it is pretty Goddessy, I would say. But there is a whole spiritual branch of XR. I'm not talking about the Christian alliance, who are also very active but there is a big spiritual side to XR.

**CT:** Do you think being in service to the Goddess makes a difference when you're campaigning like that?

**Anon:** I think it helps... to remember why you are doing what you are doing, and it also helps to keep that frequency of love and not get sucked into the 'us and them'. It's group dynamics. I grew up with left wing politics in Liverpool, which have always been at each other's throats and that has been encouraged by agent provocateurs. I think there is a certain degree of that going on in XR. I do think that's a tactic the patriarchal powers use to try and keep everyone in their place and hold on to power. I think that's a major tactic they used for any kind of protest movement. That's my take on it. It's really important to bear in mind why we are doing what we are doing – for the planet and the Goddess, who I see as interchangeable. And to do it in the spirit of love and not in the spirit of anger. I take the rage thing because what is happening is outrageous, but not to act in anger and not to let that anger take over in decision making.

**CT:** In one of your emails to me you said you had ongoing investigations with the police. Is that to do with XR?

**Anon:** Yes, that's to do with XR, mostly with XR. So, I did glue myself to the M25 – that was with Insulate Britain. I have an ongoing investigation from an action last August. I did do some actions the previous September, but both of those got dropped. But I did a 'disobeying the dock' in February to do with one of those charges and I got sent to prison for three weeks. That was nice.

**CT:** What was that like, I can't quite imagine?

**Anon:** No, it was fine. It was a lot better than it was when I was at Greenham. The prisons have improved in the last forty years. Or that prison was a lot better than my experience of Cookham Wood, which was the best of the women's prisons back in the day.

**CT:** So, were you sent to prison from Greenham?

**Anon:** Yes, I did two short sentences from Greenham, both at Cookham Wood, which was better than Holloway.

**CT:** What were the sentences for?

**Anon:** Criminal damage and non-payment of fines.

**CT:** Do you remember support by the Goddess feminists when you were in court at Newbury, which I think is where they sent Greenham women?

**Anon:** What I remember was singing. We used to sing songs a lot in the cells. It was like a party and the party carried on into the cells. It was really empowering. Especially when there were a lot of us arrested. Sometimes we did small actions, just randomly, and then there would be just a few of us and you would be locked up on your own. But the acoustic of the cell is great for chanting. I still do it now. When I have been arrested with XR I do a bit of chanting in the cell. It can irritate people.

**CT:** Was there anything particular that you chanted?

**Anon:** It depends. I spent a couple of years living in a place that Emma who set it up described as a retreat centre but in was really a mystery school. I called it a Goddess temple. We used to do a sweat lodge once a month on the dark moon and we had a bonfire for the full moon every month as well and sang songs for the Goddess and the moon and the earth, so I know a lot of chants. I sing whatever comes to me.

**CT:** Singing was big at Greenham, I believe?

**Anon:** The one I knew at Greenham, and we used to sing ad infinitum, was *She is like a mountain... and goes on and on*. We used to do a lot of singing around the fire as well. When I was living at Blue Gate, we had some quite creative women there who made up new lyrics to popular songs. It's great for keeping your spirits up and building energy.

**CT:** What do you think are the differences between Goddesses at Greenham and Goddesses now in XR? Has there been a change over the years?

**Anon:** I was very young (I was 20) when I was at Greenham and I'm a different person now (I'm nearly 60). I don't know that Goddesses have changed. I'm not sure because I didn't know many of the Goddess women at Greenham. I found them all a bit preachy. But maybe that because we were all a wild party lot at Blue Gate. So maybe they were a bit judgmental. Nowadays I find myself looking at younger people and disapproving but then I remember what I was like, and I take a step back. XR has quite an anti-party policy. It definitely has a no drugs and alcohol policy, which was not the case at Greenham. I think Goddess spirituality has deepened a lot, but as I said, I don't have that much experience of what it was like at Greenham.

**CT:** And you are still rebelling

**Anon:** Once a rebel always a rebel. Especially when you've got a cause. Between and now I've been trying to live a good life and hoping that by example other people would be inspired. You look at the planet... It was so nice to see XR start up. I missed the first couple of actions, but when I got there, I had forgotten how good for your spirit it is to rebel and how much fun it is. It might be too little too late but being with like-minded people, actually doing stuff and putting yourself on the line, is hugely empowering. I would really like to be with those people (from Insulate Britain) who got sent to prison recently. It was my intention to be with them, because that is how desperate I think the situation is but, unfortunately, I have to look after my mum now. Other people can go to prison but other people can't look after my mum. So, I'm having to 'woman up'. I left the Goddess Temple / mystery school / retreat centre because my mum needed more care. And if I can't look after my real mother, how can I aspire to look after the Goddess, mother of us all? I had to look after my mum rather than take a lead role with XR.

**CT:** I think XR understands this kind of situation.

**Anon:** Yes, but I like to be out on the streets. I don't like watching other people having all the fun.

**CT:** What happens if these things that are pending for you come forward?

**Anon:** I'm not expecting anything to happen to be honest. With the one from August, they arrested me for a minor charge to start off with and then they made it more serious, and they went and searched my house. But it was only because the action was so successful, and they were trying to make an example of me to try and put other people off doing similar stuff. I think they will just leave it standing on file for ever and then if I do anything else, they'll bring up the fact that I am still under investigation. I've got two charges like that now.

**CT:** So, it's hanging over you, isn't it?

**Anon:** I'm named on the injunction with Insulate Britain as well now, so I have to be careful not to block the roads. I don't want to risk having to go to prison again at the moment. Especially as the charge for the August one was conspiracy to commit nuisance, and the maximum charge for that is life imprisonment. I'm told conspiracy is hard to prove which is why I am not expecting anything to come of it. Better not to chance fate.

**CT:** Well, you seem to have done your bit over the years.

**Anon:** But what is your bit? What do you think is appropriate as your bit for the planet? I was speaking to one of the other people from Insulate Britain and it seems that those who are most desperate to go to prison are going to be at the bottom of the list of people to go. She said she felt it was her duty to keep going until she gets locked up. Her grandmother survived Auschwitz and she feels she has to keep going because things are that desperate and people didn't do enough then, so we have to do it now.

**CT:** Do you think the authorities are reluctant to send people to prison?

**Anon:** It's money, isn't it? It costs a lot of money to lock someone up. Money is everything. It must cost them a lot for policemen too. I think they will give a few people big sentences and hope it puts everyone else off. They gave that man who glued himself to a plane six months, which was a bit over the top, I thought. And there was a big appeal, not on an XR protest, but about blocking

the road to an arms fair that went through which meant loads of XR convictions for obstructing the highway have had to be overturned. There are loads of them under appeal at the moment and that's why one of my charges got dropped because they couldn't have convicted me. There is now a precedent that you have a right to sit in the road as a protest. So that is why they are giving injunctions. You don't get done for sitting in the road, you get done for breaking the injunction.

**CT:** Did you get a lot of abuse from people when you were blocking the M25?

**Anon:** I did it quite late on at the end of October and those headlines showing people dragging protestors off the road gave out the idea that it was OK to do it. There were about four or five guys who were very vocal and threatening and everybody else was quite supportive, to be honest. There was a guy on my blockade who did start responding to the motorists and it made them a lot worse. I was worried when all that started to happen, like was I going to start giving it back. But actually, it was quite the opposite, so I was pleased with that. Because I remembered that it was quite difficult at Greenham. When you see mounted police pick up women by their scarf and drag them across razor wire, it is difficult not to jump in and intervene on behalf of your friends. So, maintaining that discipline of non-violence in the face of violence is difficult. XR are really good at training, showing that arguing with people doesn't make it better, doesn't de-escalate things, it just makes it worse. Just occasionally you might get punched.

**CT:** I have been told that the policemen on duty at XR actions have been very accommodating. Have you found that?

**Anon:** Some of the City of London police can be very nasty. Quite a senior officer from the City of London in August was particularly nasty and he was behind the searching of my house. I heard some of the senior officers complaining that they had to order the PCs to go in and stop people painting all over the floor and things. The general police, especially the ones on that protest, weren't bothered. They weren't anti XR. Mostly the police were nice – they are doing a difficult job – but there are some who aren't nice and unfortunately as an institution they protect each other and the not very nice ones set the level.

**CT:** What is the general feeling in prison about XR protestors. Are you accepted?

**Anon:** When I was in prison it was lockdown because of Covid, so I didn't get to talk to many other people. And those I did see, I was talking to them about their problems not mine.

**CT:** All the XR people were split up? You weren't with each other?

**Anon:** I was on my own because I did a one woman protest in 'disobeying the dock' so there was only me. But it was not like Greenham when there were loads of us going to prison. The women in prison think you're a bit mad because you're choosing to be there, but they have a grudging respect. I was surprised when I came back to my Welsh village after being in prison to find I was like a minor celebrity, and how much support I got, especially in the hospital I was working at and among the Welsh speakers. They were all saying "Fair play for standing up for what you believe in." What I hadn't appreciated before was that at one time, a lot of Welsh people were put in prison for speaking Welsh, so they were more sympathetic towards political prisoners than the average English person.

**CT:** Do you think belief in the Goddess is passed down the generations?

**Anon:** Maybe in some ways it's passed down the generations. I know a generation of hippy women who are into the Goddess, and they are younger than me. I think belief in the Goddess comes more to people in their 20s and 30s, maybe. But I don't really know. One of the things that has really impressed me with XR is that they do an opening ceremony and a closing ceremony. So, at the rebellion in August I was really lucky to be at the opening ceremony. I was guided there by the Goddess because I went to the wrong place and I couldn't find the bus stop I needed, so I cut through all these streets and then suddenly there it was in a very obscure place in the City of London. I know a lot of people didn't find it because it was in a secret location. So, the opening ceremony was also an action, but it was amazing and it's really lovely that there's that holding, so that the feminine power is being tapped into and appreciated as well as the "hey let's get out there and onto the streets" kind of thing. Because to be honest, I think our best hope is in magik to actually make a change. We need to bring balance back into the world, because ultimately that is what the problem is, everything is so out of balance and out of kilter. And rebalancing is a real Goddess thing.

[Question to Informant 6 via email. 29 November 2021](#)

**CT:** Do you remember hearing about women menstruating together while living at Greenham?

**Anon:** Yes, I think it happened quite a lot. Our cycles would shift so a bunch of us would be bleeding at the same time. I think it is quite common when women live in community.

We decorated the tree at Christmas with painted tampons. No used ones, as some of the tabloids may have reported.

[Informant 7 – Anonymous, female, West Wales, 70-75 years old \(25 November 2021\)](#)

**CT:** I understand you were at Greenham?

**Anon:** Yes, but I didn't live there. I was what was went as weekend relief and would arrive Friday so women could go off and get baths etc.

**CT:** So, then they came back, and you went off back home?

**Anon:** Yes, it was only when I had weekends free. Obviously, I went on the demonstrations like everyone did. I stayed for a couple of nights, quite regularly for a few years.

**CT:** Did you get involved in any of the Goddess spirituality at Greenham?

**Anon:** I took a decision, and I think it was very much by chance that I did it, I turned up by chance at Yellow Gate, the main gate, and that was not a particularly spiritual gate. It was a hard place to be. It was hard politically, and it was hard from the point of view of abuse from passers-by and from inside the base.

**CT:** Because at Yellow Gate you were on the front line

**Anon:** We were very much on the front line, there was very little greenery, the police and the bailiffs paid more attention to us there than they did anywhere else. They didn't do evictions at the weekend, so I didn't experience that, but I did experience a lot of police aggression at various times, coming along and putting our fires out, spraying hoses everywhere. The gate I used to visit



was Green Gate which was known as the Spiritual Gate. I used to visit it because it was a lovely place to visit, welcoming, full of trees...but I didn't ever stay there, I always went back to Yellow.

**CT:** Did you just stay Friday nights or do stay there for the whole weekend?

**Anon:** I went on Friday and stayed until Sunday afternoon. Basically, it was when my husband had the kids. He worked as a consultant at the Ministry of Defence, and I'd phone him and say "Look – I want to go to..." and I had to say the words 'Bognor Regis' because if I'd said 'Greenham Common' on the phone he might have lost his job.

**CT:** So, you didn't get involved in Goddess spirituality at all?

**Anon:** Well, I had some amazing experiences. We sang our songs and weaved our webs. And it went very deep. For me and for everybody there. So, I remember when they installed generators so they could light us up more clearly, we spent a long time, singing spells to stop the generators. Unfortunately, I cannot remember that it worked.

**CT:** Nowadays, are you in XR or involved in any way with the climate protests?

**Anon:** I am very involved with Extinction Rebellion, yes. I used to live on a Scottish island in the recent past, but we moved back to West Wales in October 2018, so for me that was Samhain<sup>281</sup>, the beginning of a new year, it was also the day Extinction Rebellion started. I was very aware that was happening, and it was all part of the move back to Wales. That move was a difficult decision to make for me, but one of the things that made it seem very positive was I could come back and be part of the Rebellion.

**CT:** So, you go on protests?

**Anon:** I've been arrested a couple of times. I was tried by video earlier this year. I was found guilty. The DPS didn't give the magistrates any fuss about that, but the magistrates were very moved by my statement, and I think they did the least they could do and gave me a conditional discharge. But the DPS fined me £800 pounds, well, it wasn't a fine, it was costs. And that rocked me. I could pay it, but it absolutely rocked me, and I spent an awful lot of time considering did I want any more money going into the system. And I also have reservation about the thinking behind mass arrests.

So, I went up to Glasgow for a few weeks for COP and took the decision that I was not going to be arrestable. I did a couple of other things like keeping an Extinction Rebellion vigil and I co-ran half a dozen workshops with XR Reconnect while we were in Glasgow.

**CT:** Have you been involved with Insulate Britain?

**Anon:** No. That's part of my thinking about the policy of getting arrested. Roger is a neighbour here and I've heard him speak and I don't like what I hear. It's the insistence that you must sacrifice yourself, do it in a spirit of sacrifice and for me, I absolutely hate that. And I won't do it.

**CT:** I have heard it said that he is almost returning to patriarchy.

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<sup>281</sup> The fact that this informant referred to Samhain, part of the Pagan Wheel of the Year, as a normal expression, suggested to me that she was involved with Goddess spirituality

**Anon:** That's an interesting thought. Certainly, it seems to me to be imbued with Christianity. The idea of sacrifice and white Christ did was a sacrifice and we are all supposed to do with our lives and that's the kind of sacrificial thing that I hate, so that keeps me well away from Insulate Britain. The only thing I do – I'm a psychotherapist and I volunteer therapeutic support. And that's fine. I'm happy to help anybody who is doing climate work.

**CT:** I was wondering about younger people in XR. I was told there aren't an awful lot of them in XR, but I think there is a Young XR group?

**Anon:** There are many, many groups in XR. In our local group, we don't have many young people but that's because they are all away doing stuff. But I am aware of one young woman who contacted me recently to ask about Greenham, and she is very young, 18. She did the walk for Greenham Common in September, and she wanted to ask me what it was like then. And she's a climate activist. So, I think there are young climate activists although we don't see them here in West Wales. In London probably, so I can't say much about that.

**CT:** I was surprised how many young people there were in Glasgow. I know Greta (Thunberg) was there, so that made a difference, but there were so many of them and I thought, where are they normally?

**Anon:** You're right. They are out there, and they are desperately, desperately unhappy. Climate change is affecting young people, understandably.

**CT:** One other thing I wanted to ask you. There was Goddess spirituality at Greenham, which everybody knew about. But in XR, it has gone underground a bit. It isn't quite so obvious in XR as it was at Greenham.

**Anon:** It certainly isn't (as obvious) and I think the huge difference is Greenham was for women in a place where they could really, really explore that. I had some very powerful experiences there connected with that world and that sense of sacred presence. XR is so much bigger, it is absolutely huge, and most of it is active most of the time, or you're not seeing it. In Glasgow I joined the inter-faith group deliberately – it was inter-faith because there was Christianity and Buddhism with some Judaism and some Islam. It wasn't obvious that Goddess Spirituality was being brought to the fore, but you don't know what is in people's hearts.

**CT:** Is there anything else you could tell me that might be helpful?

**Anon:** In the bigger picture about XR is the Regenerative Culture. That comes mostly from women and mostly from the whole thread that goes back to Greenham and it's not overtly to do with Goddess. The thing about Extinction Rebellion is that we are completely and utterly concerned what's happening to the natural world and that takes you straight into Goddess spirituality. So, anybody looking at the Regen side of it or encouraging that, where it happens it is very powerful. But what I would also say is that I am struggling with my local group at the moment, which has been taken over by people who have forgotten about the Regen. And we don't talk about those things, we talk about action, action, action, without preparation, with no kind of spiritual preparation. It's become very masculine dominated, and they are out there doing things with almost no space to think about why they are doing it. And that love is there, and they are not

stopping to be empowered by it. But we have a weekend to look back at Glasgow, so we'll see what happens then.

Informant 8 – Bliss, female, Stroud, 40 years old

**(2 December 2021)**

**CT:** What is your position in Stroud Goddess Temple.

**B:** I am the founder and priestess.

**CT:** How did the Goddess Temple come into being?

**B:** I initiated the community group, I brought people together. And held the vision for three years.

**CT:** You were on Facebook a long time before you came here.

**B:** We had a virtual temple and gatherings at different venues in Stroud. We had gatherings to vision the temple and call it into being and that was also an information harvesting event, so we could ask people what it was they wanted from their temple. We had more than 70 people attend that original visioning event, that was at Imbolc 2019. And we've had gatherings to celebrate the seasonal festivals, several Summer Solstice gatherings, Equinox, Lamas.

**CT:** How did you become a Goddess? What drew you to Goddess worship?

**B:** I am not a Goddess. I am a devotee of the Goddess. That's a common misconception when people describe those who are part of the Goddess loving culture as Goddesses. But we are all part of the Goddess, so you are part of the Goddess, Prince (Bliss's dog) is part of the Goddess, this building is part of the Goddess... but I really see myself as in service to her rather than identifying with her. And I think that's a really important distinction. There is this generic stereotype of the Goddess that I would really like to dispel. And people describe that as women who are wearing floaty clothes and essentially playing dress-up with made up rituals, so the idea of the Goddess, or a Goddess, a group of Goddesses, is a flaky kind of stereotype and can be used in a derogatory sense to disrespect and negate the spiritual path that people like me follow.

I can embody the Goddess and I am dedicated as a priestess of the Goddess. I have several times made a pledge to devote my life, my talents, my offerings, in the service of Goddess. So that means radiating her love into the world, living through love and lifting others up, and transcending the wounds of patriarchal culture, which we have all been subjected to for the past 3,000 years. But that also means healing our communities, so it's about healing relationships, allowing all of us to shine our gifts and be authentically present, without the wounds of patriarchy. It's healing for everyone, men and women because everyone has suffered under patriarchy.

**CT:** Can men be in service to the Goddess?

**B:** Yes, in fact we have several members of our community who identify as men and live as men. We have people who are male assigned and people who are non-binary, people who are trans, and people who are women. So, the Goddess is for everyone.

**CT:** I understand.

**B:** We believe here that we also call in the elements, so we are working with the spirits of this land.

**CT:** That's like Eco-Shamanism?

**B:** Yes, so that's particularly important because many of the people in Stroud and its environs are environmentalists and activists who are looking to shift our attitude towards use of energy, having an understanding of the inter-relatedness of ourselves and our environment. We are one with the source of life. So many of the problems within modern culture are coming from a sense of separation, of being divorced from one's environment. What we aim to do here is to educate people about the traditionally worshipped Goddesses of the Cotswolds. Cuda, is the centre of the Cotswold wheel of Goddesses, and she is Goddess of the land and goddess of the harvest. Very much associated with the hills of the Cotswold landscape and the sandstone and the honey limestone of the area. There is this sense of the enormity of time and the changing earth and how the landscape can transform. So, you can never be separate from it. It is part of all of us.

**CT:** And to a great degree many of us have lost that, lost the contact?

**B:** Many people have, particularly if you live in an urban environment or work in an artificial office environment, it can be very hard to connect. I lead forest bathing sessions as part of my therapeutic work. I also take people out to sacred sites, archaeology tours, so it's very important for me, as her priestess, to be reconnecting people with the landscape and with the ancient sites of our ancestors. That's one of the ways I offer my work in devotion to Goddess. That's sacred service. When I lead a group of people into the forest, I am reconnecting them and educating them to the fact that the trees have a kind of sentience, they live in families, and they care for and support one another. We are living in these communities and our natural environment is a community, so I remind people of the sentience of our neighbours within the landscape, all living things around us are our neighbours. It's important to me to bring people into solemn kinship with the animals, the plants, the hills and even the stones. It's all part of her.

**CT:** I've been comparing the Goddess feminists at Greenham Common with the Goddess feminists now, forty years later. Is the way the Goddess is worshipped today, different from the times at Greenham?

**B:** Some of those Goddess feminists are the same people but the way we communicate now is different. In the past there was a sense of a village dynamic within a lot of protest movements, people knew each other very well, and the type of actions that were taking place were planned around a fire. People were living in camps. So, before XR, that kind of spirit was resurrected by the Occupy movement at St Paul's, and I was part of that, but more involved with the bank of ideas, which grew out of that camp. It started off being a camp and grew into a squat and took over a building in the financial District and turned it into a college and community centre. So that had a lot of the spirit of Greenham Common. The emergence of XR was very much more about trying to raise awareness in a very modern way. It was inspired by events like the Arab Spring, that was the beginning of the use of social media as a vehicle to galvanise people into action. So, from that, all these other movements around the world have really changed since the revolution in Egypt. Since that time, it has become something that you can do from home, or if you go to an action, you can be live streaming what is happening and people can be sending you money, can be sending you

support. Just knowing that other people are there and watching makes you feel a lot safer in terms of what you are doing, because you know you have got witnesses. So, you are less likely to be charged by police forces, for example, because nobody is going to want a video of that on the internet.

**CT:** It has really changed the way things are done.

**B:** It's enabled people to be a lot braver. People are buoyed on that sense of community that is coming from the internet, so I think that can be helpful. At the first XR action that took place at Parliament Square when they planted those apple trees, my daughter and I went dressed as witches, because it was Hallowe'en, so we were blessing the protestors with mugwort, and asking them to vision their dreaming, what is it they want to call in; imagining a better world, imagining success for the movement – to save humanity from extinction. Wouldn't it be wonderful for us to live sustainably on the land and in reverence for all of life? I was really touched by that gathering of people because I did feel a sense of the sacred and I did feel that we were praying together; we meditated together, we visioned the change as it happened and we grieved together, so all those things are emotions we need to become reconnected to. I was part of a group who were magical practitioners, so we held a ceremony under the statue of the Suffragette Millicent Fawcett for the resurgence of the divine feminine to empower the movement.

We have to create culture in order to galvanise action and one of the bests ways to do that is through the use of ritual and ceremony, it really brings people into attunement with one another; when we witness, when we see each other in a ceremonial or ritual space, it gives us all a depth of presence which is not as accessible in mundane life. The use of ritual in XR has empowered the movement because it has given us a sense of gravitas.

**CT:** I have been told by a couple of women who were at Greenham and are now in XR that patriarchy has shown up again in XR.

**B:** I think that is because of the lack of structure in XR, which is a movement compose of autonomous groups. So, no central hierarchy. This is the problem and when there is a power vacuum, sometimes people step up to fill that space who have their own agendas. This is why I have attended XR events, but I am not part of the planning, or the administrations and I've not gone to many meetings. I am a doer. We have to have a lot of meetings here at the temple and that is everything I can devote my committee time to, creating sacred space. I was the same at Occupy, all these people were having waving hands public assemblies, and I was massaging homeless people in the Buddhist tent. I want to get out there and do things. I will show up if something has been organised and I am not at risk of being arrested – for me that's very important. I work with vulnerable people, and I have a daughter. Some people are doing direct actions that could potentially put them in prison, and I really support those people for what they are doing, but I need to stay on the right side of the law. I question some of what has taken place (in XR). I don't think some of it is in alignment with upholding those values of earth care, people care, fair shares for all. So, I do question some of the direction action that has been taking place because I am not sure that they are focussed on the principles – like when they blocked the road to the hospitals, and when they stood on top of that tube train and people couldn't get to work. That's having the opposite impact. It's impacting on people's health and care for their loved ones, and it's impacting on people's ability to keep their homes. So, some of the things that have been

suggested during the last year, like don't pay your mortgage, I just can't get behind that. For me it doesn't really feel it's taking into account the needs of people who are on the margins of society and I believe we always need to bring people who are less privileged than ourselves into the centre. As someone who is of mixed race, I have been in situations in my life when I have lived in poverty. I think it is really important to plan actions where we can lift people up who are in minority groups, or people who are financially disadvantaged – not everyone can pay for a train to get to London for an action – and also to make events accessible for people who have got different types of disability.

What has emerged out of XR is that a lot of people are still living with these underpinning pre-conceived biases and there is a lot of privilege. In the same way as the Transition Network (a charity founded in 2007 to support transition initiatives emerging around the world) was criticised – a lot of Rob Hopkins' work has been brought into XR, particularly the visioning, which is fantastic but what ended up happening was that the people who were in the steering committee tended to be the dinner party set of middle class, privileged white people and why is that? Is it because those who aren't privileged are living hand to mouth and literally haven't got the time or capacity to think about sustainability, to think about being in these community groups? How do we make these things so that everyone can be a part of it? At the beginning XR was really good at that because anyone could share things online, anyone could use the logo and show their support for XR without necessarily having to buy something. Then it got to a point where there were a lot of financial backers for XR where there were major corporate interests, and this is where things started to get a little bit blurry because what is going on there are these corporate organisations using their support for this activist movement as a way of marketing themselves and making lots of money. And it is major corporations who are the major polluters, so there is a kind of sense of greenwashing, unfortunately. I don't believe that Gail or Roger or any of the founders of XR ever intended that to happen. Roger is very deeply committed to the idea of social change and having a movement which is actually an uprising against this corporate ecocide.

My little claim to fame is that the first women's circle that I ever did here in Stroud in 2016 was attended by Gail and Polly and they were visioning this movement. So, Polly was talking about Stop Ecocide coming into international law, and Gail was talking about really creating change to help the planet. I remember later watching Stop Ecocide and XR and thinking they did it; they pulled it out of their wombs. But they spoke that in a women's circle in a sacred space in ceremony with other women witnessing in Stroud, witnessing their pledge, really calling their intention and using the power of their womb in connection with the sacred feminine to bring forth these visions and these ideas into manifestation. I find that really inspiring.

In a lot of ways, I find that similar to what happened at Greenham Common because it was circles of women who were empowering, raising awareness for one another. I don't think that at its core the vision of XR is different from that of Greenham Common because these things are happening in circles, among women, in the presence of the divine feminine. But then it is manifesting out into the world, it spreads itself out to something else.

**CT:** At the core there are these groups of women who are doing exactly the same thing as they did at Greenham?

**B:** And they are still doing it. In Stroud we have Stroud Sisterhood which is a grassroots movement with women supporting women in the local community and quite often someone mentions XR and what is happening. You can't divorce any kind of activism from feminism ultimately. At its core it's about creating equity and breaking down barriers. Whatever kind of activism you are doing, there's going to be some element of trying to dismantle patriarchy. But unfortunately, we have all been raised in this patriarchal culture, so I think sometimes people are behaving in a way that is oppressive to others because they've got this internalised patriarchy.

Even in the Goddess movement, powerful women will sometimes, as a way of maintaining their power, will push others down in order to lift themselves up. The idea that you need to push others out of the way in order to get ahead is an example of patriarchy and that manifests itself as internalised misogyny. We find ourselves doing it without even realising it. Judging, gossiping about others... we need to think the best of one another and share from the heart – and being real, because sometimes life is really hard. The idea behind Stroud Sisterhood is lifting each other up, supporting each other, offering advice or guidance but not from a place of judgement. These online spaces became so much more important during the pandemic. That's one of the reasons the temple took so long to open. We needed somewhere people could be in a sacred space and be open to the presence of the Goddess, which was my vision, and many people in Stroud share that.

**CT:** Was it difficult to find the right place for the Goddess Temple?

**B:** We faced discrimination over the period of time we were looking for a place because I think people have got in their mind this idea of Goddesses or witches and there is still a lot of patriarchal programming which leads people to judge us harshly. Even to mention the word Goddess, people can find really threatening because she has been given a really bad press. So many Goddesses have been transferred into demons.

**CT:** We're going back centuries now to witches?

**B:** Yes, there is this idea that anyone who is practising a pagan, nature-based faith is potentially going to besmirch the reputation of places that were hosting us. I felt as though the welcome mat had been withdrawn from us several times.

**CT:** But do you not think that when things don't work out, they are not meant to be?

**B:** Yes, and where we are now is perfect for us. This temple is an A-political space so anyone one can come here of any faith, any political belief, so we have made this place a neutral space, where people can come and connect with the divine. To come and have some softness and some gentleness. We are trying to make it family friendly and accessible, so it doesn't have that sense of militant activism here in the temple. We will make people aware of the Goddess, but it is happening in quite a subtle way. And that can be as powerful as direct action. When people come to this space and have a sense of the sacred, things change inside. Being in sacred space that is one of the most transformative things. I believe in the transcendence of the human spirit everyone has the capacity to find the sacred. When we provide an environment for them to do it, amazing things can happen. Like the women's circle with Penny and Gale. That was an example something profound taking place and then somehow that's a ripple which creates a wave, and the world is changed. Everyone in the world knows about XR and Stop Ecocide. I feel so humble just to

have witnessed someone talking about it before it even happened. As a priestess my role is to witness that profound, magical potential in everyone and just by holding space for them and just by seeing them and hearing them, something changes and something magical happens. Something in that sacred space, something which was bigger than all of us, came into being through the divine feminine.

Informant 9 – Stella, Stroud, 70-75 years old  
**(2 December 2021)**

**CT:** How do you identify yourself?

**S:** I'm an Eco-feminist and Hedge Witch

**CT:** You're not anything to do with XR and you weren't at Greenham?

**S:** No.

**CT:** So how do you view the Goddesses in XR for instance? Do you think about them or are they evident to you in any way? Do you think they influence the people in XR?

**S:** Like Greenham, where there was link with the second wave of feminism and the Eco movement and the respect of the Goddess, I think the same thing has happened now with XR where the feminine influence has come to the fore.

**CT:** People I have been speaking to who are in XR have said there is a lot of patriarchy now. It's gone a full circle almost. Have you noticed that?

**S:** I think it may be the last hurrah of the dinosaurs. When there is a big change imminent, the old paradigm fights back big time. So that's what you saw with Trump and the rise to the right, the patriarchy is feeling uncomfortably challenged by the women and the way women work much more collaboratively.

**CT:** And in Eco-feminism, have you found Goddesses there?

**S:** I think the Goddess spirit drives everything I do - my work with Stroud Valley Project, which is all about working with the earth and with the Bi-Dynamic Land Trust, which is all about looking after the soil and respecting the loci of place. It's Gaia, who is the Earth, the Spirit and the Goddess, where I try to direct my actions and my thoughts. I was very anti traditional religion when I was growing up in the Church of England. I never felt comfortable with it. I thought the whole time 'where are the women'. When I got to about 15, I really started thinking about the implications, Later I did a weekend course when was inducted into the first level of into Shamanism.

**CT:** Did you know anything about Shamanism before that?

**S:** I think what really brought it on was having a hysterectomy and thinking about femaleness and Goddesses. So, I went on this weekend retreat, not long after that and I've been dipping in and out of it for years. Life always gets in the way, but I've always had it at the back on my head. Also, when I was a child, I seriously did believe in fairies and I got told not to be so stupid, because I used to see things. And I sort of killed that part of me off and got on the track where it says you must get married and you have to have children.... It wasn't until my menopause that I started to



question all this stuff and simply because it was the feminine side of me I felt I was losing somehow. When I was inducted into Shamanism, they did this process on me which they said was giving me back my womb. They laid hands on me and said: 'We are spiritually giving you back your womb'.

**CT:** Did that make you feel different?

**S:** Yes, it was quite... You go on a Shaman's journey to the land of lost limbs and collect the part that has been taken and then it is spiritually put back into the person. This made me feel more spiritually whole and this is what working with the Goddess does, it makes me feel more spiritually whole. We are all enclosed within a circle, and no one is top dog. And that is how I feel about nature, we are all integral to each other's survival and no one has dominance over another.

Since I was 50, I have been dipping in and out of doing these kinds of things. Over the past five years I have seriously been trying to get to grips with healing the land. So that is what is important. It is all about restoring the energetic balance to the earth.

**CT:** Do you think we are making progress?

**S:** Definitely, but slowly.

**CT:** Do you think the XR people are going in the right direction, or do you think they have lost their way?

**S:** I think they have lost their way a bit. To begin with they were absolutely right to raise the profile and all they are doing is following in a long line of demonstrators, like the Suffragettes, who had to resort to doing aggressive acts to make people understand what was happening, so I think they started off doing that, but I think they have lost their way.

**CT:** Do you think XR may have been infiltrated by people with other agendas? Maybe men who just want action and have no time for the spiritual?

**S:** Yes, I do. I think that is why there is a rise in things like being a hedge witch. Women are becoming solo operators and doing what they can in their own way, rather than being caught up in the big actions where men what action and have no time for the spiritual. It's the women who are more tuned into this, I think. Maybe because they are the care givers and through having children, they are more aware.

**CT:** Is chanting and keening part of Eco-Shamanism?

**S:** Yes, it is, and I do. It is part of fire ceremonies. My special place where I go to talk to the Goddess is Coaley Peak. It is very windy up there, like the breath of the Goddess breathing on you. It is also the place where I see Ravens, which are important to me. And it also has a prehistoric long barrow, so I can go and talk to the ancestors and leave an offering there. I usually leave a pebble or a stone.

**CT:** How important are the ancestors?

**S:** Very important. It's your contact right back to the beginning of time. A long line of people, some your own ancestors and some just people. Spirit is very important. It has always been there and

always will be there. Our energy goes on, we can't physically, but our energy just gets recycled. Reincarnation.

Informant 10 – Antonia, Gloucester, 17 years old

**(11 December 2021)**

**CT:** Do you know anything at all about either Greenham Common or Extinction Rebellion?

**A:** I know a bit about Greenham Common. I know it was about nuclear missiles being on British soil. But I know more about Extinction Rebellion because I have been a bit more involved with protesting stuff.

**CT:** So, tell me about your experiences with XR.

**A:** Well, I am at college in Bristol and it's quite big there. A lot of blocking roads and stuff like that. I know a lot of people who have been to the actual protests, but I haven't been to any protests myself. But I see a lot of XR graffiti around Bristol.

**CT:** Do you follow what's happening?

**A:** It's all over my Instagram feed and I follow Greta Thunberg. She was in Bristol to give a talk a while ago.

**CT:** So, what are your thoughts about women and activism?

**A:** I think the activism stuff is really important. It's really hard to get your voice heard. I don't think the Government particularly listens. It's very frustrating. People say it's a pain to have the XR activists in the streets, blocking roads and stuff and obviously it is a pain if you're trying to get anywhere. But it makes a point. You have a right to protest peacefully, but you can only say you've had enough for so long before people stop listening. So, you do have to be annoying, you have to be in the way, you have to be loud or else people just don't hear it.

**CT:** Do you worry at all about climate change, it's your future...

**A:** I do worry. I try to do my part. I try to recycle, and I am vegan. There is only so much that we as individuals can do. Big companies and corporations need to take responsibility. You can only recycle so much.

**CT:** Do you know about Goddess feminists at all?

**A:** I've sort of heard about the Goddess movement, but not really.

**CT:** Among the young people I know, very few know about the Goddess movement, but it seems to be big in Stroud, for instance. You're not living that far away, and you've not heard about it.

**A:** Well, it's not reached any of the young people I know, definitely not. I really don't know anything about Goddesses.

**CT:** Did you say you know people who have protested? Or anyone who has been arrested?

**A:** I know several people who have been to protests and there is one girl at my college who was arrested at one of the XR protests by the police quite brutally. She's black so she puts the brutality down to that.

**CT:** Do you think being black makes a difference?

**A:** I think so because I know a lot of white people, especially white boys, who have been to these protests, and they are the loudest and the rudest and they are the ones kicking in police cars. They get a slap on the hand and are told not to do it again. But she was pinned to the floor and arrested.

**CT:** So, I think generally Greenham and Goddesses haven't filtered down to your age group. But it seems XR has?

**A:** I think the protests and stuff does get the attention of young people, definitely. There's a lot of talk of it in college tutorials by teachers. We are asked what we think the college could do, but we say and then they ignore us. Young people do like to be a part of something, for sure. So, when the Extinction Rebellion says: 'You can be a part of this', young people think: 'Oh yes'. When I get the train to Bristol, I see a lot of people wearing jackets with Extinction Rebellion on the back. So, people are aware. Extinction Rebellion probably does have quite a grasp on my age group. It's probably the Goddess stuff in Stroud and such hasn't reached us, but I think Extinction Rebellion has. I think young people are quite lazy sometimes. They like the idea of it, but they can't be bothered to put it into practice. Also, if you are living at home and you're a young person, there is only so much you can do.

**CT:** So, although some young people are aware of what is going on with XR, many have not really been touched by it. Although when Greta Thunberg was in Glasgow for Cop29, there were loads of young people there.

**A:** There are a lot of young people who love Greta and really support her, but the people who make fun of Greta Thunberg are louder than those who support her.

**CT:** Why do they make fun of her?

**A:** She is very passionate, and some don't like to see passionate young people. But I find a lot of young people, especially young men, like taking the piss out of her and making fun of her. And she has autism as well, so they make fun of the way she talks. But I think she is amazing. Whether people like her or not she has clearly made an impact. Everyone knows who she is.