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A new age of goddess worship in new wave feminism : witch way forward? : a qualitative study

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A NEW AGE OF GODDESS WORSHIP IN NEW WAVE FEMINISM: WITCH WAY FORWARD?

A QUALITATIVE STUDY

Joanne Kostopoulos-Riganello (B.Soc.Sci.)



A report submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the
Award of Bachelor of Social Science Honours,
Faculty of Computing, Health and Science,
Edith Cowan University.
Submitted October, 2009

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A NEW AGE OF GODDESS WORSHIP IN NEW WAVE FEMINISM: WITCH WAY FORWARD?

ABSTRACT

This research investigates the question: Are women who are currently engaged in a Goddess religion, such as Wicca, practising a new wave of feminism, one that has its roots in a uniquely female order? This is grounded in a qualitative interpretive paradigm, using a feminist poststructuralist methodology. A comprehensive literature review was undertaken, drawing on relevant material from the areas related to the topics of the Goddess, feminism, theology, witches and Wicca. Five High Priestesses of Wicca were interviewed using one-on-one unstructured interview techniques. All five interviews were guided by open-ended questions focussed on participants' experiences and perceptions of Goddess worship and feminism. Data analysis techniques used combined grounded theory analysis and narrative analysis that was closely guided by principles of 'reflexivity' and 'reciprocity'. Data from the interviews revealed five themes including: A Goddess Who is Immanent; Virgin Mary Symbolism: A Woman Faithful to Herself; Feminist Ideals and Feminist Disassociation; Goddess Worship: Both a Personal and Collective Journey; and The Goddess Breaking and Creating Binary Opposites. These findings indicate that Witches, Wiccans and Goddess Worshipers are creating a unique space that has the power to re-write the symbolic structure. This is significant for a new hybrid feminism that is taking form as an individual undertaking. As not all witches are feminists, and not all feminist are witches, feminist activists can imitate the witch and find another way in which to inhabit the same unique space that has facilitated their liberation.

Joanne Kostopoulos-Riganello
Supervisor: Dr Elizabeth Reid-Boyd

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

The Women's Movement of the 1970s was a powerful political force that prompted a cultural shift in the West (Weedon, 1997, p. 1). Principles of equality inspired a re-evaluation of our understandings of maleness and femaleness (Starhawk cited in Salomonsen, 2002, p. 214). A re-evaluation of gender roles was not restricted to feminist activism and theory alone, but extended to the realm of spirituality (Starhawk cited in Salomonsen, 2002, p. 214). As a result of this shift, many women rejected the oppressive patriarchal institutions of church and synagogue, enthusiastically reviving and embracing the Goddess (Starhawk, 1989, p. 23; Salomonsen, 2002, p. 6). The goddess religion offered new possibilities for female identity. Through Goddess religion, women were able to see their bodies as sacred and divine, enabling women to see the wild power in nature and experience the pleasure of sexual intimacy as a path to the sacred (Starhawk cited in Salomonsen, 2002, p. 215). Through the Goddess, women could gain strength, enlighten mind and body, and celebrate emotions. Women dared to hope they could move beyond the prescribed constricting roles and become whole (Starhawk, 1989, p. 24). The Goddess, above all else, represented the extent of women's potential (Morgan, 1996, p. 103).

The theorists Irigaray (1987, 1985a, 1985b), Cixous (1986, 1981a, 1981b) and Kristeva (1982a, 1982b, 1981) moved feminist theories beyond the concept of sameness and equality to explore maleness and femaleness (Tong, 1998, pp. 193-211; Weedon, 1997, p. 9). Many feminists today, largely influenced by French philosophy and psychoanalysis, agree, to an extent, with the 'equalists' de Beauvoir, Friedan, Firestone and Greer (Salomonsen, 2002, p. 217; Tong, 1998, p. 207); woman, as defined in Western culture, is confined within the male symbolic order that created her. Instead of eliminating sexual difference to gain equality, however, contemporary theories outline how women should be invoking "she-who-is-not-yet-known" (Salomonsen, 2002, p. 217). Women have only ever known themselves as the other of man; his mirror image. Tong (1998, p. 197) explains that without feminine language and symbolism to express the female experience, women have been silenced, repressed, left on the outside of the symbolic order, "beyond

thoughts and words". French feminist psychoanalyst Luce Irigaray suggests that a new purely 'female symbolic order' needs to be created, one that highlights otherness and represents woman's undeniable difference (Salomonsen, 2002, p. 217); not only her biological difference, but also her unique spiritual self.

The revival of Goddess religion and contemporary understandings of feminist theories of difference are of particular interest to me, as both a Women's Studies student and as a member of a Goddess religion, Wicca. Weedon (1997, p. 9) draws these two ideas together by explaining how feminist theories of difference urge us to celebrate uniquely female figures. Weedon (1997, p. 9) points out how the witch is specifically identified by radical feminists as one powerful example of the uniquely female figure. The witch is seen as resisting patriarchy and the social structures through which its power is exercised (Weedon, 1997, p. 9), alluding to the possibility that a space may already exist where women simultaneously celebrate difference and function outside of patriarchal confines. The purpose of this research is to consider the possible connection between Goddess religion, witches and contemporary feminism, in an attempt to further the advancement of feminist activism, promoting positive social changes and freedom for women in the future. The research question, then, is: Are women who are currently engaged in a Goddess religion, such as Wicca, practising a new wave of feminism, one that has its roots in a uniquely female order?

CHAPTER TWO: METHODOLOGY AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

To begin my thesis research, I started with a comprehensive literature review that focussed on the most current information related to topics of the Goddess, feminism, witches and Wicca. A search was undertaken at Edith Cowan University, Murdoch University and Alexander State Library. The starting point for this literature review was to reflect on the various works of French psychoanalyst Luce Irigaray (1985-2008), whose work inspired this research. From here, I forwarded the search for material on this topic in various sources using keywords that included *Irigaray, Luce, Goddess Worship, Goddess Worship and Feminism, Feminism and Divine, Feminism and Witchcraft, Feminism and Wicca, Feminism and Goddess, Women and Wicca, Women and Witchcraft, Goddess and Women, Feminism and Witches, Thealogy, and Thealogy and Wicca.*

A general book search yielded information in the general areas of Feminism, Feminist Theology, Religion, Witchcraft, Goddess and the New Age Movement, Psychology, and Thealogy. There were countless and varied books within these areas, and thus I narrowed my reading to books published between 1995 and 2009 that were very specifically related to my research topic. Two of the most prominent authors that I identified were Melissa Raphael's (1999) *Introducing Thealogy: Discourse on the Goddess* and Kathryn Rountree's (2004) *Embracing the Witch and the Goddess: Feminist ritual-makers in New Zealand.*

It is commonly thought that we choose a Goddess path, but I would dispute this. I believe that the Goddess path finds you. For so long the more conventional religions just did not appeal to me. My best friend and I started looking into witchcraft and witches. Years later, my best friend met an individual by chance, who asked if the pentagram around her neck was real. To this she replied, "yes, it is, merry meet". In response, the answer came back, "merry meet, merry part, and merry meet again". Promptly my friend was invited to come along to a weekly meeting at this person's home. She accepted, and I went along with her. It was our first experience in a Wiccan coven. To this day, we are still with the same coven and have followed the Goddess path since. It was like finally coming home.

Journal articles were the most important component of this literature review as they provided me with the most current information on the topic. Again, I limited my search to articles from 1995 onwards. The databases that I used for a general search included *A+ Education*, *Academic One File*, *APA-FT*, *Australian / New Zealand Reference Centre*, *Academic Search Premier*, *MasterFILE Premier Contemporary Women's Issues*, *Current Contents Connect*, *Education Full Text*, *eLibrary Australasia*, *ERIC (EBSCO)*, *Eric (Proquest)*, *ERIC (US Dept. of Education)*, *Ingenta Connect*, *Proquest 5000 International*, *Proquest Social Science Journals*, *Proquest Women's Interest and PsychINFO*. This general search yielded a large quantity of material, most of which was not directly related to my topic. The search was then narrowed to the following journals: *Australian Feminist Studies*, *Feminism and Psychology*, *Gender and Society*, *Signs*, *Hecate*, *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, *Gender and History*, *Journal of Gender Studies*, *Feminist Theology*, *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, *The Journal of the British & Ireland School of Feminist Theology*, *Psychoanalysis, Culture and Society*, *Subjectivity*, *Hypatia* and *Feminist Review*. The keywords used to search journals included: *Wicca and Feminism*, *Goddess and Feminism*, *Wicca and Women*, *Goddess and Women*, *Feminism and Witchcraft*, *Women and Witchcraft*, *Feminism and Witches*, *Theology and Wicca*, *Theology*, *Wicca*, *Witches*.

Theoretical Framework

The research design for this project is grounded in a qualitative interpretive paradigm. The interpretive paradigm provides a theoretical basis for research that focuses on the individual subjective experience, social realities, actions and individual systems of meaning (Sarantakos, 1993, pp.33-35). Stringer (1999, p. 167) explains that the interpretive paradigm recognises that knowledge accumulated by people in everyday life is as valid and important as knowledge acquired through academia or "bureaucratic policies and procedures".

Methodology

Feminist post-structuralist methodology works compatibly within the interpretive paradigm underpinning this research. By using a post-structuralist feminist methodology, focus was on the deconstruction of the human subject in order to discover meanings and possibilities for change. Psychoanalytical theory has been highly influential in both post-structuralist and feminist theory, giving an invaluable contribution to understandings of subjectivity (Weedon, 1997, p. 41). Subjectivity and difference are central to this thesis, that is, specifically interested in these concepts, and that will be a representation of women's individual expression and experience.

Data Collection

Working within the interpretive paradigm and in keeping with a post-structuralist feminist methodology, I chose to use the qualitative data collection technique of unstructured interviews. Sarantakos (1993, pp. 178-179) explains that the unstructured interview has no strict procedure or schedule, and allows the interviewer flexibility to change and formulate questions as required. This flexibility in the interview setting is, according to Reinharz (1992, p. 18), key to maximising "discovery and description". Feminist researchers find this type of interviewing appealing, as it gives the researcher access to the interviewee's thoughts and memories in their own words, rather than through the words of the researcher. This is of particular importance for the study of women as it is "an antidote to centuries of ignoring women's ideas" (Reinharz, 1992, p. 19).

The Role of Researcher and Witch

There have been a number of studies on witches by witches. In her book *Embracing the Witch and the Goddess: Feminist Ritual-makers in New Zealand* (2004), Kathryn Rountree outlines her research process as a witch-researcher, and the process of other witch researchers including Hume (1997, 1994), Greenwood (2000), Salomonsen (2002),

and Foltz and Griffin (1996). These researchers used participant observation as their primary method for gathering data. This method Rountree (2004, pp. 71-72) describes as being fraught with difficulties. Being a member of the Wiccan community and as a researcher, this was of particular relevance to me and my research.

I am aware that my role as witch researcher has its limitations, as Rountree (2004, pp. 71-72) specifies. Rountree (2004, pp. 71-72) explains that in order to gain real knowledge of the Wiccan community, intimate involvement within a coven is necessary, including taking part in regular rituals and attending workshops. Unfortunately, however, in this case, becoming too involved, (the researcher becoming a witch themselves), or as Rountree describes, as “going native” (2004, p. 73), can be seen by the academic community as compromising objectivity and thus the academic integrity of the research. As a result of this, some of the researchers, namely Luhrmann (1989) and Berger (1999), stated quite clearly that they were not witches (Rountree, 2004, pp. 73-74).

According to Foltz (2000, p. 413), the negative stereotype still surrounding witchcraft means that the researcher risked being labelled ‘true believers’ and being subjected to the social and academic consequences of this. Moving into a time where the witch is becoming more accepted into mainstream society, we see the researcher better able to negotiate this difficulty. Rountree (2004, p. 74) explains how Hume (1997), a reputable researcher of witches, embraced her role completely as insider and admits openly to becoming a witch during her study. Hume explains, however, that this did not eclipse her many other roles, including her role as an academic.

It was the night following my first degree initiation. I was driving home when I saw her standing on the median strip at the intersection. I saw her only for a second, so quickly that I wasn't sure I had seen her. A woman hooded and cloaked, with a red shawl tightly wrapped around her shoulders. I quizzed my peers at coven the following week about this woman. It was unanimous. The woman I had seen was the Goddess Hecate. Seeing her as I did, and on the night I did, it was expressed to me that she had selected me as her Priestess. From that day forward she has been my Goddess.

As a Wiccan myself, I take the standpoint of Hume, and embrace my position as a witch and of my membership within the Wiccan community. I believe that it is a great advantage having the base knowledge and spiritual likeness to those I am studying. Throughout the entire research process I believe I have been able to shift in and out of my

role as the researcher and as a witch. This shift between roles I see as a natural progression, as practical and as manageable as women who successfully slip between the roles of mother, daughter, wife and sister.

Sample

The main component of my research was to interview five High Priestesses of Wicca in Perth. In doing this, I hoped to move beyond literature and theory, and learn, through their own expression and words, how these women might make the connection between feminism and Goddess worship. I chose to interview High Priestesses of Wicca as they represent a portion of Goddess centred religious groups here in Perth. Wicca, as a religion, has three stages or levels of the 'craft', the High Priestess being the highest position attainable. Getting to this level of Wicca takes time and a great deal of experience. It also requires a high level of maturity both spiritually and socially. So in choosing to interview five Wiccan High Priestesses, I have chosen women with extensive experience, knowledge and understanding of the craft and Goddess religion, their relationship to it, and how they negotiate this within the current social context.

Recruitment

Recruitment for this research was by way of 'purposive sampling' (Sarantakos, 1998, p. 152). As Sarantakos (1998, p. 152) explains, this is a selection of research participants who are judged by the researcher as being relevant to the research topic. Purposive sampling required that I, the researcher, first identify participants, and then arrange times for meeting and interviewing them. I had already identified my research participants. I then needed to gain access to them. As a member of a Perth Wiccan coven, I had rare access to the High Priestesses here in Perth I wished to interview. As Sarantakos (1998, p. 251) explains, the researcher can gain a better understanding of a subculture like Wicca if they work with key informants.

Sarantakos (1998, p. 251) describes the key informants, also known as key people (Stringer, 1999, p. 52), as those who are considered experts in their area, those who have knowledge of issues, situations and processes of a particular group or subculture. I was able to identify and acquire contact details for all of the interviewees through two key informants. My High Priest and High Priestess of my own Wiccan coven were my key informants. The Wiccan religion has been historically subjected to a great deal of prejudice and negativity, and consequently, the members often choose to keep their religious association private. This makes it very difficult for outsiders to gain access to this group. The High Priest and High Priestess, with their extensive associations with the Perth Wiccan community, enabled me to access the research participants. They were actively involved in correspondence and assistance with interviewee selection and recruitment.

All five interviews were undertaken by myself and were conducted in a one-on-one setting in the interviewees' home. All of the interviews were guided by a short list of five open-ended questions with an additional six optional questions. Questions focussed on the interviewee's experiences and perceptions of Goddess Worship and feminism. These questions guided the interview proceedings but were not limited to them. The use of open-ended questions is a preferred feminist method which enables us, as researchers, to open our ears "to the voices and perspectives of women so that we might begin to hear the unheard and unimagined" (Reinharz, 1992, p. 20). The first interview was undertaken in January 2009, and the remaining four were undertaken in June 2009. Once all of the interviews were completed, they were then transcribed for analysis.

Each time I drove to an interview, I was well prepared with directions mapped out to the detail. I was worried I'd get lost. This needn't have been a concern. I knew each Priestess's house instantly. Their houses were decorated with wind chimes, Goddess statues and the like. It always made me chuckle. A witch's abode is always quite obvious.

Data Analysis

Within contemporary feminist research there is a great deal of experimentation with innovative data analysis methods that draw from many different disciplines (Olesen,

2000, p. 216). Among these are feminist poststructuralist data analysis methods that address both issues of validity and trustworthiness whilst adhering to feminist research principles (Olesen, 2000, p. 230; Harrison, MacGibbon & Morton, 2001, pp. 323-324). Feminist and poststructuralist discourses recognise that knowledge and understanding are contextually and historically grounded, and are particularly interested in the language of the self and the subject (Mauthner & Doucet, 2003, p. 416; Seibold 2000, p. 153). For this reason, narratives are of special interest to feminist poststructuralist researchers. Narratives are a demonstration of individual meaning-making systems, and an expression of perceptions and life experiences (Ezzy, 2002, p. 100).

Reflexivity and reciprocity (Mauthner & Doucet, 2003, pp. 414-418; Harrison, MacGibbon & Morton, 2001, pp. 323-324) are terms increasingly used in qualitative research to describe and acknowledge the interconnection between the researcher, the researched, the method and the data. In contemporary feminist poststructuralist analysis methods, special emphasis is given to how the researcher interprets data, the researcher's role in the analytical process, and the preconceived ideas and assumptions we bring to the data analysis process (Mauthner & Doucet, 2003, pp. 417-418). A data analysis method that incorporates an emphasis on both narrative and reciprocity is a "voice-centred relational method of data analysis" (Mauthner & Doucet, 2003, p. 416) or narrative analysis (Ezzy, 2002, p. 95). Narrative analysis examines the whole of a person's account, including the researcher's role in the narrative. It is an examination of not just what is said, but also how things are said (Ezzy, 2002, p. 99). A narrative analysis method, along with basic grounded theory methods, was the data analysis techniques used for this research.

As is outlined in grounded theory, the transcribing process enabled a preliminary form of data analysis (Ezzy, 2002, p. 70). With the exception of the first two interviews, which were transcribed at the same time, each interview was transcribed before the next one was undertaken. As Ezzy (2002, p. 70) describes, this did indeed allow me, the researcher, to reflect on the interview process, consider how questions and settings were working, and whether or not participant cues for further information were missed.

Importantly, this also enabled me to make links early in the research process between participant experience, concepts and theory. Notes were also made as I went along, of anything that occurred during the interviews and the research process. This fed directly into the primary data analysis process (Ezzy, 2002, p. 70).

The use of notes was the primary component of this data analysis. To begin with, each transcription was read through line-by-line in an attempt to identify the stand out themes and concepts. Additionally, narrative analysis techniques were used to search transcripts for repetition, metaphors, phrasing and imagery of stories (Ezzy, 2002, p. 99). Further to this, supplementary readings of the transcriptions were undertaken. As Mauthner and Doucet (2003, p. 419) suggest, supplementary readings consider reader response, placing myself, my background, history and experiences in relation to the participant's narrative. I listened to how I responded to the narrative, both intellectually and emotionally.

All transcriptions were set out in a worksheet format with two columns, one for respondent's words and the second column for my notes, my reactions and my interpretations. This allowed me to examine more clearly how my views were affecting the interpretations of the respondent's words, how I formed concepts and categories, and how I later wrote thematic results and research findings (Mauthner & Doucet, 2003, p. 419). By taking into account both reciprocity and narrative, I was not only adhering to feminist politics and engaging in innovative contemporary qualitative analysis, I was also improving the trustworthiness, validity, credibility and believability of this research project (Harrison, MacGibbon & Morton, 2001, p. 324).

CHAPTER THREE: LITERATURE REVIEW

The topic of the Goddess, witches and feminism is the subject of a great deal of academic literature. In order to review the literature that would form the basis for this contemporary study, I made some exclusionary choices in order to review only the most relevant and recent material. The literature that I did read through included the works of Kathryn Rountree (2005, 2004, 1997), Luce Irigaray (2008, 2004, 1995, 1994, 1993a, 1993b, 1991, 1987, 1985a, 1985b), Elizabeth Grosz (1995), Melissa Raphael (1999), Penelope Ingram (2000), Rosemary Radford Ruether (2005a, 2005b), Naomi Goldenberg (2004), Kristy Coleman (2005), Paul Reid-Bowen (2007), Elaine Hall and Marnie Rodriguez (2003), Sarah Gamble (2001), Marguerite Rigoglioso (2005), Rebecca Gordon (1995), Tanice Foltz (2000), Lucia Birnbaum (1998), Lucie Marie-Mai DuFresne (1996), Amy Hollywood (1994), Lynda Warwick (1995), Carol Christ (2006, 1997), Grace Jantzen (1999, 1994), Jane Salomonsen (2002), Diane Purkiss (1996), Carolyne Larrington (1992), Bettina Knapp (1997), Starhawk (1989, 1982), Lynne Hume (1997, 1994), Jean Shinoda Bolen (2004), Eugenie Gatens-Robinson (1994), Judith Butler (1990), Stephanie Genz (2006), Sarah Page (2006), Amber Kinser (2004), Jennifer Pozner (2004, 2003) and Penelope Deutscher (1994). Although not all of this literature is referred to in this review, these works have assuredly influenced current material on these topics and shaped this research. These works are also cited by many of the authors referred to in this literature review.

In this literature review, I have delineated three main strands: Literature on postfeminism and third-wave feminism; Literature on thealogy; and Literature on feminism, witches and Wicca. It should be clarified that this categorisation is not indicative of a clear distinction between the topics, rather just a more readable and cohesive way in which to structure this complex material. They are, then, not themes, but thematic groups of literature. These categories most certainly overlap but they have been separated here for the sake of clarity. One other topic that was intertwined within these categories, but not included here, was eco-feminism. I chose not to include a section on this topic as it diverted the review a little from the research topic, and it became apparent from the

literature covered that eco-feminist principles were implicit to any study of the Goddess, feminism witches and Wicca. As Gatens- Robinson (1994, p. 223) states, “Feminist religious thought and practice in contemporary society reflects a growing ecological wisdom”.

HYBRID FEMINISM: LITERATURE ON POSTFEMINISM AND THIRD-WAVE FEMINISM

Postfeminism and third wave feminism are pertinent topics to explore in order to understand the current socio-political position of women today. The main theorists within postfeminism and third-wave feminist discourse are Gillis and Munford (2004), Juschka (2001), Oakley and Mitchell (1997), Budgeon (2001), Mann and Huffman (2005), Springer (2002), Hernandez and Rehman (2002), Faludi (1991), Pozner (2003), Whittier (1995), Baumgardner and Richards (2000), Walker (1995), Findlen (1995), Heywood and Drake (2004, 1997), Orr (1997), Dicker and Piepmeier (2003). The authors that I have chosen to review here are Hall and Rodriguez (2003), Page (2006), Kinser (2004) and Gamble (2001). These authors reflect a consistent commonality emerging within contemporary feminist thought.

Postfeminism is defined differently by different theorists. Page and Kinser (2006, p. 3; 2004, p. 132) explain that some theorists define postfeminism as the period following second-wave feminism, where everything women could reasonably want had been achieved. Research into postfeminism, according to Hall and Rodriguez (2003, pp. 878-902), indicates that an ever-increasing number of women are disinterested in feminism and feminist agendas, believing that for the most part equity has been achieved. In this same research, Hall and Rodriguez (2003, pp. 878-902) identify four main claims of postfeminism. The first claim of postfeminist discourse is that the support for the Women’s Movement has decreased from the 80s onwards. The second claim is that anti-feminism has increased, specifically amongst women. Thirdly, that feminism has lost its relevance. Fourthly, and finally, that a “no...but...” version of feminism has developed. Hall and Rodriguez’s (2003, pp. 878-902) research concluded that these postfeminist

claims are mostly unfounded. Support for feminism is identified in Hall and Rodriguez's (2003, pp. 878-902) research as remaining the same, or even as slightly increasing.

According to Page (2006, p. 3), other feminist theorists believe that feminism is not dead, but rather, has been hijacked by the media. Hall, Rodriguez and Gamble (2003, p. 880; 2001, p. 44) argue that postfeminism is predominantly a media-created social category that originated during the early 80s in response to what was termed "a joyous liberation from the ideological shackles of a hopelessly outdated feminist movement" (Gamble, 2001, p. 44). Gamble (2001, p. 45) explains that many women were inspired, through the media, to believe that feminism was unfashionable, passé and not worth considering any further. By using "various linguist mechanisms" (Hall & Rodriguez, 2003. p. 879) to manipulate present public opinion data, it is argued that the media has stimulated dominant public discourse that has led many to believe we are in an era where feminism is no longer valid, needed or supported. The postfeminist label should therefore be viewed with great suspicion, as Gamble (2001, p. 46) argues, it is more likely to be simply a knee-jerk reaction of mainstream society in defence of the status quo.

Postfeminism, then, can mean two things. Relating on a populist level, the reaction is that we are past feminism, but within academia it means more that we are in a new way of doing and understanding feminism (Page, 2006, p. 3). Kinser (2004, p. 134) warns that postfeminism is seductive. It combines motivating discourse of feminism, but accepts only a sense of empowerment as a substitute for active work towards authentic empowerment. Gamble (2001, pp. 44-45) explains that the prefix 'post' in postfeminism, should be viewed as a continuation of feminism and not a cessation of it. Extensive debate over the use of the term among theorists, and whether we are moving forward or backward, has held feminism in suspension (Gamble, 2001, p. 49; Page, 2006, p. 3).

I have always encountered snide remarks, particularly from men, when I identify myself as a feminist. I have always accepted it as par for the course. Interestingly, more recently, when I identify myself as both a feminist and a witch, I am met with quite a different reaction. The reaction seems to be one of fear, curiosity and more than just a little intrigue. It is at that point that the would-be heckler, suddenly finds some respect. The image of the witch still holds her power and acts as a shield for me, as a feminist. Being the embodiment of both feminist and witch, I give off a sense of greater power, a power that most do not wish to meddle with.

To avoid the problems of postfeminism, then, Gamble (2001, pp. 52-54) suggests we adopt a third-wave feminism, a further evolved feminism that is characterised by 'hybridity', understanding that one experience of oppression is different to another's. Third-wave feminism can be defined by its position and response to the current socio-cultural, technological and political climate. A third-wave feminism expands its concerns from a postfeminist focus on pop-culture, to include institutional bodies such as the workplace, government and religious institutions (Page, 2006, p. 5). It embodies a multiplicity of feminist ideologies (Kinser, 2004, p. 133). A third-wave feminism acknowledges that it is derivative of earlier feminist movements and builds on them (Gamble, 2001, p. 54; Kinser, 2004, p. 133; Page, 2006, p. 3). Third-wave feminism would be capable of describing a position from which past feminisms can be both celebrated and critiqued, enabling new activist strategies to evolve (Gamble, 2001, p. 54).

Gamble (2001, p. 54) describes third-wave feminism as a form of activism that is not hostile to theory; instead, it is informed by it. Page (2006, p. 5) warns, however, that it is important when re-invigorating feminist theory that we do not isolate it as an exclusively academic activity. It should also incorporate those outside academia, to avoid the injustice and prejudice that would repeat mistakes of the past. As Baumgardner and Richards (cited in Page, 2006, p. 5) state, "testimony is where feminism starts". Hall and Rodriguez (2003, p. 899) label this shift towards a third-wave feminism as "lifestyle feminism". Lifestyle feminism is described as a move away from the collective struggle that characterised second wave feminism and moves towards a more individualist undertaking. Third-wave or lifestyle feminism is specifically significant for the purpose of this research project as it is still in the early stages of development, yet to be precisely articulated. This new feminism, whether we choose to call it third-wave feminism or lifestyle feminism, therefore provides the ideal space for innovative thought, theory and feminist activism.

WHO IS THE GODDESS? : THEOLOGICAL LITERATURE AND SYMBOLISM

The use of the term thealogy is said to have been started by Canadian scholar Naomi Goldenberg (Raphael, 1999, p. 9; Knowledgerush, 2009, p. 1). Thea, a Greek word meaning goddess, and Theo, meaning god, makes clear the distinction between thealogy and theology. Goldenberg used the term to denote feminist discourse on the goddess (Raphael, 1999, p. 9). When Goldenberg first used the term, in approximately 1979, she is said to have used it as a half whimsical possibility, a serious feminist analysis of religion was considered unfathomable (Raphael, 1999, p. 9). Today thealogy is an extensively studied topic and is now also known as Goddess Feminism (Reid-Bowen, 2007, p. 102). Some of the main theorists in thealogy include Raphael (1999), Goldenberg (2004), Christ (2006, 1997), Jantzen (1999, 1994), Radford Ruether (2005a, 2005b), Starhawk (1989, 1982) and Irigaray (2008, 2004, 1995, 1994, 1993a, 1993b, 1991, 1987, 1985a, 1985b). Authors reviewed here include Reid-Bowen (2007), Raphael (1999), Grosz (1995), Coleman (2005), Ingram (2000), Hollywood (1994) and Irigaray (1991). The literature of these authors provides the key concepts and succinct understandings of a vast collection of theological literature most relevant to my research question.

According to Reid-Bowen (2007, p. 102), Goddess feminists were initially resistant and hesitant in articulating, defining and exploring their concepts and religious models. Many goddess feminists believed that thealogy was in danger of creating disembodied, elitist knowledge and understanding that is characteristic of patriarchal scholarship (Raphael, 1999, p.11). As Reid-Bowen (2007, p. 102) explains, it is these traits that had suppressed women's voices for so long in the past. Reid-Bowen (2007, p. 102) identifies Carol Christ's *Rebirth of the Goddess* (1997) as a first attempt at "systematic thealogy" (p.102), that is, a categorising system that enabled some cohesive and understandable concepts of the Goddess to be created. Reid-Bowen (2007, p. 103) claims that this was a successful exercise that did not compromise theological terms. Not only was it useful for goddess women, helping them to make sense of their experience, it also brought goddess religion into academia, giving it intellectual integrity (Raphael, 1999, p. 11). Having this so called

“philosophical precision” (Reid-Bowen, 2007, p. 103) has allowed for a more determinable understanding of who the Goddess is, to both those who study her and to those who worship her.

Reid-Bowen (2007, pp. 103-109) identifies three different ways to understand who the Goddess is and how people typically choose to worship her; the pseudo-polytheist view, the pantheistic or pagan view, and the Goddess as the Chora. From a pseudo-polytheistic view, the Goddess can be understood as a single divine power who is loving and morally good, who is open to prayer and dialogue, and who is capable of intervening in our world. Though she is seen as one, she is also many. Hundreds of Goddesses are drawn upon, revered and ritualised. Again, Starhawk (cited in Reid-Bowen, 2007, p. 104) explains that the many different Goddesses are specific ways, specific paths, to the one unifying force. From a pantheistic or pagan view, the Goddess can be seen more closely related to nature. She is the whole of nature; she is the cosmos and the world through a model of female embodiment. The rhythms of the Goddess and nature are one through the birth-death-re-birth cycle, which is so closely associated with the biology of woman. In this view, the Goddess does not transcend the world, nor is she a personal part of us. She is neither morally good nor evil, and cannot be petitioned and be a deliverer of moral justice. She is to be revered and valued in a way that is “functional, ecological and religious” (Reid-Bowen, 2007, p. 107).

The third way in which Reid-Bowen (2007, p. 107; Grosz, 1995, p. 116) explains we can understand the Goddess, arguably the most relevant for the purpose of this study, is by considering the Goddess as the “Chora”. The Chora, a concept hypothesised by philosopher Plato, is described as the paradoxical, primordial feminine space / place (Reid-Bowen, 2007, p. 109; Grosz, 1995, pp. 112-113). The Chora is described as a mediation between the material and the ideal, between the various binary opposites. It is the receptacle through which reality is mediated or becomes. It is a channel that allows the instantiation of qualities in the world without itself possessing any. It is associated with femaleness and the Goddess in that it is a space that is primordial, nurturing, incubating and generative (Reid-Bowen, 2007, p. 108; Grosz, 1995, pp. 114-116). For

feminists including Kristeva, Derrida, Grosz and Irigaray, the Chora is of great interest (Reid-Bowen, 2007, p. 108, Grosz, 1995, p. 112), and has inspired a great amount of theory relating specifically to the Goddess and the female divine.

Coleman (2005, pp. 226-228) identifies feminist spiritualists Carol P. Christ, Rosemary Radford Ruether, Naomi Goldenberg, Grace Jantzen and Luce Irigaray as recognising the significance of the symbolic nature of culture and religion. All of these theorists advocate for the construction of an alternative symbolic system that transforms current patriarchal culture and its religious systems. Symbolic gestures perpetuate cultural patterns, and have the power to transform them as well. Semiotics is a tool of analysis that explores the relationship between signifier and signified, in order to discover meaning and ways in which we produce and communicate meanings. It is the study of signs and sign systems (O'Shaughnessy & Stadler, 2005, p. 111). According to Coleman (2005, p. 231), semiotics is also a value system that replicates a culture's status quo. Irigaray and Jantzen (cited in Coleman, 2005, p. 235) explain that if we wish to change the prevailing patriarchal structures, we must first undo and disrupt current religious symbolism. Semiotics plays a leading role in this endeavour.

The symbolism of the Goddess herself is considered as the starting point to being able to break free from the existing hegemonic symbolic order (Coleman, 2005, p. 227). In order to emancipate women from male oppression, it is suggested that we must first have a concept of the divine in our own image (Coleman, p. 236). Woman requires an horizon, the possibility of the infinite (Ingram, 2000, p. 50). Irigaray (cited in Ingram, 2000, p. 54; cited in Hollywood, 1994, pp. 159-160), like other Goddess spiritualists, considers the divine immanent rather than transcendent. Irigaray's divine is, instead, a "paradoxical construction" (cited in Ingram, p. 54); she calls it the "sensible transcendental" (cited in Ingram, 2000, p. 54; Irigaray, 1991, pp. 105-117).

The sensible transcendental is described as transcendence that can be realised rather than idealised or theorised. Transcendence, according to Irigaray (cited in Ingram, 2000, p. 54; Irigaray, 1991, pp. 105-117), can be realised at will in and through the body. The divine

is within us. The divine can be used for everyday mundane events as well as for grand tasks. All that is required is opening the pathway to our sensible transcendental. It is through the symbolism of the Goddess that this becomes possible. In this way, it is explained that we are our own mediators; we become the bridge between the physical and the spiritual (Ingram, 2000, p. 54). For women to become truly 'woman', then, Irigaray (cited in Ingram, 2000, p. 55) explains, she must locate and celebrate the cosmic, the divine and the transcendental in herself, as well as the material, her body, her sexual and spiritual body, and the changing phases of our lives.

SIGNIFICANCE OF MODERN WITCH PRACTICES: LITERATURE ON FEMINISM, WITCHES AND WICCA

By looking at literature on witches and Wicca, and the significance of these within the context of feminist agendas, it is possible to draw together all the material within this review to form the literary foundation for this research. Given the overlap between the literature on feminism, the Goddess, witches and Wicca, many of the main theorists for this topic are the same as within Theological discourse. Some of the main theorists, then, are Rountree (2005, 2004, 1997), Starhawk (1989, 1982), Foltz (2000), Hume (1997, 1994), Salomonsen (2002), Purkiss (1996), Raphael (1999), Goldenberg (2004) and Radford Ruether (2005a, 2005b). The authors of the literature reviewed here include Ingram (2000), Raphael (1999), Radford Ruether (2005a), Goldenberg (2004), Rountree (2005, 1997); Rigoglioso (2005) and Coleman (2005). These authors offer the most current and innovative perspectives on subjects that have a long history of debate.

Goddess Spiritualists, as identified by Ingram (2000, p. 69), is a term used to signify many diverse groups, including those who practice witchcraft and Wicca. The Wiccan divine is described as primarily immanent in nature, meaning that the material world is a manifestation of divine energy (Raphael, 1999, p. 140). Matter and spirit are one. Fox (cited in Ruether, 2005a, p. 153) describes how, although many Gods and Goddesses are worshipped and honoured as manifestations of the divine, there is a unity and oneness that underlies all things. The human body and sexuality are considered to be sacred, with

specific emphasis on female sexuality. Sexual desire is also considered a sacred power instead of a mark of spiritual failure as in many other world religions (Raphael, 1999, p. 140).

It is the focus on these alternative ways of thinking that has attracted such a great deal of attention from feminist theorists. Raphael (1999, p. 142) discusses the otherness of the witch's title as part of her power. It signifies how her energies cannot be assimilated into, or diffused by, patriarchal structures of exploitation. Starhawk (cited in Raphael, 1999, p. 142) states that the word witch "reeks of holy stubbornness". As Goldenberg (2004, p. 205) agrees, the word witch carries with it great power. The word witch conjures images of "female carnality, deep emotion, imaginings that border on madness, the playfulness and vulnerability of infancy and old age, the perpetual birth and decay of the natural world" (Goldenberg, 2004, p. 205). As Goldenberg (2004, p. 205) points out, witches are thus positioned well to make institutions nervous, and have the potential to disrupt the status quo.

Rountree (1997, p. 224) argues that the witch's disruptive significance lies not so much on what she does as what she symbolises. The witch has become a potent symbol of woman; symbolic of a woman who possesses power and knowledge, which is not obtained through patriarchal institutions, and who is not dependant on patriarchal legitimation or approval. Rountree (1997, p. 224) explains that it is the witch's independence, and not her insubordination, that makes her an archenemy of patriarchy. Goldenberg (2004, p. 206) believes that the witches otherness is her power. Patriarchy has persecuted the witch throughout history, and in doing so, provided the modern feminist with an image through which to manoeuvre feminist agendas outside patriarchal control. Feminists have re-defined witch to mean those who challenge patriarchal control, and who claim independent knowledge and power. "By re-membering the witch and the goddess, women are re-membering themselves" (Rountree, 1997, p. 212).

Rountree (2005, p. 160) posits that due to the increasing interest in the goddess and the witch, it is feared that the witch may be losing her provocative power. Just as the witch is

becoming an accepted member of society, so too is the feminist. Both of whom, in their deviance, were once able to stir confrontation and motivate social changes for women. Just as the witch is seen as losing her political edge, so too is feminism believed to have lost its momentum. Both Rountree and Purkiss (1997, p. 213; 1996, p. 442) point out that the symbolism of the witch is useful, but also warn that the witch should not be simply re-born. The witch needs to be re-invented to avoid enacting the same patriarchal mechanisms that facilitated her demise so long ago.

Ruether (2005a, p. 157) argues against maintaining the witch as other. Ruether describes how long witches have fought and continue to fight against negative stereotypes and damaging labels. She explains that those of us who are interested in creating an equal, peaceful and sustainable “earth society”, should realise that we have little to gain from maintaining Goddess worshippers as strange and dangerous, and more to gain from understanding and acceptance. Starhawk’s (cited in Rigoglioso, 2005, p. 179) words, however, are powerful and poignant when she considers the symbolism of the witch and her relationship with feminist activism. Starhawk believes that spirituality is not about avoiding conflict. Conflict is a high-energy place and a place of potential change. Starhawk states, “Systems don’t change from within. Instead they try to maintain themselves. They seek equilibrium. So if you want to change a system, you first have to shake it up to disturb its equilibrium” (cited in Rigoglioso, 2005, p. 179).

In the literature on witches and the Goddess, it is argued that despite the general acceptance of the Goddess in contemporary society, she is still under attack. Goddess Feminists, Rountree’s (2005, pp. 161-162) term for witches interested in feminist politics, seem caught between accusations of forcing a political agenda and being a-political, that is, so called self-indulgent navel-gazers. Rountree (2005, p. 163) points out that Goddess Spiritualists spend a great deal of time working with their power within, devoting a lot of their time to understanding their own psychological and emotional processes through ritual. It is this practice that Rountree (2005, p. 163) identifies as why these women are accused of being a-political, self-indulgent, narcissistic navel-gazers.

Ingram (2000, p. 68) explains that many theorists critique the Goddess as nothing more than an image of power evoked by the oppressed, in an attempt to feel more empowered. Ingram goes on to say that to believe in the Goddess is to believe in a Golden Age, a time when greatness and power were thought to be possessed by women (2000, p. 68). This is downplayed as nothing more than an act to make life less bleak and more tolerable for women. This belief in a “utopic” idea has many critics devaluing and dubbing Goddess spiritualists as politically ineffectual (Ingram, 2000, p. 68). Goddess Spiritualists have been downplayed as those who seek an image of power for women from the past, who engage in nothing more than nostalgia, with no real political influence. Ingram believes that this is just another way in which feminist practice and activism is minimised and contained. In exploring the theory of a feminine divine, Ingram (2000, p.68) is able to identify that Goddess Spiritualists may have been practicing politics all along.

Witches and goddess women are no more self-indulgent than any other women in society. They have simply found a way, through ritual, to deal with whatever arises in their lives (Rountree, 2005, pp.163-164). Whilst some witches and goddess women are specifically interested in feminist politics and activism, many are scarcely aware of its existence. Rountree (2005, p. 163) concludes that the witch, then, whether overtly feminist or not, is engaging in politics, either on a personal level or a broader social level. Simply practising the witch’s craft is a political activity. Goldenberg (2004, pp. 205-206) explains that practitioners of the craft enact rites that are elective, non-prescribed, and more importantly, encourage innovation with the use of words and symbolism. “Witchy words” (Goldenberg, 2004, p. 204) have the power to disrupt ordinary speech, and in doing so, existing symbols and structures.

According to Coleman (2005, p. 232), cultural values can be written, and re-written, through the alternative practice of ritual and language. Writing and performing a ritual exceeds the limits of phallogocentric language, and therefore provides ways to express sensibilities that can not be expressed in any other way. At any Goddess ritual, a re-writing of the signifier ‘woman’ can be observed. Coleman (2005, p. 232) goes on to explain that in a Goddess ritual, the Goddess symbolism is carefully selected and

arranged. The richness and plurality of Her image signifies to all participants, that “She is all things, one and many, immanent and transcendent” (Coleman, 2005, p. 232). The celebration and recognition of Her in so many different symbols places Her in the position of the transcendental signified. The transcendental signified, as Coleman (2005, p. 232) explains, is the most influential, the most powerful, the most central signified within the symbolic structure; this position is generally held by ‘God’. So, if the transcendental signified changes, so too does everything else in the existing symbolic structure.

SUMMARY

Theories on third-wave, or lifestyle feminism, indicate a move towards a feminism that is less of a collectivist struggle and more of an individualist undertaking (Hall & Rodriguez, 2003, p. 899) Raphael (1999, p. 11) points out that goddess women generally prefer to take their own path to the goddess. According to Irigaray (2004, pp. 165-167), discovering the divine within is a solitary endeavour. Whilst instruction and guidance can be helpful, it must remain a testimony of someone else’s experience and way, and not substitute our own path. Irigaray (2004, p. 167) describes how the feminine divine would require a woman to remain within herself, to make exchanges with the outside world, and then collect herself. She would communicate with the soul of the outside world, sometimes the soul of the other, but then would return to the solitude and silence of her own soul. Does this indicate that Goddess spiritualists are indeed practicing a more individualist, lifestyle feminism? Perhaps a third-wave, a new-wave feminism? As Page has pointed out (2006, p. 8), this new feminism is so new, very few scholars have linked it with religion. The objective of this research, then, is to explore the question; are women who are currently engaged in a Goddess religion, such as Wicca, practising a new wave of feminism, one that has its roots in a uniquely female order? I now turn to five High Priestesses in Perth, who I interviewed with these questions in mind.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE PRIESTESSES / INTERVIEW THEMES – FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Interviewing the five Priestesses for this research was both a successful academic endeavour and a spiritual experience. Going into the interviews, I was quite nervous given the honour and respect awarded the High Priestess in Wiccan circles. What I did not expect, though, was that a couple of the Priestesses were as nervous and unsure of what to expect as I was. From each interview I walked away with not only useful data, but also a marked increase in admiration and respect for women of the craft. The interviews were invigorating to me as both a feminist scholar and as a Wiccan. For this research, the interviews provided an invaluable insight, and more



There was one interview that I was especially nervous about. It was with one of the Priestesses who was reputed as a very experienced and accomplished witch. I procrastinated about this interview for a while, but finally mustered the strength and courage to just dive in. This interview ended up being the most memorable of them all. We connected in not only a feminist scholarly way, but also on a deep spiritual level. I walked away that day invigorated. The energy that went back and forth between us was amazing. It was so inspiring to meet such a powerful woman. I walked away with a lot more than research data that day.

than this, provided me with a rare opportunity to gain knowledge and understanding from some of the most experienced practitioners of the craft. Having this opportunity is conducive to the acquiring of knowledge, experience and maturity needed to grow personally, and to advance as a witch.

One important advantage to being a Wiccan, researching Goddess women, was that I did not need to dedicate a great proportion of interview time attempting to understand and clarify basic concepts of Goddess worship, and Wiccan beliefs and practices. This would not have been interview time well spent, as other witch researchers have already established these fundamental concepts (Luhrmann, 1989; Berger, 1999; Hume, 1997, 1994; Greenwood, 2000; Salomonsen, 2002; Griffin & Foltz, 1996; Rountree, 2004). Being a witch myself, then, allowed me to spend more time drawing out a deeper understanding of Goddess worship that could be analysed alongside more detailed theoretical musings. I identified five themes from the interview data that have clear links to the theories outlined within my review of current literature. This seemed to indicate that my research hypothesis may be possible, that Goddess worship, and its practice, is

aligned closely to contemporary feminist theories. The five themes include the Goddess as an immanent force, as part of the 'self'; the Virgin Mary, symbolic of a woman faithful to herself in love, generation and spirit; the Priestesses feminist ideals teamed with adamant disassociation from feminist activism and politics; Goddess worship as a unique personal journey, but at the same time, a shared collective experience; and lastly, the Goddess breaking down binary opposites/dualisms, whilst at the same time, creating more binaries/dualisms.

Theme One – A Goddess Who is Immanent

The first theme revealed in the data was the immanent nature of the Goddess as described and defined by the Priestesses. Priestess 1 spoke metaphorically about the Goddess:

It's like, I often think it's like sailing a little yacht- that you're sailing the yacht yourself, but you're only actually doing it in the context of the water and the wind around you. So in a sense you can go where you like, but you've got to be attuned to the universe, and you've got like, pick up and basically, you listen to a voice within yourself- I guess you could call it your higher self. (Priestess 1)

Priestess 2 adds, "I think we're more able to understand that the Goddess isn't separate. It's not an image thing, it's not someone who sits there and does nothing and grants wishes". Priestess 3 states, "The universal energy I interpret as the Goddess". "I see her everywhere. Look out the window, it's all reproducing, feeding, nurturing. Inside and out. To me, everything's Goddess. And inside too, you know" (Priestess 3).

Priestess 4 made clear, before describing her Goddess, that she does not like to use the word belief, as this implies that she may not exist, that she is not true. Priestess 4 explained that she does not have a belief system, instead, she has a knowledge base. The Goddess exists, she is true and she knows.

Priestess 2 tells a story. She starts by explaining how in our part of the world we're working together, but in other parts of the world, there are still female problems. A Muslim woman started visiting her, seeking spiritual guidance and comfort. She would hide her car, just in case somebody drove by and saw it. The most extraordinary feeling for this woman was when she received a hug. Priestess 2 explained that she had not experienced touch, other than the demands of her husband. She described how here, we take for granted that someone will hug us when we need comfort. That, she describes, is "pure Goddess energy".

Interestingly, Irigaray (1993b, pp. 28-29) states that belief destroys identity and responsibility, and goes against what experience teaches. In this way, belief reinforces historical gaps and oversights. What we see to follow, then, is a description of the Goddess that is, as one Priestess describes, “an essence of the self – whether you’re male/female, or somewhere in between”.

In describing the Goddess, all five Priestesses responses shared overwhelming and obvious commonalities. The Goddess is seen as one creative energy, a universal energy, the ultimate source. The Goddess is the mother, she is everything, she is everywhere. “She is me, she is you. The earth. The heavens” (Priestess 5). The Goddess is described as our creative energy. The Goddess is “like a power source, like electricity, it’s something you can plug into. It’s energy” (Priestess 2). The Goddess is approachable. We can always talk and pray to her. The Goddess is not all sweetness and light, though. She is described as having “a bitch attitude” (Priestess 2), but we must acknowledge all aspects of the Goddess. She is also “angry, mad, mother, killer, birther” (Priestess 3). Priestess 2 describes how Goddess energy itself is like electricity, “it’s got to have that positive and negative energy”, if it does not, “it’s going to blow something up”. The Goddess is complete, with all shades of grey. Sometimes the energy that the Goddess puts out is cold. It was described by Priestess 2 that sometimes love has to be cold in order for us to grow. The Goddess energy means for us to grow and learn “and like for me, they are learning and growing” (Priestess 2). The energy of the Goddess is not stagnant, she too is constantly evolving.

As all five Priestesses are Wiccan, there is a strong acknowledgement of the God as well as the Goddess in their worship, which dispels the critique that Goddess Worship imitates patriarchal based monotheism (DuFresne, 1996, pp. 101-102). This may be seemingly incompatible with such a strong Goddess emphasis, but after hearing how the Priestesses describe this duality, the balance is made clear. The Goddess is not seen as separate from God, but instead they are two parts of the same universal force that forms our creative energy. This creative energy is seen as having more female attributes than male in that “we are creative in having our babies and in reproduction” (Priestess 1). It is here that I

made correlations to concepts of the 'Chora', the hypothesised, paradoxical, primordial feminine space / place described as a mediation between the material and the ideal. The Chora is the receptacle through which reality is mediated or becomes (Reid-Bowen, 2007, pp. 108-109; Grosz, 1995, pp. 112-116). It is associated with femaleness and the Goddess in that it is a space that is primordial, nurturing, incubating and generative (Reid-Bowen, 2007, p. 108; Grosz, 1995, p. 114-116).

This motherly energy is an intelligence that helps us all make sense and relate to what is happening in our lives from day-to-day. The God energy, our father energy, is described as being a little more intermittent. It's "fertilising, and resting, and then fertilising, then perhaps returning, and coming and going with the seasons" (Priestess 1). In honouring both the Goddess and the God, it is explained that we are acknowledging all the different aspects of the energy force throughout the universe, and therefore all aspects of the 'self'. Priestess 1 explains, "my real feeling is that the intelligence through the universe is above sex, so it's...there's truth in that, but then there's not truth in that. It's one of those paradoxes".

In honouring both the Goddess and God in this way, we are celebrating what Irigaray describes as "a true union of difference" (Ingram, 2000, p. 56). Fortune (cited in Graf, 2007, p. 50) and Irigaray (cited in Ingram, 2000, p. 56) believe that we must work towards a divine that is representative of both male and female, offering both sexes an infinite horizon. Irigaray (cited in Ingram, 2000, p. 56) advocates for an 'us' in her divine, marking her specific interest in an "Ethic of Sexual Difference". As Fortune (cited in Graf, 2007, p. 50) believed, once the balance of female and male power, and divinity, is established individually, a flow-on effect would ensue. Then it would be possible to see power being shared between men and women at a socio-political level.

Theme Two – Virgin Mary Symbolism: A Woman Faithful to Herself

In all five of the interviews, the Virgin Mary was mentioned with great reverence, signifying poignant symbolism. Demonstrating such reverence for Mary seemed

particularly curious for women whose religion seems so far from conventional Christian doctrine. The energy force of the Goddess is described by the Priestesses as being represented by many figureheads, one of which is the Virgin Mary mother of Christ. It is explained that the Goddess never really left us. She could always be found in the imagery and figure of the Virgin Mary. The symbolism of the Virgin Mary is of great significance to women's spirituality, but not in the negative way that is most often represented (Ruether, 2005, pp. 234-236). The significance of the Virgin Mary being mentioned in all interviews became more obvious when I reflected on Priestess 2 speaking about Mary in the Temple of Aseneth:

She [Mary] was in the temple of the Aseneth at the age of three. From three until she produced Christ, what was she doing at the temple, other than learning? What was Joseph, the so-called Carpenter? Translation – take it back to Greek, take the Greek back to the Hebrew, you come up with a word called, craft. And not carpenter, craft. Joseph was in the Temple of Aseneth. So you've got a whole group of people, highly trained magical people, with God/Goddess connections. The Magdelana was the title, of the reverend mother I guess. So you've got that whole aspect in there. So the Goddess has always been there, it's just been covered up. (Priestess 2)

The same Priestess speaking about the Virgin Mary believes the name Mary has something specifically to do with Aseneth on some level. She explains that at Aseneth, Joseph was surrounded by Marys, "Mary Magdalena, Mary the mother, Mary and Martha, Mary's sister of Aseneth" (Priestess 2). Priestess 2 explained her belief that Mary may have been a title that was given to a person of a particular level of the craft within the Temple, "And Magdalena was the higher level" (Priestess 2). It was explained that Mary was indeed a virgin. "In the true sense of the virgin word, Mary was a virgin" (Priestess 2). According to Priestess 2, the word Virgin at that time, simply meant, "a woman who had enough wealth and power, wealth and power to do what she wanted to do, to rule her own life, and to

Priestess 5 explains, that like all four other Priestesses, she was raised a Catholic. Priestess 5's story, though, was slightly different. She explained that Jesus was of no interest to her growing up, it was Mary that had captured her attention. She tells how she started ritual when she was about 12 or 13 years old, but this was not a Catholic ritual. Her Grandmother, on each full moon, would take her down to the beach for a Goddess ritual. They would acknowledge the Goddess and the cycles of the moon together. This was described as a very special time.

choose lovers where she would". Virginity referred to a woman's power, and her ability to be autonomous and rule her own life. This caught my attention as it echoed Irigaray's alternative understanding of the Virgin Mother.

Irigaray (2004, p. 152) explains her astonishment that many women today, liberated women, still wish to imitate Jesus or his male disciples rather than Mary. Irigaray suggests that this may be because Christian tradition has not transmitted exactly the significance of Mary, and for fear of committing sin, many people have been unwilling and therefore unable to work out the truth for themselves. According to Irigaray (2004, p. 152), virginity need not relate to the physiology of the hymen as is the common understanding. It should instead be understood in a spiritual, rather than material, sense.

Irigaray (2004, p. 165) maintains that all women are divine from birth. It is at our birth that we all acquire our spiritual awakening, our spiritual virginity. Irigaray (2004, p. 165-167) explains that the breath is the first autonomous gesture of all humans, and the vehicle of the soul itself. "Breathing itself incites to an awakening, and the divine knowledge within" (Irigaray, 2004, p. 165). Irigaray (2004, p. 152) believes that this spiritual virginity that we receive at birth, can be maintained and protected through an ongoing relation with the spirit. The Virgin Mary represents to us a woman who stays faithful and true to herself in love, in generation and in spirit. I suggest that Mary represents to these Priestesses a pure feminine spirituality that they identify as their Goddess and therefore identify as a part of themselves. Irigaray (2004, p. 152) suggests that the "spirit breathes differently in our times", referring to the coming of another age of history, "The Age of the Breath" (2004, p.165). The Age of the Breath is related to the appropriation of the divine feminine. Perhaps we enter into this age now. Priestess 1 states so eloquently when speaking about the Bible and the forgotten Goddess within it:

And there are a few indications like that, even when they talked about the word. I understand that in the beginning was the word, that that word was the feminine. So I think it was really like, feminism went with a rediscovery of a hidden balance, and that the balance might have been 50/50, and it might have even been a little bit more than 50/50, originally. (Priestess 1)

Theme Three – Feminist Ideals and Feminist Disassociation

Another theme to emerge from the interview data was related to the Priestesses' attitudes towards feminism. Priestess 1 identified feminism as "someone who rejects a traditional role for males and females", as "more to do with like social roles and political roles and legal roles". Priestess 2 explains that she would have once called herself a feminist, but things had changed. There was a general sense from all the Priestesses that feminism had gone too far.

It was explained that feminism got to be too "hard-nose" (Priestess 5). It became too hard, too severe and too harsh. Feminism was described as having gone too far one way and that feminists were no longer able to see the other side (Priestess 4). Feminism had grown to portray strong "anti-male sentiment" (Priestess 5). Undoubtedly, a stigma has formed around the word feminism and association with it is, in many cases, undesirable. When asked if she was a feminist, Priestess 3 replied very reluctantly, "I'm afraid I am a little bit. I'm afraid I am". She then added, "I suppose I am a feminist but the secret is women won't say it, but I'm saying it, because immediately you're building hate around yourself. Men hate feminists". Priestess 4 highlighted her desire to disassociate herself from the feminist label by explaining that she preferred to be called a "female activist" instead. The same Priestess then began another sentence with, "I'm not a feminist but...".

Hall and Rodriguez (2003, p. 879) identified a "no...but..." version of feminism that has developed and I believe we see an example of this demonstrated here. Hall and Rodriguez (2003, p. 879) describe the "no...but..." version of feminism as women who are reluctant to associate themselves with the feminist label, but who approve of and advocate for women's economic, social, sexual and reproductive freedom. This is certainly true for all of the Priestesses. Two of the five Priestesses identified themselves as feminists, but even these two discussed a general distaste for feminism and being labelled a feminist. I see this as a result of the "linguist mechanisms" that Hall and Rodriguez (2003, p. 879) explain have manipulated public opinion discourse in a way that has de-valued and demonised the word feminism. Priestess 2 stated that "we don't

need feminism now, we need humanitarian now”. A need for balance was highlighted as a way for the future.

It was no surprise, then, that the Priestesses expressed reluctance to associate feminism and Goddess worship together. Priestess 4 believed that to associate the two together would be potentially destructive. It was explained that so many hardships were suffered in order to de-mystify Paganism, Wicca, Witches and Goddess worship, that if we politicise them again, we risk undoing all that has been achieved.

If we use it [Goddess religion] for political ends, all those gains that we have where people no longer consider us to be devil worshippers and to be Satanists, and all that sort of thing... whilst we wouldn't take, they wouldn't come back, people would look at us as extremists. If the extreme side of feminism started using it, you know what I mean. Or started using it, quoting it. (Priestess 4)

Another of the Priestesses explained that she would like to see women using the Goddess more to gain personal power than to push feminist agendas (Priestess 5). It was asserted that the Goddess has always been around, in whatever form, it was a broader generic freedom socially during the seventies that saw her resurgence and not feminism itself (Priestess 2). Resurgence of Goddess worship is described as part of “a natural cycle”, “a growth pattern” (Priestess 2). “There was a space, nothing comes from nothing, there was a void for this to happen in” (Priestess 2).

And because people were disillusioned, and not having hands on things, this whole mother resurgence – it was there. And so it was like, yeah, that whole coming home thing – was like, yeah, this works for me. But it was a time of that... was giving back responsibility for your own spirituality. (Priestess 2)

Priestess 3 says that she travelled all over the Mediterranean in search of the Goddess. “Every cathedral, everywhere I went, I went from the west coast of Ireland to west coast of Turkey, and I went to Turkey for one reason – to see one neglected site”. The locals in Turkey refused to take her to this forgotten site. So on her own she found her. “There she was, in a swamp, and there was one pillar left”. Priestess 3 describes in disgust, that this was a visual demonstration of how the Goddess fell out of favour, how she became nothing more than a memory.

Theme Four – Goddess Worship: Both a Personal and Collective Journey

The fourth theme to be drawn from the interview data was the individual way in which each Priestess worships the Goddess and practices the craft. The Priestesses describe the uniqueness of each individual's path to the Goddess. One person's experience of, and expression of, the Goddess is very different to another's, and instead of seeking dogmatic uniformity, as with the majority of more conventional religions, individualism is embraced and celebrated in Goddess worship. One Priestess states, "how you worship is a personal thing" (Priestess 4). Priestess 1 adds:

I haven't gone from this big set belief system, with all the cupboards and all the shelves and everything like that, to another belief system with all the cupboards and shelves again. It's more like going from that big cupboard thing maybe to an activity room, where you've got all...and bats and all sorts of things in there, and I can use the ones I like. So I can honour the seasons, but if somebody says that I must honour in this particular way, then I can say well, no, I don't think so – my feeling is that I'll do it differently. (Priestess 1)

Priestess 4 adds:

I really believe that when you're ready for it, it comes, and I don't believe it has anything to do...we can't get it together around the world as a religion because there's too many different eyes that will see it too many different ways. That's not to say anyone's wrong, that's not to say anyone's right. They're all right. Because it's a personal journey. (Priestess 4)

Irigaray (2004, p. 175) explains that the universality of the traditional Christian model of the divine, that advocates for the personal and collective identity, with its behaviour modifying moral laws like love the other as brother, do not commit adultery, do not kill and bring forth children, is grossly outdated. Irigaray (2004, p. 175) adds that today we require more subtle spiritual guidance. This tends to be more respectful of difference that is a by-product of multicultural times and globalisation. Today we are more acquainted with other traditions and moral paths. Paths to the divine that are more diverse, and less abstract and general, are the way of the future. Irigaray (2004, p. 165) states in searching for the divine:

Nobody can accomplish this process in my place, for me. The instructions given to me have to remain a testimony of someone else's experience and way, they cannot substitute my own path. The teachings I received from someone else can neither withdraw me from my breathing nor paralyse my breath, my soul, without separating me from my relation with the divine.

Priestess 5 points out that whilst she agreed that Goddess worship is an individual endeavour, it can also be a collective one. She states, "It is personal, but we share and journey together" (Priestess 5). Goddess women, though, completely autonomous in their own belief structure, are also privileged with deep spiritual connections and tutoring from a considerable peer network. As High Priestesses of Wicca, of the Goddess, their role within this network is one given great honour and respect, but one that also carries with it responsibility. It is the High Priestess who teaches, trains, mentors and guides others on their own path. Most often this requires great patience and understanding, but also considerable skill, tolerance and respect of difference and autonomy.

If you take twenty people and introduce them to it [the craft], you can show them, you can walk them along the, take them walking along the first few steps of the path, but if they don't find it in themselves, they're gonna stay at those first few steps and they're never gonna walk along that path. (Priestess 4)

In considering the role of the High Priestess, it was possible to assert another perspective on the critique of Goddess women's practice as navel-gazing, narcissistic, self indulgence. As Rountree (2005, p. 163) pointed out in response to this critique, this criticism comes from the time Goddess Spiritualists dedicate to understanding their psychological and emotional processes, and working with one's own power through ritual. The Priestesses emphasise that self-awareness and emotional maturity is a very important part of the Goddess path. Priestess 1 explains:

Goddess Worship, it's like something you might partake of when you think more of yourself. Like if a woman is coming fully into her own energy, and into the most fulfilling role, then she's going to sort of better able to experience her own spirituality, like stepping into a freedom. (Priestess 1)

Priestess 5 asserts, when speaking of those she teaches, “I would only take 21 year olds and they had to be willing to grow and take responsibility for themselves”. “This path requires the spiritually tough, requiring maturity. This is why I never took on young people. I expected maturity and growth. I wanted them to improve their relationships and self” (Priestess 5). “We need good growth personally in order to project it” (Priestess 5). In response to being accused of being self-indulgent, then, it was interesting to hear Priestess 4 refer to herself as self-indulgent when talking about a short absence from her teaching and mentoring role. She chastised herself saying, “its time to stop being self-indulgent, and get back out there”.

A rather fiery addition to this criticism of Goddess Worship was asserted when Priestess 3 compared Goddess Worship to other male dominated religions. “What about all the Hindus and all the male stuff – you know, the Buddhism”, “giving all their lives, their whole existence to transcending, you know what I mean? And meditation”. She added, “I have never seen, in my experience, any covens sitting cross-legged on the floor, or wherever, navel-gazing. Any such nonsense, we’re too busy, we’ve too much to do” (Priestess 3). Whilst Goddess Worship is described as a very personal journey, there comes with it a responsibility to yourself and your fellow peers. A great amount of inward reflection and self-awareness is necessary, but it does not consume all your time and energy. Part of the Goddess path is to help others, in whatever way you can, whether that be in energy raising for a healing in a coven, sharing knowledge of the craft with a peer or offering someone some helpful advice for improving a difficult situation. It is as much an individual undertaking as it is a community conscious lifestyle.

Theme Five – The Breaking and Creating of Binary Opposites

The final theme to be revealed from the interview data relates to dualisms, or binary opposites. Dualisms and binary opposites have long been a topic of great interest for feminists, particularly poststructuralist feminists. Helene Cixous and Jacque Derrida are two theorists who have demonstrated the influence of hierarchical binary thinking (Cranny-Francis, Waring, Stavropoulos & Kirkby, 2003, pp. 59-60). Binary opposites

permeate Western language, literature and philosophy, and constitute our existing symbolic structures. Binaries such as man/woman, father/mother, culture/nature, intelligible/sensitive, sun/moon and spirit/flesh are some of the most familiar examples. The reason feminist theorists are so interested in abolishing these dualisms is because in these opposing positions, one term always dominates the other. Further to this, the first term cannot exist without the second. This means then that the second term is allowed no autonomy and drives its meaning only through its opposition to the privileged term. (Cranny-Francis, et al, 2003, pp. 59-60). When considering this in terms of man/woman, it becomes clear the power and privilege that man maintains and how patriarchal structures continue to reign and disadvantage women.

The way in which the Priestesses have reconceived a divine that is immanent and accessible, as we have seen demonstrated in Irigaray's 'sensible transcendental' (cited in Ingram, 2000, p. 54; Irigaray, 1991, pp. 105-117), a significant political manoeuvre has taken place. The spirit/flesh binary is merged. No longer does one have privilege over the other. "In envisioning a divine of spirit and flesh, an integration of the human – man and woman" (Ingram, 2000, p. 55), Irigaray and Goddess spiritualists have dissolved this dualism, and in turn, potentially abolished the binary logic that plagues Western symbolic structures. This abolition has the power and influence to change the position of women's existence.

Given the description and definition of the Goddess, given by all five High Priestesses, it is possible to see the breakdown of the binary between spirit and flesh move from theory to practice. This is a very exciting prospect until it becomes apparent that other binaries become present. What is identified from the interview data is the formation of other dualisms that emerge when considering the association between topics of the Goddess and feminism. Given the obvious existence of feminist idealisms that the Priestesses exhibit and aspire to, accompanied with an adamant disassociation from feminist activism, a 'being versus doing' dualism is identified. With an emphasis on Goddess Worship as a personal journey, and as it being clearly stated as separate from feminist politics, the Priestesses have highlighted the dualism made famous during second-wave

feminism, 'personal versus political'. Another dualism that is of particular significance, for the purpose of this research question—are women who are currently engaged in a Goddess religion, such as Wicca, practising a new wave of feminism?—is the covert/overt binary.

I would suggest, from the current theories relating to a third-wave feminism and “lifestyle feminism” (Page, 2006, p. 3; Kinser, 2004, p. 133; Hall & Rodriguez, 2003, p. 899; Gamble, 2001, p. 54), combined with the data yielded from the five interviews, that it is possible feminism is being practiced in a new way, a covert way. Further to this, I suggest that the covert way in which it could be operating, is in most cases, unbeknownst to the individual. This subtlety, then, I propose, would change the overt way in which feminism has been practiced in the past; and in doing so, eliminates the possibility of feminism being hijacked by the same mechanisms that have made the word feminism hate-laden and loathed. Dualisms and binary opposites, then, have been seriously challenged by visions and beliefs of the Goddess, is it possible that she can abolish binary thinking in other areas? And can she do away with the further dualisms identified here? Given the covert way in which she may be allowing the contemporary practice of feminism, do we want to do away with this particular dualism? Is there a way to engage both sides of the covert/overt binary in relation to feminist activism? Perhaps a balance between binaries is possible, as is achieved in the Wiccan worship of both Goddess and God. These are the questions I consider next in discussing the significance of the research findings.

Priestess 1 tells the story of how she was first introduced to the Goddess, witches and witchcraft. Priestess 1 explains that her partner had met a couple of witches and they had invited the two of them to tea. They decided to go along. She explains that she was terrified, her “eyes were like saucers”, but “she was so very curious”. After supper was finished, the hostess, or rather the Priestess, declared that they were heading to the backyard because they were doing ‘a circle’. The Priestess offered her a black robe, which she promptly declined, explaining “I couldn’t possibly wear black”. After another robe was found, and before she knew it, she was in the witches circle. That is how much preparation she had. She very quickly realised that this wasn’t devil worship, as she had always been led to believe. There was a real special energy present here, which she understood, even back then, as “the Goddess energy”.

CHAPTER FIVE: SIGNIFICANCE

Returning to the research question: Are women who are currently engaged in a Goddess religion, such as Wicca, practising a new wave of feminism, one that has its roots in a uniquely female order? I observe the significance of these research findings. The five themes: A Goddess Who is Immanent; Virgin Mary Symbolism; A Woman faithful to Herself; Feminist Ideals and Feminist Disassociation; Goddess Worship: Both a Personal and Collective Journey; and The Breaking and Creating of Binary Opposites, point to one central concept. The witch, the Wiccan and the Goddess Worshipper, are creating a unique space through which their everyday lives are shaped. Within this space, each individual's subjectivities are accommodated and celebrated. It is a space through which binaries merge, where we no longer think in terms of spirit vs flesh, Goddess vs God, theory vs practice, being vs doing, personal vs political and covert vs overt. Instead, it becomes spirit and flesh, Goddess and God, theory and practice, which then invokes a flow-on effect making it, being and doing, personal and political, covert and overt. It is through Goddess symbolism and Goddess ritual that contemporary theories of the female divine can be identified and, more importantly, can be mobilised. Given the research findings, it appears that this space is a part of the self, and therefore, accessible not just to witches alone. By re-evaluating current theories related to Goddess symbolism and current feminism, in light of the research themes, it is possible to see how this occurs.

As these research findings have indicated, the Goddess symbolises something truly unique. Starhawk (1989, p. 22) describes the Goddess in the same overarching way that the Priestesses have. The Goddess is the moon, sun, earth, star, stone, seed, flowing river, leaf and branch, fang and claw, flesh and spirit, woman and man. Starhawk (1989, pp. 22-23) has explained that, unlike 'God the Father', her Goddess does not rule the world; "she is the world, and all things in it". She is manifest in all of us and is known internally by every individual in all her diverse forms. Each human being is born with spirit or deep inner self, a part of us associated with the Goddess, and so present in all of us (Salomonsen, 2002, pp. 215-216). What this research has divulged, is how she is known to individuals, and how this is relevant to feminism.

“The first wound comes with the cutting of the umbilical cord” (Modjeska, 1990, p. 3). Irigaray (1991, pp. 25-26) believes it is the cutting of the umbilical cord that severs us from the mother physically, culturally, historically and spiritually. This cutting of the umbilical cord, and severance from the mother, can be likened to the symbolism of the Virgin Mary, the severance from our spiritual awakening and our spiritual virginity. This spiritual virginity, theoretically bestowed upon us all at birth, I suggest, then, can perhaps be re-discovered and maintained through the re-visiting of the “female imaginary” (Irigaray, 1991, pp. 36-40). The female imaginary has been identified as present within early childhood development, but Hopkins (2001, p. 29) believes that we can access the feminine imaginary beyond this developmental stage. Hopkins (2001, p. 29) describes the feminine imaginary as an unbounded space that is timeless, fluid and chaotic. It is a place where we are not bound to the microcosmic “sensations of everyday specificities” (Hopkins, 2001, p. 29). Within the feminine imaginary we experience the macrocosmic senses. According to Hopkins (2001, p. 29), we can move to this space in moments of stillness, often through memory and always through the senses. Hopkins (2001, p. 29) calls this disconnection and momentary stillness ‘lyric stasis’, through lyric stasis we can connect to the feminine imaginary.

Writing the significance chapter was a daunting task. It was so difficult to even imagine bringing together ideas I had been formulating for the better part of 6 years. To make things even more difficult was that I was suffering physically at the same time I needed to tackle this task. At first I thought this would prove an impossibility, but amazingly, it just seemed to flow. It was interesting that this flow and creative space occurred at the same time that I was writing about momentary stillness and lyric stasis. There I was on the couch, with computer on my lap, food and medication on hand...and I typed. I was there for 10 hours straight. I was on the edge of sanity, and my body cried out, and yet I had found such a creative space. This space felt so raw and it felt as though I was operating on instinct. Once I finally put the work down and re-read it the next day, I barely recognised it. Where had I been?

Lyric stasis can be achieved, and the female imaginary accessed, if we find a way to refrain from our cultural obsession with continuous forward momentum. Winterson (1990, pp. 89-90) explains this idea beautifully by describing our “inward lives” and “outward lives” (Winterson, 1990, pp. 89-90). “Our outward lives are governed by the seasons and the clocks”, “our inward lives are governed by something much less regular – an imaginative impulse cutting through the dictates of daily time, and leaving us free to ignore the boundaries of here and now” (Winterson, 1990, pp. 89-90). Salomonsen (2002,

p. 218) explains that if we listen to this inward life, or rather, our deep inner self, we may hear the voice of a culturally conditioned person, but we may also hear the voice of the Goddess. I suggest, and the research data indicates, that witches, Wiccans and Goddess Worshipers are performing lyric stasis, and connecting to the feminine imaginary, through Goddess ritual. As was reviewed earlier, Goldenberg (2004, pp. 205-206) asserts that practitioners of the craft enact rites that are elective, non-prescribed, and more importantly, encourage innovation with the use of words and symbolism. "Witchy words" (Goldenberg, 2004, p. 204) have the power to disrupt ordinary speech, and in doing so, existing symbols and structures.

"Witchy words" (Goldenberg, 2004, p. 204) can be an expression of what is termed "mother tongue" (Modjeska, 1990, p. 151). The mother tongue is "conversational and inclusive, the language of stories, inaccurate, unclear, coarse, limited" (Modjeska, 1990, p. 151). I associate the mother tongue with what Hopkins (2001, p. 26) describes as the "sensual self". The sensual self is the psychic, spiritual, emotional, sexual and physical dimension of the self. The "father tongue" is the public discourse that provides "the language of objective thought that reasons and measures" (Modjeska, 1990, p. 151). I associate the father tongue with what Hopkins (2001, p. 26) describes as the "knowledge-making self". This is the part of us that reflects on and makes sense of experience conceptually. If we do away with the dualism that maintains woman and man in opposition, as we have identified in the research themes related to the acknowledgement of both Goddess and God, and merging of body and spirit, then we create an amalgamation of the mother tongue and the father tongue, creating what Le Guin (cited in Modjeska, 1990, p. 152) terms, the "native tongue". The native tongue breaks down the dichotomous split inherent in the father tongue and introduces a language where reciprocity is the primary purpose, "a sort of porousness" (Modjeska, 1990, p. 290) between the feminine imaginary and the masculine imaginary.

As we saw Coleman (2005, p. 232) explain earlier, cultural values can be written, and re-written, through the alternative practice of ritual and language. Writing and performing a ritual, and following a Goddess path, exceeds the limits of phallogocentric language, or

father tongue. At any Goddess ritual, or reverent honouring of the Goddess, a re-writing of the signifier 'woman', as we know her within existing male symbolic order, can be observed. As Coleman (2005, p. 232) explained, the richness and plurality in which the Goddess is signified and acknowledged within this context places her in the position of the transcendental signified. This position is the most influential, the most powerful, most central signified within the symbolic structure, the position generally held by 'God'. Just as the transcendental signified changes within all acts of Goddess worship, so too does everything else in the existing symbolic structure. What we see happening, then, is a purely female symbolic system, born from the female imaginary, move from being theoretically bound, to being enacted within the context of these women's everyday lives. What is then drawn from the interview data, that is of particular significance, is how this influences contemporary feminist activism.

As we have seen made clear from the interview data, witches do not necessarily like being associated with feminism. It is not fair, therefore, to say that all witches are feminists, or, that all feminists are witches, but rather that the witch demonstrates a space where contemporary feminist theories are being practiced. For the current feminists who wish to engage in activism, it can perhaps be acknowledged that it may need to remain as covert, and private as the practicing witch. A blurring of personal and political would ensue. What it becomes, then, is indeed a "lifestyle feminism" as Hall and Rodriguez (2003, p. 899) predict. It is a feminism that engages a part of the human consciousness inherent in all of us, a part of us that is purely feminine in that it is chaotic, unpredictable, non-linear, amorphous, tumultuous, and speaks in a language that is unbound by traditional means of communication. If this new feminist activist is to emulate the practice of the witch, without being one, it would be necessary to blur the dualism between theoretical and spiritual. It would be necessary to mimic the individualist approach, the witch, and be able to, in some way, connect with one's own feminine imaginary.

A new wave, or third-wave feminism, is still in early stages of development, yet to be precisely articulated. By all indications of this research, this is a state that would be best

maintained. Historically, once feminism is too closely defined and universalised as one unified force, it becomes fodder for the male symbolic mechanism that so quickly made feminism a dirty word. Third-wave, or lifestyle feminism, then, would need to be a truly hybrid feminism, collective only insofar as it would encompass the seemingly endless subjectivities of each individual's female imaginary, along with the knowledge and experience accumulated from past generations of feminist activists.

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION – FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The aim of this thesis was to answer the question: Are women who are currently engaged in a Goddess religion, such as Wicca, practising a new wave of feminism, one that has its roots in a uniquely female order? An in-depth review of current academic literature, combined with data obtained from interviews with five High Priestesses of Wicca, has revealed this hypothesis to be plausible. The sample chosen for this research confirmed links between the current practice of Goddess worship and a new form of feminism. This new feminism, whether we label it new wave feminism, third-wave feminism, lifestyle feminism or hybrid feminism, is unlike anything we have witnessed so far, and whilst we see it functioning within the context of Goddess worship here, it prompts further investigation into other contexts to ascertain its function there. I therefore propose further research of the Goddess in other religions and, specifically, a study of women in non-organised religion; a study of women and their beliefs and practices, who don't adhere to any one religious teaching, but who follow a more eclectic spiritual path. I also propose further research into Wicca and Paganism more generally, but of an increased sample. I would suggest, however, that if pursuing a greater study into Wicca and Paganism, the sample is of a younger generation. Perhaps limit the sample to young women aged between eighteen and twenty-five. This would give perhaps a clearer picture of an emerging feminism within a younger generation of women, and give an idea of its function in an altered demographic.

As a feminist scholar, I have delved deeply into theology and Goddess symbolism, and considered this in great detail alongside theories relating to contemporary feminist activism. In finalising a research project grounded in academic theory and protocol, I would like to conclude with my own personal account and experience, as I believe I represent the embodiment of this third wave, lifestyle, hybrid feminism. Undertaking this research project as both a practicing witch and a passionate feminist was a difficult experience. The space we open up within ourselves as Wiccans and Goddess worshippers is always present, and relentlessly pursuing the Goddess throughout academic writings and making her come alive on paper for others to see, was nothing short of maddening.

To stand in the witch's circle and take part in a Wiccan rite with theories running through my head relating to the space you're about to inhabit, is hard to negotiate. Many times I was so immersed in the Goddess, both theoretically and spiritually, that I began to feel physically fatigued and emotionally addled. As a final way of sharing the blurring of the theoretical and the spiritual, I describe briefly the magic of the Wiccan circle.

Within the witch's circle, I stand alongside my peers and prepare myself for the unpredictable energy and power that will ensue as the veil is lifted. As part of the ritual, the veil that separates us from the realm of the Goddess and the God is symbolically parted, signifying the altered space in which we intend to work. Next to me, both men and women are present, but the dynamic has changed. In each other we see and feel the energy of the Goddess and God, and thus revere each other so. The High Priestess rules this space and is never more powerful than she is within the circle, and the High Priest speaks in tongues not of this world. Together, in our own unique way, we experience this space in revelry. We laugh, we cry, we dance, we joke, we show reverence, we remember, we touch, we work, we divinise, all in the presence and energy of the Goddess. When the rite is over, what I walk away with is a reminder of this space, a piece of it. It is a part of me. This is an energy that rejuvenates and strengthens as the burdens of everyday drain us. It fills me with a peace that, if not replenished, will wither and recede to the shadows of the 'self'. Once we have learned, through the practice of ritual, to let our minds go, and blur the lines between mind and body, we can journey to this part of ourselves more freely. It becomes possible to slip into this space without the need of ritual or the circle. It becomes a power and ability that we can draw on at will as we need it in our daily lives. Metaphorically speaking, once the door within us is unlocked, it becomes possible to visit this space more freely, opening and closing the door at will.

Excerpt from 'The Charge of the Goddess'

...Call unto thy soul; arise, and come unto me; for I am the soul of nature, who gives life to the universe. From me all things proceed, and unto me all things must return; and before my face, beloved of Gods and of men, let thine innermost divine self be enfolded in the rapture of the infinite.

Let my worship be within the heart that rejoiceth; for behold, all acts of love and pleasure are my rituals. And therefore let there be beauty and strength, power and compassion, honour and humility, mirth and reverence within you.

And thou who thinkest to seek for me, know thy seeking and yearning shall avail thee not unless thou know the mystery: that if that which thou seekest thou findest not within thee, thou wilt never find without thee. For behold, I have been with thee from the beginning; and I am that which is attained at the end of desire.

(The Book of Shadows)

If I listen carefully, if I analyse it, the language of women reveals itself to be different from that of men. Believing that they both speak in the same way means staying at the same level of needs. Eating, housing, for example, can be said in the neuter, and maybe it is the same for God if we reduce him to the servant of our necessities. But the whole universe of relations – to oneself, to the other gender, to others, to the world – is expressed in various ways by woman and man. *She* lives much more in an interweaving of relations with other subjects or with nature; *he*, in contrast, builds himself his own world: with tools, objects, laws, gods, and he bends others to an order created by him. *She* makes use of language to communicate, *he* uses it as an instrument to conquer, acquire, manufacture, exchange goods, information.

Existing religious tendencies become illuminated in the light of such differences. They also indicate the task to be accomplished by women in order to live a theology of incarnation in a free and responsible way. Women have to discover their word(s), be faithful to it and, interweaving it with their bodies, make it a living and spiritual flesh. This stage is not just necessary for their divine becoming, but also for that of man. It is as two, through respecting their difference(s), that man and woman are co-redeemers of the world: of their bodies, of the cosmic universe, of society and of history (Irigaray, 2004, p. 151).

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