**‘You Can’t Kill The Spirit’ (But You Can Try):**

**Gendered Contestations and Contradictions at Menwith Hill Women’s Peace Camp**

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**Abstract**

In the mid-1990s Menwith Hill Women’s Peace Camp outside the US National Security Agency military base in Yorkshire was the only full-time women-only peace camp in the UK and was wo-manned by several Greenham stalwarts. From whatever background, peacewomen were united mainly by a brave and passionate commitment to Non-Violent Direct Action (NVDA), and a tolerance for Goddess songs. While the unifying slogans and shared language of the peace camp often invoked lesbian feminist and Radical Feminist themes, it was not necessary to be an actual believer. These cultural norms were effective as humorous, affectionate totems in the building of collective identity, and are not proof of essentialism. While camp was a women’s space, it was not a gendered space as such. Gender was at once much more vibrant and various than in the mainstream, while also fading into the background and being almost completely irrelevant. This chapter will reflect on some of the roles, meanings and contradictions of sexuality and gender in the peace camp. It will do so in the light of more recent developments in the feminist movement and protest cultures in the UK, such as the ‘spy-cops’ sexual abuse scandal and the so-called ‘gender wars’ in which the meaning and exclusions of the category ‘woman’ are under renewed scrutiny.

**Keywords**

Feminism; queer; social movements; gender; direct action

**Introduction**

First beginning operations in the 1960s, Menwith Hill is a satellite communications listening station run by the National Security Agency of America, or NSA. It is situated on the North Yorkshire moors, approximately seven miles west of Harrogate, on the A59 Harrogate to Skipton road. The US NSA base is the largest known spy base in the world, consisting of giant, white radomes, which resemble golf balls, covering over six hundred acres of countryside. The first two domes were built in 1974, and now number thirty-seven. These radomes are weather-proof, protective covers for huge satellite dishes beneath, which point this way and that, allegedly internally and externally; listening in to all telecommunications in the Northern Hemisphere (Campbell, 1980). The US has another corresponding base, although smaller, covering telecommunications in the Southern Hemisphere, which is located at Pine Gap, in Australia (Bartlett, 2013) and also links directly with NSA headquarters at Fort Meade in Maryland, USA. The role of the base is the gathering of military, political, and economic information advantageous to the interests of the US; it is also part of the US Ballistic Missile Defence system and is central to US military operations around the world, providing intelligence for warfare, including real-time information for drone operations for example (Schofield, 2012). The base is effectively foreign soil, using dollars on site, shipping in all supplies and consumer items, drivers drive on the right-hand side of the roads while inside the base. Despite this, responsibility for securing the area sits with British Ministry of Defence or MOD police, who patrol regularly around the perimeter fences and work from a police station at the gatehouse of the main entrance.

<*Insert Figure 4.1 around here>.* Randomes at Menwith Hill, Yorkshire, November 2005. Source: Matt Crypto, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Menwith-hill-radomes.jpg>, Creative Commons

A Women’s Peace Camp was established outside Menwith Hill from 1993 at weekends, and, following an appeal from prison (for convictions due to NVDA) by founding and influential Greenham peacewoman, the late, great, Helen John, ran permanently from 1994 for around five years (on the enduring influence of John, see the mention of her in the chapter by Kate Kerrow et al. in this volume, and also the documentary ‘Disarming Grandmothers’ (Pope, 2012). The camp was wo-manned from the start by peace activist and researcher Anne Lee, amongst many others over the years (FFVC, 1996). Prior to this there had been temporary mixed peace camps, regular protests and events organised by groups like the local Yorkshire Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND), national CND, and the Campaign for the Accountability of American Bases or CAAB. A founding member of CAAB, Lindis Percy, is a renowned local peace activist from Yorkshire who is still very much an active protestor at 80 years old, with a record of over thirty years of activism so far (Morning Star, 2020). Women-only peace camps obviously follow the legacy of Greenham, though that camp initially started out as mixed. There are both practical and feminist political reasons for this prioritising of women; as Helen John would always say to me, it isn’t about excluding men, it’s about including women. Many problems of exclusion and violence toward women can arise in mixed protest camps, as several chapters in this volume attest. For example, the chapter by Emma Gomez Nicolau points to issues at a mixed protest in Spain in 2011, where safety concerns for women, lesbians and LGBTQ protestors became apparent; culminating in an incident where a banner proclaiming feminist revolution was torn down by a male protestor, to applause from other protestors.

**The Road Out: My Journey to Menwith Hill**

I first visited the permanent Women’s Peace Camp in the Summer of 1994 when I left school and was waiting to start college later that year. I was seventeen years old and had been inspired by Greenham Common since the age of seven. Coming from a largely poor, farming community in rural Southwest Scotland I was perhaps not the usual demographic, but had grown up with political parents who made up for in culture what they missed economically. Family friends in the next village happened to be two women who visited Greenham and brought me back bits of snipped fence and cassette tapes of peace songs. When I finished secondary school at the local mixed comprehensive in the nearest town, I broke a household rule by using the phone on my own. Using the phone was not allowed, due to the cost, as my parents were often unemployed and money was tight. I waited until my parents were out, and rang the old operator number to find the contact for national CND based in London. I rang CND to ask if there were any women’s peace camps running in the country and was given the name and number of someone called Betty in Otley, who was a contact for a peace camp at an American base near there. In conversation with Betty I found out the nearest train station and arranged to visit for the Summer holidays.

I was met at the station by a woman called Jo, who was wearing an LA Raiders black beanie hat and a silver bomber jacket. Escorted to a little blue van I met Helen John and her partner at the time. The women had stopped off to collect some new printed fliers about Menwith Hill and the role of the base; I was given one to read in the back of the van. This was useful as I did not know the first thing about the base or what it did. Although much of my motivation was getting involved in political direct action, perhaps a stronger motivation was getting away from a difficult home life, and away from the isolated rural location I had felt trapped by for a long time.

After setting up my tent I was shown round Moonbow Corner, which was, at that time, on the edge of the A59, at the corner of a turnoff down one of the roads to the base entrance. There was a toilet tent, a couple of caravans, and a firepit area with a tarpaulin roof on a metal frame. All the food had to be kept in tins or jars because of the rats, water was in large plastic containers that had to be driven back and forth to the small town of Otley a few miles away where local supporters refilled them and peacewomen could wash clothes and take showers. Around the fire on the first night I remember everyone laughing at me because I knew all the words to Greenham songs, even though I’d never been there. As it happened I’d arrived at Menwith just before the start of the Women on the Road for Peace tour, which was set to go back up towards where I’d just come from, to the nuclear processing plant at Sellafield in Cumbria, and then from there, down to Aldermaston Atomic Weapons Establishment, and then Greenham in Newbury, Berkshire, in the South of England. I was absolutely beside myself that I was finally going to make it to Greenham Common, and, when asked by the women in a circle of consensus decision making about my view on the best day to head off there, I replied that I’d been waiting to go to Greenham for ten years, so one more day wouldn’t make a difference.

*<Insert Figure 4.2 around here>.* Moonbow Corner camp as it was when I first visited. Source: Still from documentary, ‘Don’t Trust Menwith Balls’, online at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K2e898z9OGY&t=5s>, Creative Commons

That Summer I got arrested for the first time, on suspicion of criminal damage after being found inside the base at Menwith with my friend TJ. Peacewomen came in a battered old camp car to meet us at the main gate and brought chocolate and sweets to honour this rite of passage. I got to Greenham Common, at last, staying at Green Gate, while the site was still being used by NATO forces for training exercises, although the US military had long gone. Several of us snuck in, between security patrols, and explored one of the famous bunkers, almost getting lost in the tunnels on the way out. A peacewoman called Jane taught me how to cut chain link fence with bolt cutters and then gathered up the snippings, saying: ‘don’t feel obliged to keep those’. Of course, I did, and made them into a mobile which I still have, currently hanging in my kitchen window. It was a truly magical time and I decided to return to Menwith permanently once I completed my course at the local agricultural college I had applied to. I was at Womenwith Hill, as we called it, for all holidays, including Christmas and then moved to live at camp in early 1995, staying for around a year and a half. As a permanent resident I got my own caravan, a tiny one-person van. I was involved in all parts of camp life, I took part in and organised NVDA, defended myself in court, wrote newsletters, managed the mailing list and donations, wrote articles and did media work. It is the definition of empowerment, not the now overhyped, neo-liberal media construct of that word, but that term in its real sense, to take politics into your own hands. To be in a group committed to a certain political vision and then taking your struggle to the very gates of the institution you seek to change, and together start taking it apart, literally and metaphorically, is an irreplaceable experience that I carry with me every day.

**Watching the Web**

My time at peace camp has given me insight into how the state works, or, rather, who it works for and who it works against. Obviously, I am reflecting here on events over twenty years ago now, and weaving my own tales from the memories I have; always partial, always from my own standpoint on the land. As Hemmings (2011) insists, feminist storytelling, and storytelling about feminism, matters, and, such narratives construct images and imaginaries at the same time as they seek to describe them. Using personal experiences of cultural and political events that then become the subject of study as “history”, or analysed as institutions even, including institutions that are then critiqued – in many cases by those who were not there – can be a discombobulating process. A personal experience that was a marginal one, shared only by particular insiders, becomes known to wider culture and so one’s own memories and stories are brought to life again, and can be compared to what is presented in the current discourse.

In this article I reflect on two experiences of such topics, both of which have gone from being, arguably, niche concerns within feminist activism, to mainstays of public interest and commentary, namely the recently highlighted scandal of undercover police in protest movements in the UK, including the peace movement in the UK, and including the camp I lived at myself, and, secondly, the so-called ‘gender wars’ and the construction and expression of gender and gender identities at women’s peace camps. In both these instances, I watch stories unfolding in mainstream news outlets and political channels in ways which do not always reflect my own reflections of those sites and events. This is particularly the case with common misconceptions and framings of Greenham Common, and by implication the whole of the women’s peace movement, as essentialist, retrograde and transphobic. This was certainly not my experience, as I shall argue later in this piece.

The first times I was arrested on blockades, we were confronted sometimes with armed police, and once police outriders in militarised black leather and opaque visors on their helmets. We were thrown into the caged backs of dog-handler vans while police waited for riot vans to arrive. Sometimes we were left in the tiny cells in riot vans for several hours while the local police station struggled to process us all. I can still feel the emotion of sitting in the road with a handful of protestors, singing peace songs, while being physically dragged away by police who looked like soldiers; it was overwhelming, the injustice of it, the upside-down unfairness of mistreating us for protesting against war and war-making. It was certainly a political education to go through the criminal justice system, to experience police harassment and violence, to witness first-hand how the police as an institution can and do use lies and cover-ups to protect their own and attack others. Long before the current spycops scandal came to light in the UK around 2011 (COPS, no date), those of us involved in NVDA knew only too well that undercover police were possible, present, and to be expected and managed. Now it has been publicly exposed, of course, that undercover police had key roles in many of the most influential direct-action campaigns in the UK through the 1990s, in anti-roads occupations, in animal rights groups and the peace movement. Undercover male officers engaged in non-consensual relationships with women protestors, even having children with those women, all under false pretences (Police Spies Out of Lives).

Peacewomen shared stories of undercover police at Greenham and other protests too, including the anti-roads protests of the 1990s and against the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act of 1994. I see many parallels with such mobilisations then, and the more recent uprisings against the UK Policing, Sentencing and Courts Bill, even down to the familiar placard slogans such as ‘Kill The Bill’. I note with despair the lack of political awareness and political history, even amongst the Left, that leads to common misconceptions that such phrasing refers to attacking or killing police, as in the English slang for the police force ‘the Old Bill’ or ‘the Bill’. Being alert to the potential of undercover police, in my activist experience, peacewomen used to warn of anyone who went off at the same time every day because they had to make a call, and to look out for those who were always at the front of demonstrations urging violent disruption against property or police, but who then disappeared whenever conflict arose; to notice who always seemed to just miss a sweep of arrests or who was always conveniently away when there was an eviction. There are also many insider clichés about shoes – polished shoes, shoes that are too clean, or police issue safety shoes!

At Menwith we had a police infiltrator who herself was manipulated and violated by the police. The policy of inclusion at peace camp, common to all as I understand, was that unless a woman was violent, she would not be denied entry or inclusion. This meant that while we had our suspicions about this individual, and raised them with her, we would always conclude that she was welcome regardless. Our Menwith infiltrator was a young woman who had desperately wanted to join the police, she had tried to become a Special Constable and somewhere along the line had been persuaded that if she gathered information on us, she would be rewarded by a job in the MOD police. It later emerged that there was never any intention of giving her such a job, and her specific vulnerabilities had been exploited and manipulated. One night while we were round the fire, an MOD police patrol, who we knew as a regular, pulled into our layby and came over to talk to us. The officer told us that they had been doing their usual patrols around the roads that surround the base, and had noticed a young woman sleeping in her car, parked up in a layby further down the main road. We were told that this young woman had a difficult home life, and we were asked if, for her safety, she would be welcome to park up in our layby and sleep in her car there instead. Of course, we said yes, and Justine joined our camp.

We became friends with her and she generously used her car to ferry campers to court visits, or for signing on in the nearest town and for shopping trips. Justine did not like the camp vegan food, she did not like cold, muddy tents or communal caravans so she slept in her car in the layby, going home to her parents to shower and for clean clothes. While Justine was with us we noticed our camp diaries would go missing, then reappear, as did the camp address book. Many suspected she was working with the police, but we didn’t realise until it all came out, just how used by them she had been. We were all sorry about the episode, not because we were endangered in any way by it, or our security invaded - as we were living outside the world’s largest military spy base we always assumed that everything we said and did was monitored somehow. We were sorry because Justine then lost a network, and, I think, people who had been real friends to her, and who had included her as an equal, non-judgementally. The police were the ones who emerged as the worst party in the whole business. Justine broke the story herself in the end, in the local press, when she realised that the police were never going to deliver on all the false promises they had made her. We reached out to her and told her she was still welcome, but we never saw her again.

**Pitching Up: Feminist Tendencies at Peace Camp**

As I have always been a queer boi with transgender tendencies, a women’s peace camp may not seem initially, to the reader, to be my natural home. Much scholarship has addressed the essentialist assumptions, stereotypes and activist tropes often attached to Cold War women’s peace movements, not least to Greenham Common (Managhan, 2007; Roseneil, 1995). As Eschle (2017) notes, popular imagery of peacewomen includes earth-mothers and Goddess-worshippers. Indeed, this was a criticism of those protests, at the time, from within the feminist movement. My own research on UK feminist activism from the Second Wave to the resurgence in the 2000s, encountered Radical Feminists, lesbian feminists, and revolutionary feminists who reported doubts about the women’s peace movement (Mackay, 2015). Some had resisted visits to protest at Greenham, put off by the maternal imagery of baby booties tied to the fence along with teddy bears or photos of children (Griffiths, 1995), and an uncomfortable suspicion that women were being called to activism on the grounds of being natural protectors of human and all life. Many rejected this biological essentialism (see also the chapter by Kerrow et al. in this volume).

These differences speak to broader differences in feminism itself, between lesbian feminism and other strands (Campbell, 1980), and perhaps particularly between cultural feminism and Radical Feminism (Banerjea et al, 2019). Cultural feminism is generally understood as a form of feminism motivated by a belief in a natural female superiority and naturally superior female values, the aim being to populate, celebrate and adopt these superior values for all, and for the sake of all humankind, regardless of sex. These female values emerge from an ability to create life in pregnancy and motherhood, whether or not an individual chooses to do so (Alpert, 1973). Radical Feminism, meanwhile, emerged from the New Left, from anti-war and anti-racist organising. Radical Feminist theory is characterised by a commitment to anti-essentialism and a clarity that unjust systems of social organisation under patriarchy can be changed because women and men are not, in fact, different species, nor genetically programmed to either make peace or make war (Millett, 1970). Writing of early Second Wave feminism, Echols emphasises that cultural feminism may have emerged from Radical Feminism, but was not widely accepted in the feminist movement as a whole. ‘This nascent cultural feminism within radical feminism, which was sometimes termed “female cultural nationalism” by its critics, was assailed by radical and Left feminists alike’ (Echols, 1989:243).

Because feminism as a social movement is simplified and misrepresented, these two very different schools of feminism – Radical Feminism and cultural feminism - are often conflated. ‘Though cultural feminism came out of the radical feminist movement, the premises of the two tendencies are antithetical. Yet on the Left and elsewhere the distinction is rarely made’ (Willis, 1984:91). It is often wrongly suggested that Greenham Common was some sort of essentialist red tent: transphobic, classist, heterosexual and conservative. For example, writing in the *New York Times* in 2019, Sophie Lewis maps the roots of anti-trans feminism as beginning at Greenham. ‘The movement crossed over to Britain in the 1980s, when cultural feminism was among the lesbian-separatist elements of antinuclear protest groups who saw themselves as part of a ‘feminist resistance’ to patriarchal science, taking a stand against nuclear weapons, test-tube babies and male-to-female transexual surgery alike’ (Lewis, 2019). This is an outrageous generalisation and accusation, not least because queer and genderqueer campers were certainly present at Greenham. For example, overdue attention to the creative subculture from the Rebel Dykes of London in the 1980s, a punky, intersectional, and inclusive feminism, recalls that many of those pioneering dyke activists and creatives first met at Greenham (Lloyd, 2017). In addition, it should be noted that biological essentialism was often ridiculed, deconstructed, weaponised and rejected by Greenham campers themselves, as can be seen in the queering of pop songs, hymns and folk music at Greenham (Feigenbaum, 2010). In the quote above from the NY Times, Lewis argues that Greenham politics were a backwards, feminist resistance to science and technology. Eco-Feminism was indeed visible in the politics of Greenham, but I would argue that Eco-Feminism is a valid school of feminism, and should not be used as an insult; it is not against science and technology but against what humans often choose to do with that knowledge and potential (Shiva, 1993). Far from being anti-progress, or backwards, Eco-Feminism is an intersectional, multidisciplinary feminist approach which contains pertinent and arguably increasingly relevant critiques of the deadly legacy of masculinist Enlightenment theory, or, what we could call, EnWhitenment theory. This is not to deny that essentialist or maternalist strands were influential at Greenham, or at any other Women’s Peace Camp to this day. Arguably, a Daly-esque (Daly, 1978) version of eco-feminism can be read in the protest throughout, ‘through songs that sang of the spirit and mother earth, poetry and prose about witches and the Goddess’ (Welch, 2010: 230). Plus, the herstory of the camp is that it grew out of a march proudly advertising itself as made up of mothers for peace; but over the years the camp included multitudes of motivations and inspirations.

Peacewomen were aware of how the media and much of mainstream society viewed them at its height, this was reclaimed and directed back out. But, mainstream society certainly did not always see Greenham women as maternal mothers protecting their children from nuclear death, quite the opposite. Thus, the songs and chants often included references to hating men, abandoning children, practicing witchcraft…tampons were tied to the fence, loud and raucous references to lesbianism and lesbian sex were made at every opportunity when in courtrooms or on shopping trips for example, whether or not the women involved were lesbians (see also Kerrow and Mordan et al, this volume). Goddess images and women’s symbols became representative of being a ‘Greenham Woman’, rather than of sign-up to any strand of feminism: ‘ironic, self-mocking gestures – in songs, on banners, badges and leaflets, spray-painted on road signs and walls all over Berkshire and beyond – made a clear statement about where Greenham women were locating themselves in relation to “regimes of the normal”’ (Roseneil, 2000: 6). Within feminism as a broader movement at that time, there was also a strong political rejection of maternalism and cultural feminism, which no doubt influenced Greenham campers too as the wider Women’s Liberation Movement was in many ways the web that helped the camp to function, communicate messages, promote events, receive practical and financial support etc.

While the rainbow colour coded camps, at the gates around Greenham, were understood to have certain characteristics, from eco-feminist spiritual to anarchist, all arguably made use of, whether in an irreverent or more arcane way, the slogans, chants, symbols and songs that came to represent Greenham and the Women’s Peace Movement. Such collective rituals contribute to collective identity (Reger, 2002; Taylor, 1989). Shared language and practices can foster solidarity and maintain morale: ‘the daily, intimate communications that shape (and make possible) activist communities demand, at least momentarily, a common language’ (Feigenbaum, 2010: 385). This could be seen as almost spiritual, or ritualistic, or be experienced as such, in their effect. Used for ‘collective creation’ such practices served to bring together a diverse community often of differing political standpoints (Steans, 2013: 218). For example, campers at Greenham and Menwith Hill frequently took up terms previously used as slurs for independent women, such as ‘hags’, or ‘witches’. For some this was a significant part of a much wider aim of changing language and culture to a more woman-centric one, a commendable aim. For others it was an element of peace camp culture, but did not come with a requirement of adherence to Eco-Feminism, women’s spirituality movements nor cultural feminism. Therefore, the presence of a shit-pit dug into a crude women’s symbol cannot and should not be taken as proof of a wedding to biological essentialism, nor the claiming of everything as ‘cosmic’ suggest a universal worship of Goddess entities.

**Camp as a Row of Tents: Gender at Peace Camp**

My memories of living at peace camp are of a period in my life noteworthy by the absence of gender, or rather, the absence of gendered pressures. This was partly because we were, practically speaking, living outside of the scrutinising glare of capitalism’s body beautiful industry (Lury, 1996). I simply didn’t see billboard adverts, film trailers, or shop window displays. These images did not assault me on the daily basis they do in mainstream life. For me, as someone who has identified as and with masculinity for as long as I can remember, this meant that I was blissfully free of the mid-1990s expanding explosion of visibility and use of the male body and hyper-masculine tropes in media and advertising (Brod, 1994; Bocock, 1993). In terms of gender presentation, the models I had to compare and contrast my own identity and presentation were all female bodied, and ranged from what would stereotypically be seen as more masculine to more feminine. At peace camp I was able to breath out a sigh of tensely held self-consciousness and see and know other female bodied masculine people (Halberstam, 1998). I met women who had spent years in their life living and passing as men in different environments, including working as men to secure jobs. There were women who flamboyantly grew full beards or manicured moustaches. I was friends with women who were expert in men’s fashion and tailoring, women who had not worn an item of ‘women’s clothing’ for decades. This was not some lesbian feminist rejection of femininity on political grounds; it was an expression of gender, be that gender identity or gender preference, and many of us shared experience of long-held identification with masculinity which we understood to feel natural (Levitt & Hiestand, 2004), while having an intellectual and political critique of any born-this-way concept of gender.

While there was obviously a diversity of body shape and size, it was a relief to shop in clothing stores with people who also had to accommodate hips in trousers from the men’s department, or who also wore sports tops to flatten their chests to straighten the appearance of shirts. This became normal, rather than abnormal and thus I felt normal, rather than abnormal. In a Butlerian sense, camp was a place where gender, as in masculinity or femininity, was more easily and seamlessly separated from and independent of sexed bodies. ‘There is no “proper” gender, a gender proper to one sex rather than another, which is in some sense that sex’s cultural property’ (Butler, 1993: 312). I was no longer only limited to looking for resonating images of selfhood in male bodied people, and therefore was no longer having to compare my own presentation to bodies with flat chests, narrow hips, or broader shoulders. Gender was not disappeared at camp, into some externally prevalent stereotypical vision of a homogenous wood pallet of women in unisex dungarees. It was present as an expression, style and preference and definitely visible; but at the same time completely different to gender ‘outside’ in the world.

Most campers wore practical clothes of course, for living outdoors in all weathers, but this was mainly the case for permanent residents. Hairstyles varied, buzz cuts were not the norm as these actually require more maintenance, having to be cut more regularly. Women often cut their own hair, or shaved the sides to sport a mullet style. Many had long hair, which they would often say was less labour intensive as it didn’t require cutting as often and could be tied back when it got too long. For some women longer hair styles were an expression of femininity, some more cosmic witchy campers who identified with the ‘Earth-Mother’ (Eschle, 2013: 721) or eco-feminist identity wore their hair long as part of that, for others it was not by design but simply practical. Weekenders and visitors were often in civvies, I recall 90s lesbian chic styles (Cottingham, 1996), and of course this overlapped sometimes with the grunge aesthetic of the time, or what Cottingham critiques as the Tank-Girl effect. This included ‘the donning of laced boots, including Doc Martens, Timberland work boots, and heavy combats; short and buzzed hair without feminised bangs or feathered fringe; loose-fitting plaid flannel shirts; and minimal or no jewellery or make-up’ (Cottingham, 1996: 51). There were also the subcultural styles that went with the New Age Travellers of the time, as well as goths, femme styles and clubber trends. What was different in the peace camp context, especially for those living there permanently, was that gender didn’t have so many rules or expectations. Styles, cultural codes and expressions could be taken on, taken off, wilfully ignored, blended, and disrupted; or stolen and displayed on the types of physical bodies they were never intended for.

**Making a Home in Women-Only Space**

It is perhaps counterintuitive that a women-only setting such as a women’s peace camp could include masculine individuals, but this has always been the case throughout the whole of the Women’s Liberation Movement (Noble, 2004). It isn’t always an easy relationship, phenomena such as the so-called lesbian ‘sex-wars’ and the forceful influx of lesbian feminist theory on femme-butch identities and relationships made many cautious about entering such spaces (Mackay, 2019; Carter & Noble, 1996). Reflecting on this now bears extra weight, due to the contemporary context of the manufactured culture-wars in the UK and the rise of trans-exclusionary campaigns against the increased visibility of the trans rights movement and the lives of trans individuals themselves (Mackay, 2021; see also Gomez Nicolau, this volume). Often called Gender-Critical or GC activism, such a stance seeks to limit any expansion of trans inclusion, limit or even remove legislative gains and protections, limit or remove access to therapeutic and/or medical interventions for young trans adults and/or adults, and secure the borders of any women’s spaces so that they are closed to trans women (Moore and Greenesmith, 2021; Hines, 2020).

It may seem ironic perhaps that my experience of masculine gender was so expansive at Womenwith, but my point is that irony, contradiction and juxtaposition were commonplace in the Women’s Peace Movement, at and since Greenham, and perhaps are a foundational aspect or even, tactic, of a Greenham style or collective identity. There are parallels here with understandings of ‘camp’, that is, camp as respectful, immersive parody, usually from the margins and usually about critiquing mainstream power relationships. As Newton states in her famous work, camp is about: ‘incongruity (subject matter), theatricality (style), and humor (strategy)’ (Newton, 1972:107). We all sang Goddess songs at camp, because that’s what we did; we all declared ‘ask and the Goddess sends’ whenever a visitor dropped by spontaneously with something we desperately needed; we howled at the full moon and made triangle vagina symbols with our hands held together; we recited that we were the witches who couldn’t be burned. It didn’t mean we actually believed any of that, it meant we believed in each other, it meant we believed in a shared political purpose and a necessary shared solidarity, not least because living outdoors is hard, maintaining a full-time women’s peace camp is hard, NVDA is hard. We honoured that, and we honoured each other; including nodding our respects to those who were believers. As Jill Liddington noted of life at Greenham and the role of ritual and shared traditions: ‘such mumbo-jumbo might seem irrelevant to stopping cruise missiles. But extraordinary times call for extraordinary responses; and ritual, symbol and incantations soon assumed a vital role in sustaining such an unlikely being as a woman’s peace camp outside a nuclear base’ (Liddington, 1989: 236). Humour was therefore essential, but womanhood of any particular type at all, was not.

**Conclusion**

The title of this article is inspired by a friend who was a fabulous singer, and who would always add cheeky extra verses to peace songs, in a different but complementary key. Particularly, with the song ‘You Can’t Kill The Spirit’, which Feigenbaum (2010) calls a Greenham anthem. Illustrating the internationalism and diverse spiritual influences of Greenham, this song comes from a feminist musician, North American Chicana Indian, Naomi Littlebear Morena. Into this song, my friend would add: ‘but you can try’, in the pause between the two lines, ‘You can’t kill the spirit’ and ‘She is like a mountain’ - to much hilarity from all. Being ‘too cosmic’ was a commonly understood critique of campers who were a bit too witchy. Womenwith was not a cosmic camp in that sense. In the movement at the time, when it came to our discerning characteristics, we were known as the ‘Menwith Hill Maddies’: not because we were wild, but because the weather was wild. We were frequently snowed in, isolated on a high point of the Yorkshire Dales; all winter everything froze, from kettles to the hot water bottles in our sleeping bags. The peace campers in the South of England, at places like Aldermaston for example, told horror stories of Menwith trips, of gales stripping away shelters and rocking static caravans.

While I was living there, Anne Lee was the primary person wo-manning the camp. For much of the time she and I were the only ones at camp, and when the weather got bad we would walk down the verge of the A59 to the nearest pub and play dominos in the corner by the fire. Anne arguably did not have much truck with cosmic witchyness, yet joined in, as all of us did, with songs that would suggest the contrary. It was a soundtrack to our lives, a cultural reference and insider tradition that brought us all together. We accepted that some women may hold such references dear, but that did not stop the overwhelming recitation of such practices being predominantly humorous, self-deprecating and irreverent. ‘Women sought to demonstrate that their involvement with Greenham was anything but self-sacrificial and altruistic. Living at Greenham was, much of the time, great fun. Humour was an important part of life there and often took the form of self-mockery, irony and parody’ (Roseneil, 2000: 134). In this vein, I suggest, why wouldn’t masculinity be present at a Women’s Peace Camp, why wouldn’t butch lesbians and transmasculine, transgender individuals flourish there; such contradiction, or queering as Roseneil would call it (2000), is what peace camps are made of.

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