

AN' IF IT HARM THE LEAST: NATURE-CENTERED
BELIEF IN THE U.S. MILITARY

by

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A THESIS

Presented to the Folklore Program
and the Graduate School of the University of Oregon
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
Master of Science

June 2016

THESIS APPROVAL PAGE

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Title: An' if it Harm the Least: Nature-Centered Belief in the U.S. Military

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Degree awarded June 2016

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THESIS ABSTRACT

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Master of Science

Folklore Program

June 2016

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This thesis is the result of my work with the Military Nature-Centered community. The first thing it does is examine some of the distinctive features of the population, such as its history, sense of community, magical consciousness. It then presents the military Nature-Centered community as an emergent tradition.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First and foremost, a thank you to Dr. Lisa Gilman and Dr. John Baumann is in order for this support and their unending patience.

I am also extremely grateful to and owe a thank you to the men and women that made time in their busy schedules to answer all my questions.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Don't succumb to your beliefs just because of how other people perceive you to be. What you believe is important and shouldn't be given up. If something so deep and personal is given up on, what's to say what you wouldn't give up? (Alex Whisler, Army service member, and Earth-Based Pagan.)

There is an old saying, "there is no such thing as an atheist in a fox hole," while the origins of this infamous, and controversial, phrase are unknown, it does put an emphasis on the importance of faith for many in the military. The systems of those in the military include the major religions of the world but also esoteric, sometimes stigmatized, spiritualities. These spiritualities, which are the focus of this thesis, have had a variety of names, including paganism and witchcraft, and have been associated in the past with devil-worship and cannibalism. A generalized definition of these spiritualities, that I have culled from both academic and vernacular sources, is that these spiritualities are unique, created by the practitioner based on want, need, desired outcome, and personal experience. Yet, there is some commonality between these individualized practices. Most are polytheistic, based not in one divine entity but many; this also provides a sense of legitimacy by connecting the practitioner to the great pantheons of the past. Furthermore, there is the belief in the gender polarity of the divine, if there is a male god, there must also be a female goddess. These spiritualities follow a cyclical calendrical cycle that is often associated with the planting and harvesting of crops, changing of seasons, or the movement of celestial beings. Lastly, these spiritualities are centered on nature in their practice and in much of their philosophy. For these reasons, the inclusive,

umbrella term *Nature-Centered spirituality* has been used, and will be used in this thesis, to discuss this population of practitioners.

As a group, the Nature-Centered population is comprised of a variety of individuals; the differences between practitioners is not based on age, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, education level, or any of the other societally constructed categories humans like to sort themselves into. Practitioners divide themselves into categories based on which gods they venerate, how they practice and perform ritual, who or how they learned the practice, and how long they have been practicing. Individuals perform their spirituality in groups or alone and often in places that hold meaning to the practitioners.

My thesis is about practitioners of Nature-Centered spiritualities who are also serving in the United States (U.S.) military. I will use an unspecified Army practitioner as an example of the practice and these spiritualities in the military. An Army practitioner will be stationed on Army bases which, except in the case of joint bases, means the practitioner will have contact with other Army practitioners while on- base. If this practitioner is living on- base, he/she must follow the Army's guidelines as to what can and cannot be in base housing; this may mean the practitioner cannot have certain ritual tools, such as a ceremonial knife and candles. The base where the Army practitioner is stationed may or may not have a designated area for Nature-Centered practice; or if the practitioner is on a small base he/she may be the only practitioner present. Furthermore, the military demands that the mission must always come first, therefore, an Army practitioner may not be able to acquire the time off to perform rituals on days significant to his/her practice.

Many military practitioners have adapted their practice to the military lifestyle. They make minor adjustments such as using flame-less candles when practicing in the barracks and performing rituals on the days they are granted or have leave. These small adjustments make the military Nature-Centered community an anomaly amongst other Nature-Centered populations. However, this community is also an anomaly among other military faith communities because of the community's non-traditional structure and lack of similarity to religions like Christianity, Judaism, and Islam. For these reasons, it is interesting to consider the military Nature-Centered community because practitioners are simultaneously part of and at odds with both their spirituality and their occupation. Furthermore, this community diversifies the conversation about Nature-Centered communities because this population has adapted their spirituality to their occupation.

The idea of community is essential to this group, and in this project community has means several different things. When I speak of the *Nature-Centered community*, I am speaking about all Nature-Centered practitioners. In the spirituality, it is common for practitioners to practice either with a group or alone. When looking at a group of practitioners practicing together it is easy to get a sense of community; yet, those solitary practitioners are also part of the community, connected to it by their belief. Similarly, when I speak of the *military Nature-Centered community*, I am referring to all practitioners in the military. There are, in my opinion, intangible communities, because not all the members will be known to each other yet there is still a profound sense of connection. By contrast, tangible communities are the ones found on-base, where practitioners know and interact with each other regularly.

This thesis examines some of the distinctive features of military Nature-Centered practitioners and their community. As a group, these individuals feel a connection to other practitioners despite the differences in their personal practice. Further, the practitioner's spirituality links them to a community that is hard to be a part of because their belief.

I had several interviewees explain to me that they do not think most people know there are practitioners of Nature-Centered spirituality in the U.S. military. This has been reaffirmed by my own experience, when I mention what I study to non-practicing service members and veterans. I remember one such instance when I was speaking to a Korean war veteran during the summer of 2015. When I explained to him the population that I work with, he got real quiet. Unable to stop myself from asking, I prompted him to explain his reaction. "Well," he started, "it's not that I'm offended or anything, it just never occurred me that there were non-Christians in the military that weren't Jews or Muslims." This experience exemplifies one of the reasons this project is important, it sheds light on a little known community.

History of the Project

In mid-September 2013, I attended a Pagan Night Out event at Papa's Pizza in Eugene, Oregon. It was a small gathering initially consisting of two local Crones who are elders in the local community, a middle-aged man, and myself. Approximately an hour into the event, a fifth joined our party. He introduced himself first by his name, then by his spiritual Tradition, which he called Belgium Greencraft Wicca, and finally as a veteran of the U.S. Army.

To be Wiccan and serve in the military must be incongruous, I thought at the time because I felt that the Wiccan Rede was in direct conflict with military service. The Wiccan Rede reads,

Bide the Wiccan Law ye must,
In Perfect Love and Perfect Trust,
Eight Words the Wiccan Rede Fulfill,
An' it harm none, do what ye will.

I wanted to know how he was reconciling the Rede with his former occupation.

In looking for answers, I first drew on my prior experience with non-military, Nature-Centered and Wiccan groups. From this, I knew that the Wiccan Rede was a continued point of controversy and debate amongst the Wiccan community. For some it is an absolute rule and they weigh every decision and action by it; others consider it to be too idealistic but believe it is an ideal worth striving for; while others view the last line as a suggestion only.

I then turned to Nature-Centered literature and discovered Judy Harrow's "Initiation By Ordeal: Military Service as Passage into Adulthood," which directly addresses Wiccans in the U.S. military. In this essay, Harrow utilizes scholarship from both Victor Turner and Mircea Eliade to first classify military service as a rite of passage and then to understand how it intersects with Wiccan practitioners. Harrow also closely examines the Wiccan Rede, which she refers to as the "core ethical statement of our religion."¹ She argues that Wiccan service members must reconcile their level of

¹ Judy Harrow, "Initiation By Ordeal: Military Service as a Passage into Adulthood" in *The Pagan Reader*, ed. Chas S. Clifton and Graham Harvey. (New York: Routledge, 2004), 289.

adherence to the Rede with their military service and that this is the first trial of the rite of passage.²

When I was able to arrange a conversation with the Wiccan veteran I had met at Pagan Night Out some three months after our first meeting, I was eager to ask him how he found harmony between the Rede and his military service. I remember distinctly that he answered my question with a very nonchalant shrug and explained that there had never been a conflict between the two for him and added, “It’s impossible to harm none, so you harm the least to protect the most.” This one statement not only forced me to reassess my knowledge on the matter but resonated so strongly with me that it became the primary title of this project. This thesis is entitled, “An’ if it Harm the Least,” to recognize where I started with the Rede and my own assumptions about what it meant to be a service member practicing Wicca.

Shortly after this first interview, I began reading military folklore. Tad Tuleja and Eric A. Eliason’s edited volume *Warrior Ways: Exploration in Modern Military Folklore*³ was important in the early reading for this thesis because it provided insight into military culture by covering topics such as military marching chants, slang, and more. Since I have never been in the military this broad look at military culture allowed me a certain level of confidence during the fieldwork process because I was not having to constantly stop the interview to ask for a translation of military culture.

² Ibid.,

³ Eliason, Eric A., and Tad Tuleja, eds. *Warrior Ways: Explorations in Modern Military Folklore*. Logan: Utah State University Press, 2012.

Carol Burke's article "The Things They Bring to War,"⁴ was especially useful. Although not writing about Nature-Centered spiritualities in the military specifically, Burke writes about the use of talismans and charms by service members. She argues that these good-luck objects are used by soldiers when they are in highly stressful situations such as deployment; especially when that deployment is coupled with a level of uncertainty as to where the danger is. A manifest example of this uncertainty is an IED (improvised explosive device) that is hidden and specifically meant to take troops by surprise. This uncertainty causes some service members to turn to otherworldly means of protection. While I did not speak specifically to the use of material culture in this thesis, this article did prompt me to begin thinking about the importance of space and place in spirituality.

Similarly, Lisa Gilman's "An American Soldier's Ipad: Layers of Identity and Situated Listening in Iraq,"⁵ also looked at the effect of something external on the service member. Music, Gilman writes, is a way for service members to reaffirm their old identities and create new ones within the demanding environment of war. Individuals embody multiple identities that are best viewed as layers: how a person views him/herself, how a person wishes other people to view him/herself, and how a person represents him/herself. Music offers a way for scholars to navigate these identities. This compelled me to begin thinking about what an individual's belief could tell me about their identity and if space and place could alter belief or how belief was practiced.

⁴ Carol Burke, "The Things They Bring to War," in *Warrior Ways: Explorations in Modern Folklore*. Ed. Tad Tuleja and Eric A. Eliason. Logan: Utah State University Press, 2012. 19-37.

⁵ Lisa Gilman, "An American Soldier's Ipad: Layers of Identity and Situated Listening in Iraq," in *Music and Politics* 4, no. 2 (2010).

One of the last books I read in the preliminary stage of this project was Stefani E. Barner's *Faith and Magick in the Armed Forces: A Handbook for Pagans in the Military*.⁶ Barner is the wife of an Iraq War veteran and a practicing pagan. Upon reading, it seemed that Barner wrote this book to prompt practitioners who are considering enlisting to think through difficult topics like a willingness to kill, while providing guidance for those practitioners who are already enlisted. Barner's book, particularly the interview transcripts she included, proved to be useful in the formulation of my research questions. It also provided a distinct direction for the thesis because I did not want to write a handbook, Barner has successfully done that. Instead, I wanted to craft a project that went beyond the *how-to* of the Nature-Centered community and into the *why* and *what*. To look at the *whys* and *whats* of the community, I realized the scope of this project needed to grow beyond looking at the conflict between the Rede, which is predominately Wiccan, and a service member's occupation, to include practitioners of the different military Nature-Centered Spiritualities. To do this, I knew that I needed to cast a broad net when searching for interviewees.

Through asking around I was able to make contact with Penny Dex, a 27-year-old Army veteran who practiced a spirituality she called *Cascadian*. After a successful interview, she introduced me to Eddie Black, a 45-year-old Army National Guard service member, who was also a former Marine, and had titled his practice *Stoicism*. From these two preliminary interviews, I was able to make a few more connections with military practitioners in Oregon, but these connections did not lead to additional interviews.

⁶ Stefani E. Barner, *Faith and Magick in the Armed Forces: A Handbook for Pagans in the Military* (Woodbury, IL: Llewellyn Publications, 2008).

Vocabulary, Limitations, and Biases

As the preliminary interviews demonstrated, Nature-Centered spiritualities are extremely idiosyncratic. In three interviews, I had three different and individualized spiritualities. For this reason, vocabulary became extremely important as did my use of the term *Nature-Centered* as an inclusive term. However, I do have reservations about using a blanket term because I know that not every military practitioner who participated in this project will identify as Nature-Centered, it is the nature of working with idiosyncratic practices. By using this term my hope is to not intentionally exclude any of interviewees or members of the population I am writing about, but rather to be as inclusive as I can. Throughout the work, the only time I will deviate from using the identifier *Nature-Centered*, will be if I am identifying an individual's specific Tradition or I am directly quoting one of my interviewees.

In these instances, the reader will note that the communal identifiers of *pagan*, *neo-pagan*, and *earth-based* are sometimes used. While these are valid terms, I have chosen not to use them. Earth-based is a variation of Nature-Centered but I find Nature-Centered to be a more accurate representation of the community, which often includes things beyond the planet earth in its practice. Pagan and Neo-Pagan are problematic as communal identifiers because they can also indicate a specific Tradition; however, they are commonly used as a blanket term because of the association of historical paganism and paganism as the Old Religion.

Diversity in belief and practice is something that the Nature-Centered community prides itself on. Despite this, the reverence for diversity does not always translate to the use of umbrella terms. As pagan scholar Gwendolyn Reece details in her article,

“Prevalence and Importance of Contemporary Pagan Practices,” contemporary practitioners do not lend any authority to other spirituality’s sacred texts, doctrines or, dogma; nor do they give any preeminence to a head of church. Due to this, Reece explains, practitioners are an anomaly among American religious traditions.⁷ This can also be said about Nature-Centered Traditions.

The lack of “traditional” structure, central authority, and canon allows Nature-Centered Traditions to be highly individualized to the practitioner. This makes it difficult not only to find an accurate over-arching term for the community but also to pen broad, sweeping statements about Nature-Centered practitioners because what is true for one individual may not be true for another. With that, I will make the disclaimer that the conclusions I draw in this thesis are ones I have made based on the fieldwork I conducted with a small portion of the military Nature-Centered community. By no means do I believe I have found a single truth of what it means to be a member of the military Nature-Centered community but my hope is that I have captured a snapshot of the complexity of what it mean to be a military practitioner.

Further, having never been in the military, I rely heavily on the fieldwork I conducted to speak to the military side of this project. While the fieldwork will also inform the Nature-Centered side, I will supplement personal experience with non-military Nature-Centered communities to provide knowledge to the reader when necessary; when this occurs, it will always be noted. My personal knowledge of Nature-Centered spiritualities comes from my experience as a practitioner. Being a practitioner of a

⁷ Gwendolyn Reece, “Prevalence and Importance of Contemporary Pagan Practices,” *The Pomegranate: The International Journal of Pagan Studies* 16(2009): 36-37.

Nature-Centered spirituality proved useful while conducting the fieldwork because my interviewees did not feel as though they were being judged by an outsider. However, I must conclude that it changed the way they explained things to me. In almost every interview, whoever I was speaking to inevitably asked me, “do you practice?,” and when I gave an affirmative answer there was an immediate reaction of relaxation. I can only assume that this more relaxed state changed the way my informants answered the questions.

I also understand that being a practitioner interviewing practitioners, even those in the military, blurs that line between emic and etic. For this, I will defer to Sabina Magliocco, as she explains, “The trouble with the categories such as ‘emic’ and ‘etic,’ ‘insider’ and ‘outsider’ is that they presume identity to be fixed and essential, rather than shifting, negotiated, contextual construction we know it to be.”⁸ During the research I was constantly walking the fine line between being a member of the Nature-Centered community and being a researcher. Furthermore, I had to be extremely careful that my own conceptions about Nature-Centered spiritualities and the various Traditions, as well as my own idiosyncratic practices and philosophies did not affect how I was portraying my interviewees and their beliefs and practices.

Fieldwork and Methodology

When I officially began conducting interviews for this project, I relied heavily on two methods for finding interviewees. The first was word of mouth. This method became

⁸ Sabina Magliocco, *Witching Culture: Folklore and Neo-Paganism in America*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 15.

integral later in the fieldwork process when I began to interview military practitioners in positions of power. For example, the Greencraft Army veteran that I initially interviewed in 2013 facilitated an introduction to the leaders of Sacred Well Congregation, an organization for Active Duty military practitioners. These leaders then sent my information out, which allowed me to make contact with members I would not have otherwise interviewed.

The second method I used was cold calling via email. After digging through the internet, I found a listserv of “military pagans,” on the popular website WitchVox. Over the course of several weeks, I sent out approximately 400 inquiry emails to the individuals on this list. This method was extremely successful and was how I made contact with the majority of my interviewees.

I interviewed forty-one individuals between January and March in 2015. A full list of my interviewees and some basic demographic information can be found in the first appendix. Interviews conducted in-person, over the phone, or over Skype were semi-structured; while email questionnaires were structured. I chose to utilize the semi-structured interview as my main methodology because I wanted to assure that there was a level of consistency between the interviews, while still maintaining enough flexibility to let the interviewee guide the direction of the conversation.⁹ For the interview process, I had a script of questions that covered everything from general biography questions, to specific questions regarding being Nature-Centered and being in the military. Some of these questions included: what prompted you to join the military? How do you define your spirituality or spiritual Tradition? Have you ever attended an on-base open-circle?

⁹ H Russell Bernard ed., *Research Methods in Anthropology: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches*, 5th ed. (Plymouth, United Kingdom: AltaMira Press, 2011), 157.

During the interview process I collected basic demographic information for the service members; a chart with this demographic information can be found in the first appendix. In total, I concluded the interview process having interviewed 13 women and 28 men, with the average age of 35 years old, with a span of 18 at the youngest and 65 at the oldest. I was also able to interview service members and veterans from the Army, Air Force, Marine Corps, and Navy. The average time in service for the service members and veterans I interviewed was 12 years, with a span of less than a year to 26 years in service.

I was also able to speak with individuals outside, but still connected to, the various military branches. For example, I spoke to one person who was in ROTC at a university in North Carolina. Further, I was afforded the opportunity to speak with several spouses and partners of military personnel who are often involved with the military Nature-Centered community through their spouses and partners, and also as DFGLs (Distinctive Faith Group Leaders.) A Distinctive Faith Group Leader is an individual who acts as a liaison between the Nature-Centered group on-base and military command, as well as a facilitator of weekly gatherings. DFGLs will be discussed further in a later chapter.

The majority of the interviews I conducted were with Active Duty service members. This required precise scheduling because the practitioners I was speaking to often squeezed in my phone or skype call between meetings or during their limited free time. Further complicating this was time zones; I had to be extremely careful when scheduling interviews because most of the men and women I was speaking to were not in the same time zone.

As a final thought about my methodology and fieldwork, I would like to note how many of my conclusions were made during the analysis process. After interviewing forty-one individuals, transcribing those interviews, and coding them, my ideas were saturated by the words and thoughts of my interviewees. As a researcher, I did not want my voice to overpower that of my interviewees but I also did not want the voices of my interviewees overpowering mine. My solution to this problem was to set aside my work for the entirety of summer 2015 and head into the wilderness.

The Oregon Cascades in the summer are a wonder to behold. The air is crisp, the temperature is pleasant, the sun is warm, and when the rain does fall, it falls cold against your skin. Through the summer, high in the mountains, my thoughts began to churn, very slowly at first, and then all at once. Utilizing whatever I had on hand, I began to write; I have beginnings of chapters and sentences written on the back of dehydrated food packets, on scraps of paper, in the margins of guide books. Anything I could set my hands on became a vehicle for my thoughts.

As I think about this process, I cannot help but think about it as a methodology of jottings. Roger Sanjek, who refers to them as ‘scratch notes,’¹⁰ describes this as a practice traditionally thought of as notes taken while the researcher is in the field. However, as Bernard notes, jottings are also those thoughts that “just strike you as you are walking along.”¹¹ Being able to walk and think is something I found incredibly useful for the development of this project, and without the jottings I made while in the wilderness, I would not have formed many of my conclusions.

¹⁰ Roger Sanjek, "A Vocabulary for Fieldnotes." in *Fieldnotes: The Making of Anthropology*, ed. Roger Sanjek. (Ithica, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990), 96.

¹¹ Bernard, *Research Methods*, 292.

To work through these conclusions I have designed my chapters to discuss a theme derived from my fieldwork. *Chapter One: A State of Affairs*, is a foundational chapter. It will cover, very briefly, the history of the military Nature-Centered community. *Chapter Two: Community* will examine the importance of the on-base open circle as both a place and ideal. *Chapter Three: Spiritual Landscape* will look at deployment and how being overseas can affect a practitioner's perceptions and magical practice. *Chapter Four: Tradition* will delve into the idea that tradition is dynamic and flexible while exploring how this can affect an individual's spirituality.

CHAPTER II

A STATE OF AFFAIRS

No religious Test shall ever be required as a Qualification to any Office or public Trust under the United States. (US Constitution, Article 6)

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof, (U.S. Constitution, First Amendment)

There is tension between the guarantee made by the First Amendment and the guarantee made by the Constitution. One provides the right to exercise one's chosen religion while the other restricts the federal government's ability to endorse religious beliefs and practices. This results in the government being able to recognize that there are practitioners of certain religions in the U.S. military, but unable to officially recognize specific religions. This conflict is intentional and the goal is to prevent the infringement of rights of all religious practitioners. Therefore, the U.S. military and the Department of Defense (DoD) recognize that there are practitioners of Wicca in the military but do not officially recognize Wicca as a religion. This chapter will focus on Wicca as a Tradition of Nature-Centered spirituality. I have chosen to keep this focus this narrow because Wicca is the only Tradition that the U.S. Military, and the Department of Defense, recognize that there are practitioners of within the military.

I began this project with two known facts: that Nature-Centered practitioners have a history with the military and that Nature-Centered spiritualities have a long history. I suspected that these two histories were intertwined and have since concluded that not only are they intertwined but, in many ways, are one in the same history. I have included

portions of the community's history here, as a separate chapter, because it will provide a foundation for the following chapters.

This chapter focuses primarily on western, ecstatic magical Traditions, with a primary focus on Wicca because of the relationship between Wicca and the U.S. military. As such the narratives here have been selected to follow that relationship. The narrative begins across the Atlantic in the United Kingdom before tracing the lineage of some of the earliest recorded, and recognized, Nature-Centered practitioners in the U.S. military. This chapter does not include a comprehensive history of Nature-Centered spiritualities such as Sabina Magliocco's *Witching Culture: Folklore and Neo-Paganism in America*, Ronald Hutton's *The Triumph of the Moon: A History of Modern Pagan Witchcraft*, or Susan Greenwood's *Magic, Witchcraft, and the Otherworld: An Anthropology*; that would require a book to itself. What I have done here is include portions of Nature-Centered history as they are relevant to the discussion of military practitioners.

Crossing the Pond

Nature-Centered spirituality is simultaneously old and new. Folklorist, Anthropologist, and practitioner Sabina Magliocco provides an extensive study of the roots of Nature-Centered spirituality in her book *Witching Culture: Folklore and Neo-Paganism in America*. Many Nature-Centered practitioners take pride in the fact that they can trace their spirituality back to an ancient point of origin. For example, practitioners might demonstrate the origin of their spirituality by tracing its lineage from the ecstatic mystery religions of Greece or Rome, through the neo-Platonists, to the Protestant Reformation. They may explain why the writings of alchemists affected how they practice, or how the

actual act of practicing allows them to feel like they are, as one interviewee put it, “sticking it to the Enlightenment.” There may even be a sense of triumph during a discussion of the Romantic Revival which saw the reevaluation of the folk narratives often used in Nature-Centered practice. They may even speak to the impact that scholars such as Max Müller, Andrew Lang, Edward B. Tylor, and Sr. James Frazer have had on Nature-Centered spiritualities. However, practitioners also understand there is a newness to the spirituality; especially those who practice Wicca, Paganism, Neo-Paganism, or one of their many variations.

In many instances, this newness is derived from Gerald Gardner. Gardner would use all of the previous information and more to “craft,” or “discover,” Wicca. After his retirement as a civil servant in England in 1939, Gardner and his wife settled in a suburb of Bournemouth, south of the New Forest, in England. During his time there he began to frequent esoteric circles and joined an amateur theatre circle. It was through this dramaturgical society that Gardner met a woman whom he referred to as “Old Dorothy.” Old Dorothy was, supposedly, the head of a coven of witches who practiced a pre-Christian religion in the New Forest, known as the New Forest Coven. Gardner was later initiated into the New Forest Coven and spent the rest of his life practicing the religion and writing about his journey and discoveries.

In 1954, Gardner published *Witchcraft Today*. The book described the New Forest Coven’s beliefs, rituals and practices and would come to be influential in the Neo-Pagan movement. In his writings Gardner often mixed the actions of the New Forest Coven with his perceptions about what was occurring, which drew much criticism

because the two could not be separated.¹² This is also one of the primary sources of debate surrounding the question of Gardner's role in discovering or creating Wicca.

Gardner made many important contributions to Nature-Centered spiritualities and the continued narrative of Wicca crossing the Atlantic begins with *Witchcraft Today*. Gardner's work, which announced that an old Pagan religion had survived the Dark Ages and the witch trials was read by Royal Air Force member Raymond Buckland, or "Uncle Bucky" as he is known in the Nature-Centered community. Subsequently Raymond, and his wife Rosemary, began corresponding with Gardner. These correspondences would culminate with the initiation of the Bucklands by Gardner into Gardnerian Wicca. After their initiation the Bucklands moved to New York as representatives of Gardnerian Wicca and established the first U.S. based coven. This is significant because from this single Royal Airforce member, a web of practitioners spread across the U.S.

Earliest amongst the Buckland's initiates in the U.S. was Margaret St. Clair and her husband Eric. Margaret had studied Classics at the University of California-Berkeley and had additional graduate study in Greek. Her letters with the Bucklands suggest that she, along with some associates, may have already been practicing a form of pagan spirituality in the U.S. well before the arrival of the Bucklands. Therefore the Bucklands did not bring Nature-Centered spirituality to the U.S., it was most likely here before their arrival; their arrival only strengthened it and introduced the Tradition Gardnerian Wicca.

Having expressed an interest in magic, Ed Fitch was a frequent visitor to the St. Clair's house. While Fitch was stationed in Massachusetts by the U.S. Air Force, the St.

¹² Sabina Magliocco, *Witching Culture: Folklore and Neo-Paganism in America*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 48-51.

Clairs facilitated an introduction between Fitch and the Bucklands. Soon after, he received a letter from Rosemary Buckland and began learning Gardnerian Craft.¹³

Another early military Wiccan was Joseph B. Wilson who was also a member of the U.S. Air Force. As part of his duty, Wilson spent time in with the Royal Air Force in Upper Heyford in Oxfordshire, England in 1969. Before shipping out to Oxfordshire, he arranged to meet with some local witches.¹⁴ After Wilson, I found no other narrative of military practitioners.

The next major victory for the Nature-Centered military community came in 1972, when the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) certified that the Church of Wicca was a religious institution and therefore tax exempt.¹⁵ This allowed organizations such as Circle Sanctuary and Sacred Well Congregation to come into being. Both of these organizations, in different ways, have contributed to the military Nature-Centered community.

Wicca and the U.S. Military

Fort Hood, located in Killeen, Texas, is one of the largest U.S. military bases. It is also a place of significance for the history of Nature-Centered military practice. In December of 1996, a small group of Wiccans stationed at Fort Hood, who had been studying together a little over a year, reached out to Dr. David Oringderff, a twenty-seven year

¹³ Chas S. Clifton, *Her Hidden Children: The Rise of Wicca and Paganism in America* (Lanham: AltaMira Press, 2006), 16-18.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 18-20.

¹⁵ Owen Davies, *America Bewitched: The Story of Witchcraft After Salem* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 217.

veteran of the U.S. Army, former Texas Police Force officer, and Ph.D. in Clinical Psychology. Dr. Oringderff was then directing the newly formed Sacred Well Congregation which had been founded in 1994 in Hainin, Belgium. A self-described “church without walls,”¹⁶ Sacred Well Congregation is an independent, non-evangelical Wiccan Church. The Congregation’s goal is to provide “extensive spiritual and administrative support to service members [sic.], their families, and military communities.”¹⁷

Led by Staff Sergeant Deirdre Robinson, who was acting leader of the Fort Hood Wiccan study group, the group was seeking the first step to becoming a Distinctive Faith Group. To become a Distinctive Faith Group, military regulations require a federally recognized religious organization to support the group. Recognition meant the Fort Hood Wiccan group would receive, amongst other things, recognition from the Chaplain Corps, an official meeting room, and an outside circle space to hold rituals. For the group of practitioners at Fort Hood, Sacred Well Congregation was that organization. After gaining the support of Dr. Oringderff and Sacred Well, the group still needed a Distinctive Faith Group Leader (DFGL), and a supporting Chaplain.¹⁸ Eventually the small group received all of those things and the Fort Hood Open Circle began practicing as a Distinctive Faith Group on August 1, 1997.

The reactions that occurred after that day in 1997 ranged from support to utter outrage. In the extensive and thorough article, “The War on Wicca: A Case Study,”

¹⁶ Sacred Well Congregation. <http://www.sacredwell.org/>.

¹⁷ Ibid.,

¹⁸ Benjamin Grimm, "The War on Wicca: A Case Study," *Sacred Well Congregation* (2015) 2.

author Benjamin Grimm covers the events and traces the early history of Wicca in the U.S. Military. Arguably worst amongst these reactions were accusations of human and animal sacrifice. Another memorable reaction came from then South Carolina Senator Strom Thurmond, who told the spokesman for the Chief of Chaplains, who also happened to be a two-star general, “General, I don’t want these damn Wiccans in my army.” As the story goes, the spokesperson responded, “General, it’s not your army,” and left the room.¹⁹ From speaking with many individuals who are currently stationed at Fort Hood or who have been stationed at Fort Hood, it seems that not only does the Fort Hood Open Circle exist but it is a thriving and healthy place for practitioners. Further, there are hundreds of open circles on hundreds of U.S. military bases around the world.

Before the recognition of Wicca as a Distinctive Faith Group, there had been Wiccans serving in the U.S. Armed Forces for decades. Before the Fort Hood Open Circle, most kept their spiritual practice secret. Many felt the need to practice as a solitary practitioner, as someone who practices alone out of fear of discrimination or persecution.

Many of my interviewees chose to share their stories under a pseudonym or anonymously because the fear of religious persecution. Most of these fears fall into three main categories: fear of being targeted by commanding officers; fear of harassment from other service members; and a fear that if the wrong person found out about their spirituality, it would ultimately undermine their career path. While this may seem like a

¹⁹ Ibid., 6.

foolish fear, as recently as September 2015, a woman was accused of being a witch and fired from a military dental clinic.²⁰

Furthermore, there is a problem with the military only recognizing Wiccans. Wicca is one of the many Traditions that fall under the Nature-Centered spirituality umbrella. A Tradition provides a more specific framework for what practitioners believe and for the practice of the spirituality. There is a great diversity amongst Traditions and as a result the U.S. military only recognizing Wicca is problematic. Asking all Nature-Centered practitioners to identify as Wiccan is the equivalent of asking all practitioners of the various Abrahamic religions to identify themselves as Baptists. Not only is it not true, but some would find it utterly insulting. In essence, the problem with the current state of recognition in the military is embodied in a simplification of something extremely complex and nuanced.

Despite this, many of my interviewees argue that it is better to have some recognition, even if it is not from their Tradition, than to have no support at all. That the military acknowledges Wicca is a good first step, and really a victory for all those who practice Nature-Centered spiritualities in the military, but it is only a first step. What the majority of my interviewees wish to see as a second step is a Nature-Centered Chaplain or even a Wiccan Chaplain. They want to be represented not by a DFGL, who has limitations on what they can do for service members; they want representations in the Chaplain Corps, and to feel as though they have a voice. As Lieutenant Colonel (Retired) Ron Schaefer argues, having a chaplain would help to secure the rights of religious practice for Wiccans and for Nature-Centered service members more broadly. He also

²⁰ Chris Rodda, "Is This 2015 or 1692? Woman Accused of Being a Witch Fired From Military Dental Clinic," *Huffington Post*, October 6, 2015.

believes that having a chaplain would help the spirituality not be as marginalized.²¹ I will revisit this further in Chapter Two: Community.

This is not the say that since the inception of the Fort Hood Open Circle that the Nature-Centered community has not progressed. In 2007 a settlement between the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs and the widows of pagan combat veterans concluded that the pentacle, a five-pointed star, would become an official “emblem of belief.” An emblem of belief is a symbol that can be on government issued headstones and in military cemeteries, such as Arlington. At the time of the settlement in 2007, eleven families were waiting for pentacles to be put on their grave markers.²²

Conclusion

When Wicca made the jump across the Atlantic Ocean, some of its first adherents were members of the U.S. military, thus the connection between Nature-Centered spiritualities and the U.S. military can be traced back for several generations. During the research process, I expected there to be a more robust history detailing this, yet I found very little.

From the decades-long history of the military Nature-Centered community in the U.S., the community has learned much and has an innate understanding of their standpoint. The community acknowledges that they are marginalized and are generally found at the bottom of the power structure in the military. The community is very aware that getting a Nature-Centered Chaplain would improve their position in the power

²¹ Ron Schaefer, "Witches & Wizards & service members--Oh My!: The Old Religion and the U.S. Military," *Congregation of the Sacred Well*, http://www.sacredwell.org/witches_wizards_service_members.html.

²² Cathleen Allison, "Wiccan Symbol OK on Military Headstone," April 23, 2007, *NBCNews.com*.

structure. This chapter provided an abbreviated history that brings the state of the community to date. The Nature-Centered military community has no chaplain, the military still only recognizes Wicca, and there have been no significant developments since 2007.

CHAPTER III

COMMUNITY

Community is something that's a basic need for almost all humans. A lot of people get that community through their church and their religious group. So pagans, who don't necessarily have a big building to gather at, we have to find it as best we can. That's something that I see, at least with the soldiers that we have attending, that they really miss. Yeah, they have the guys that they work with that they might have a few things in common, but at least on a spiritual level, they don't have anybody that sees the same way they do. When they have spiritual doubts or conflicts, they don't have anybody to go to, so the open circles give us the ability to give that need to other soldiers. (Jason Binder, former DFGL at Joint Base Lewis McCord, Army service member, and Shamanic Wiccan)

The sense of being a part of, or wanting to be a part of, a community is strongly sensed throughout the military Nature-Centered community; and something that came through in my fieldwork. There is desire for Nature-Centered practitioners to make a connection on a spiritual level with another person, be another practitioner or not, without fear of being judged. In an interview on February 3, 2015 DMM, a DFGL, explained,

Those connections, whether you're Wiccan, or Christian, or Jewish, having a shared experience within the framework of your shared belief helps to create a community.

For military practitioners, their spiritual beliefs link them to a community.

The primary way military practitioners make this connection is through the on-base Open Circles. An on-base open circle is both a physical place and an ideal. As a physical space, it is a space, on-base, that has been designated for Nature-Centered use; normally this is an outside area, a room in one of the buildings on-base, or a Sunday

school room in the on-base chapel. As an ideal, it is a regular gathering of Nature-Centered practitioners to socialize, make those connections, and for the occasional ritual.

The circle is an important structure in the Nature-Centered community, something Starhawk, a prominent Pagan writer who is best known as a theorist of feminist Neopaganism and ecology-centered paganism, discusses in her 1982 book *Dreaming in the Dark: Magic, Sex and Politics*. She first explains that circles are the “estrangement of hierarchies,” because hierarchies are represented by a ladder structure. One of the examples that Starhawk provides is that of corporations, in which the workers are expected to climb from rung to rung. The ladder is meant to be climbed to reach a higher position, which gives an individual at a higher rung the ability to wield power over those below him/her, creating a power imbalance. A circle is the antithesis of this structure. In a circle, the face of every individual can be seen by all, each individual’s voice can be heard, and each member is at an equal distance from the center. Its purpose is to create equality amongst participants.²³ Unlike the ladder, the circle can be expanded to accommodate individuals from all Traditions while still maintaining its meaning and shape. Ideally an on-base open circle creates a place where all are equal and all are welcomed. Creating this level of equality is important when fostering a sense of singular community from wide variety number of Nature-Centered Traditions. In this chapter, I will explore the purpose of the on-base open circle as a place to facilitate community, as a safe space, and as a way of legitimizing communal identity.

Facilitating Community

²³ Starhawk, *Dreaming the Dark: Magic, Sex and Politics* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1982), 115.

In the Nature-Centered worldview, there are two distinct types of community, as explained in the article, “From Roots to Dreams: Pagan Festivals and the Quest for Community,” written by Andras Corban Arthen in 1989. In his description of the development of the EarthSpirit Community Festival Rites of Spring, he first explains community as a group of practitioners who share a physical location, such as within a city, and interact face-to-face. However, Arthen also refers to all pagans as “the pagan community.”²⁴ These two ways of using the same term exemplify how ambiguous the idea of community is because it is used to describe both specific groups of individuals who have face-to-face interactions and a larger group of individuals, who do not have face-to-face interactions but are linked through their shared spirituality.

Further problematizing the idea of community in Nature-Centered spirituality is when Arthen quotes Judy Harrow, who writes, “The rituals seemed to be part of what transformed a group of strangers into an intense, if temporary, community.”²⁵ This, again, speaks to community as a face-to-face interaction but something that is formed through ritual. I find this very reminiscent of Victor Turner’s concept of *communitas*. In *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*, Turner describes *communitas* as “an intense comradeship”²⁶ that forms during ritual between participants.

I believe that there are elements of all three of these ideas of community in the military Nature-Centered population at large. All practitioners are linked by their shared belief. Some choose to participate in communal events, such as open circles, while

²⁴Andras Corban Arthen. "From Roots To Dreams: Pagan Festivals and the Quest for Community" in *FireHeart*, 1988. <http://www.earthspirit.com/fireheart/fhros.html>.

²⁵ Ibid.,

²⁶ Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (New Brunswick: AldineTransaction, 1969), 95.

others chose not to. At these communal events, practitioners see each other on a regular basis and begin to form connections. These bonds can also be created when people perform rituals together. However, because this is a military based community, all community is temporary as service members and their families will most likely be relocated approximately every two years.

Through my fieldwork I discovered that the on-base open circles functioned far more as a place to facilitate community than as a place to perform ritual. The conversations I had with DFGLs spoke directly to this because the trend was to create a space where the community members can either choose or opt out of participation. The role of the DFGL is to facilitate the on-base open circles while acting as a liaison between the community and the on-base chaplain. Carrie Binder, the current DFGL at Joint Base Lewis-McCord in Tacoma, Washington said:

I want military Pagans to find a way to meet their spiritual needs, whether they're only touching bases with us to use our contacts to find a group that's more of a closed circle or whether they're going to come and spend time with us. We have a study group, and we celebrate the high Days. Some people only come to our Wednesday night study group because they want the fellowship and the spending time with other Pagans but they're solitary as far as celebrating the High Days. Some people only come to the High Days because they don't really feel they need the social time, or they feel they're far enough on their path that the things we pick as study subjects are something they've got covered.

The most important thing as a DFGL, for Carrie, was creating an open-circle that fostered it's members. She achieved this by performing ritual on the High Days, generally Samhain, Yule (mid-winter solstice), Imbolc, Ostara (spring equinox), Beltane, Litha (summer solstice), Lughnassadh, and Mabon (autumn equinox), but this only accounts for eight days out of the year. The rest of the year Carrie's on-base open circle is a place for

conversation by hosting a Wednesday night study group. However, Carrie also uses the on-base open circle as a gathering place; she does this by putting on game nights.

On the first Wednesday of every month we do board game night. We just hang out, eat snacks, play board games, and get to know each other without feeling like we have to talk knowledgeable on such-and-such subject. Everybody seems to really like that.

Carrie's explanation of how she facilitates community through the on-base open circle that she runs exemplifies the idea that on-base open circles are places for ritual but they are also places for community building.

Having on-base open circles provides a space for community building to occur because it provides a place for the community to meet, interact, and engage with each other. The importance of this engagement is that it helps individuals form bonds with other community members, something that is especially important in a community that is constantly in flux. Further, my fieldwork has demonstrated that the DFGLs seem to be successful in their ability to create this space, and for the majority of practitioners, this is a safe and welcoming environment.

On-base open circles provide a place for participating members of the community to gather, socialize, and practice their religion. With the open circles there are elements of structure in place to assure that the cornerstone of the community runs smoothly. The importance of the on-base open circle to the community cannot be overlooked because it fosters an immediate sense of community.

Safe and Welcoming Space

One of the other purposes of on-base open circles is to create a safe, welcoming space for practitioners of all Nature-Centered beliefs. Carrie Binder, DFGL at Joint Base Lewis-McChord in Tacoma, Washington explained:

You get 50 “pagans” in a room, and you have 52 different Traditions. [...] We run the “pagan” fellowship on Fort Lewis very tradition-non-specific. There is definitely a Wiccan feel to when we do ritual because we are sponsored by a Wiccan congregation.

It was important to Carrie, and her husband Jason, to make their Wiccan-leaning congregation comfortable for non-Wiccan, Nature-Centered practitioners.

Having a welcoming space is important, but I would argue that having a safe space is equally, if not more important. For many, being a practitioner brings with it fear of persecution and discrimination. The on-base open circles represent an ideal place where a practitioner can practice and discuss their spirituality without fear. However, these spaces have a secondary purpose which is the formation of oppositional consciousness.

Oppositional consciousness scholar Jane Mansbridge defines it as an:

...empowering mental state that prepares members of an oppressed group to undermine, reform, or overthrow a system of human domination. It is usually fueled by righteous anger over injustice done to the group and promoted by personal indignities and harms suffered through one’s group membership.²⁷

Mansbridge also provides a list of the ideational resources that oppositional consciousness requires such as: ideas available in the culture that can be built upon to create legitimacy, emotional involvement and commitment, institutional resources, and cultural resources.

²⁷ Jane Mansbridge, "The Making of Oppositional Consciousness," in *Oppositional Consciousness: The Subjective Roots of Social Protest*, ed. Jane Mansbridge and Aldon Morris (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2001), 4-5.

The ideal that is striven for within the Nature-Centered military community is to attain all the same rights as the military Abrahamic faith communities. Mansbridge writes that the dominant group has obvious reasons, such as having ideological hegemony, for wanting to maintain the current power structure. She also notes that the subordinate group also has reasons for not wanting to challenge the “naturalness” of the inequality. The main reason is fear of retribution from the dominant group.

In their chapter “Social Movements and Oppositional Consciousness,” Aldon Morris and Naomi Braine broach this topic of space in the formation of oppositional consciousness. They assert that group segregation plays a key role in the creation of oppositional consciousness. Morris and Braine argue that the subordinate group needs to create an autonomous space that is unmonitored by the dominant group in order to create a fully formed oppositional consciousness. These spaces are sometimes referred to as “safe spaces;” within the safe spaces, the subordinate group can forge independent internal workings.²⁸

On-base open circles are important because they create the type of space Morris and Braine discuss. The existence of the open circle on-base allows Nature-Centered practitioners to segregate themselves in an autonomous space. It acts as a gathering point for the community to speak about the interactions they have had on an individual level and a communal level to practice their faith.

However, there are two major issues with on-base open circles being true safe space. The first is the actual spaces. There are recorded instances of these spaces being

²⁸ Aldon Morris and Naomi Braine, "Social Movements and Oppositional Consciousness," in *Oppositional Consciousness: The Subjective Roots of Social Protest*, ed. Jane Mansbridge and Aldon Morris (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2001), 8.

desecrated and vandalized by non-Nature-Centered service members. Two prime examples of this occurred at Fort Hood in Killeen, Texas and at the Air Force Academy in Colorado Spring, Colorado. In February 2010 the Los Angeles Times reported that outdoor space set aside for Nature-Centered practitioners on the Air Force Academy campus, an area that features a collection of stones set in a circle, had been desecrated. Over the weekend of January 17, 2010, a large cross was constructed and placed in the circle.²⁹ Ten years earlier on Friday, October 27, 2000, unknown individuals attacked the limestone altar at Fort Hood in Texas. Approximately four feet across, the altar was smashed with a sledgehammer.

In a paper entitled, “Fort Hood’s Wiccans and the Problem of Pacifism” presented at the New Religious Movements Group at the American Academy of Religion Annual Meeting in 2000, prominent pagan author Chas S. Clifton wrote:

This act of vandalism, which at the time of writing was still under investigation by military police, was, in effect a physical attack against followers of the contemporary Pagan religion of Wicca. The Wiccan group in question, the Fort Hood Open Circle, had already endured two years of political attacks from clergy, conservative lobbying groups, and members of Congress. These political attacks, made openly in daylight instead of clandestinely at night, were attempts to reverse the Army chaplains' support of Pagan military personnel, who were allowed to conduct their rituals at an on-post Boy Scout camp, Camp Finlayson.³⁰

Yet, despite this attack, other vandalism, and even protest, the Nature-Centered community at Fort Hood has maintained a physical space to practice their spirituality.

²⁹ DeeDee Correll, "Cross Found at Air Force Academy's Wicca center,," *Los Angeles Times*, February 3, 2010. <http://articles.latimes.com/2010/feb/03/nation/la-na-wicca3-2010feb03>.

³⁰ Chas S. Clifton, “Fort Hood’s Wiccans and the Problem of Pacifism,” (paper presented at the annual meeting for American Academy of Religion, Nashville, Tennessee, November 20, 2000).

All of this points to the question, how much of a safe space are the on-base open circles? After the completion of my research, I have to conclude that they are, in fact, not truly safe spaces. First, there is the physicality of the space; most on-base open circles are either designated outside spaces, like the circles at Fort Hood and the Air Force Academy, or rooms inside the base chapel. The space being located in a chapel is problematic because many practitioners chose to leave Christianity for Nature-Centered practices which can cause tension, a topic that Michael F. Strmiska grapples with in *Modern Paganism in World Cultures: Comparative Perspectives*. If the space is outside, then there is always the potential that the military practitioner will be seen and later discriminated against. Furthermore, some of the practitioners I spoke to choose not to participate in the on-base open circles because they felt that participation would put their wellbeing and livelihood in jeopardy. Second, if these were truly safe spaces then there would not be these instances of vandalism. Third, while these spaces are facilitated by DFGLs they are overseen and monitored by a Chaplain, who is, in all likelihood, Christian.

If the intention of the on-base open circle is to create a space where Nature-Centered practitioners can practice and discuss their spirituality while acting as a space in which the community can gather without fear of discrimination, then the intention failed. These are not safe spaces. Not only does this emphasize the deeply felt need for a Nature-Centered chaplain within the community but many of my interviewees believe not having a chaplain means there is not true safety and no legitimacy will exist until there is a Nature-Centered chaplain.

Community Meets the Military

Almost everyone I spoke to, who was not in a DFGL position or higher, had had a negative interaction with a member or members of the general military community directly because of their spirituality. As with anything, there are varying degrees, ranging from a service member not being allowed to wear their spiritual symbol of choice, to extra physical training, to being forcibly “outed” from the broom closet, to be proselytized to. In extreme cases a Nature-Centered service member may feel as though they have been harassed and discriminated against to the point that, when their contract is up, they leave the military. Such was the case with Cody:

It can affect your career. I remember the first year after I came out from the broom closet, my C.O.s [Commanding Officers] were making my life miserable. I had two Non Commissioned Officers: Sergeant [...] and Sergeant First Class [...]. They tortured me. They were born again Christians, and they made my life miserable. For example, they would come into my barracks room and do an “inspection” and would take things having to do with my spirituality. One time they took my wand and said it was a weapon. One time they took every bit of herbs I had and said they were drug testing the area. Some of what they took was destroyed, I never got them back. Sometimes I couldn't even look at it again because of the memories. And that, there is the reason I'm no longer in. (Cody, Army, Eclectic Wiccan)

Despite having all the forms necessary for having his spiritual tools with him in the barracks, Cody was still harassed and felt personally persecuted. Especially when it came to the destruction of those tools. Cody added:

I had...a wand which was destroyed by one of my NCOs [Non-Commissioned Officers]. He said that he thought it was a weapon and he took it. He said, “I’m going to take this to the Chaplain.” And I said, “Okay Sergeant, I understand.” [...] I never saw it again. I called the Chaplain later that day saying, “Hey Chaplain here’s the thing, I have the paperwork here, it’s a religious accommodation. It’s signed by the Brigade Commander, I’m allowed to have these tools.” My wand never made it to Chaplain.

Another example of abuses of power comes from an interviewee who wished to be completely anonymous. This service member did not want even a code name assigned to their story and no personal information collected. In keeping with their wishes, his spiritual Tradition has been removed from the following quote. The service member explained to me:

When I was in Iraq, my CO discovered that I was [Nature-Centered], being a devout Christian, he decided that I was going to have the most dangerous jobs when we were outside the wire. I was going to be the first one through every door in every building we cleared. And who could I go to? No one. All of COs were in on this. Hell, even the Chaplain was. So I venerated the Morrígan and I did what I had to do to stay alive.

These are some of the many examples I recorded of what the community views as abuses of power. Cody claimed that he had all of the religious accommodation forms that allowed him to have approved objects in the barracks. Yet, for his COs and NCOs, disregarding those forms was a way of exercising their power over Cody.

Perceived abuses of power and power imbalances also occur on the communal level. As previously mentioned, the community does not have a Chaplain. In lieu of a Chaplain, they have DFGLs. DFGLs are severely limited in what power they wield and in their status in the hierarchy. As a result, the Nature-Centered community has been attempting to obtain a Nature-Centered or Wiccan Chaplain since the 1990s; something that has not come to fruition. This is perceived as a communal injustice. There are those in the community that feel that no matter what type of chaplaincy candidate they put forward, there will always be something that stops the proceedings. Unfortunately the community has countless examples of this from the past few decades.

To become a chaplain candidate, there is a list of requirements that must be met. This list includes:

You must obtain an ecclesiastical endorsement from your faith group. This endorsement should certify that you are: a clergy person in your denomination or faith group; qualified spiritually, morally, intellectually and emotionally to serve as a Chaplain in the Army; Sensitive to religious pluralism and able to provide for the free exercise of religion by all military personnel, their family members and civilians who work for the Army.

Educationally, you must: possess a baccalaureate degree of not less than 120 semester hours; possess a graduate degree in theological or religious studies, plus have earned at least a total of 72 semester hours in graduate work in these fields of study.

A minimum of two years of full-time professional experience, validated by the applicant's endorsing agency.³¹

To even begin the process of chaplaincy a potential candidate must find and obtain the backing of an ecclesiastical agency. Generally, these agencies look for chaplains within their faith group. However, if the agency has not been recognized previously as an endorsing ecclesiastical agency then there are additional requirements for the potential applicant put forth by the ecclesiastical agency. They are looking for an ideal candidate that meets not only their requirements but that meets the military's requirements.

In addition to these requirements only U.S. citizens can apply to be an active duty military chaplain. Applicants must be able to receive "favorable" National Agency Security Clearance and pass a physical exam at one of the Military Processing Stations. The candidate must be at least twenty-one years of age but no older than forty-two years of age at the time of commission.³² The Nature-Centered community does not have a chaplain and therefore any applicant that would, in other cases, receive a waiver for something like tattoos or a combat related injury, would not meet the criteria for

³¹ U.S. Army, "Army Chaplain Corps," <http://www.goarmy.com/chaplain/about/requirements.html>.

³² Ibid.,

commission. First applicants have to be able to fit into the military's specific guidelines without any waivers. In all the Nature-Centered Traditions there is no shortage of practitioners that would fill the void of Nature-Centered chaplaincy if given the opportunity. However, in these idiosyncratic spiritualities that allow the practitioner to dictate how they practice, how they represent that practice, and even what they call that practice, finding a candidate that fits into the mold demanded by an ecclesiastical agency and the military is difficult.

Further problematizing finding chaplaincy candidates is that there is not an accredited Nature-Centered seminary. Cherry Hill Seminary in Columbia, South Carolina is the closest Nature-Centered seminary to gaining accreditation, but it does not have that yet. The lack of an educational institution makes finding candidates difficult for the community because it means they have to recruit their candidates from a non-Nature-Centered divinity school or out of a religious study program.

When the community has managed to recruit a willing applicant that meets all of the requirements, the applicant must then be approved by the selection board and the Armed Forces Chaplain Board. Ron Schaefer Lt. Col. (Ret.) speaks to that experience:

You're at the Pentagon at the institutional level, the Armed Forces Chaplains Board, you'll get one or two of those hardcore, right-wing bible bangers up there, and they're like, 'not on my watch!'" (Ron Schaefer, Air Force, Wiccan)

The community has seen instances of this when an applicant will get to this point in the selection process, and suddenly the standards and requirements will change or the candidate will be found lacking over something minor.

My interviewees continuously voiced their frustration that there was not a Nature-Centered Chaplain despite two and half decades. This has led to feelings of isolation and

discrimination. Further they feel that there it is a power imbalance because DFGLs do not wield as much power and are not as high in the hierarchy as are chaplains. This is exemplified by DFGL Maltiok Shiroshi as he discusses his first meeting with Chaplains as a DFGL:

The first time I went to the chaplains meetings when I was going to become a DFGL. They were all sitting here, greeting me, shaking my hand, and stuff like that. Now I'm an enlisted specialist. Every other person that was in that room was a Captain and above, all the way up to a Colonel who was also a Catholic priest. [During the meeting, the different chaplains speak.] It's in alphabetical order, its generally who has the most people throughout that month that goes first; so generally it's the Catholics, then the Protestants, and then Lutherans, Latter Day Saints, all the stuff like that, and then goes the DFGLs. Each of these chaplains is getting up and they just kind of like, "well, 87 people attended, and we don't need anything right this second, however for this celebration coming up we will need this and this and this." And the head Chaplain like, "oh, that's good, okay, we'll take care of that." So after all these guys have gone, I stand up and discuss my service and said, "we need more people to know about this so that we can get this information out. I don't think a lot of people know the service exists, and I'd like to get it out more." [The head Chaplain said,] "Oh, we'll work on that." And discussion continues and I'm just kind of sitting there. (Maltiok Shiroshi, Army, Neutrality)

For the rest of the meeting, and afterwards, my interviewee felt isolated. He explained to me that it was more than him being an enlisted Specialist being in a room full of officers. It had also felt like a type of spiritual isolation. This is prime example of how the circle structure in Nature-Centered spiritualities sometimes clashes with the ladder-style hierarchy of the military.

During my interview process, I always asked my interviewees, 'in your opinion, what is the next big challenge facing the community,' the answer I almost always got was that the community needs a chaplain.

Throughout my data collection process I heard the same stories of the Nature-Centered practitioner who feels that he/she cannot practice openly, so he/she performs

their ritual in the bathroom where their candles will not set off the smoke detectors. Or the service member who remains in the broom closet because they are afraid that their chain of command will discover their spiritual inclinations and either have them sent to the mental unit or that they will be discriminated against. These stories that are so well ingrained in the community that they could almost be considered lore. Further, I recorded countless stories of military service members encountering discrimination and persecution from within the ranks.

There is also a deeply felt need in the community for legitimacy; something that community members feel that having a Chaplain would solve because they do not feel as though the broader military community accepts their spirituality as legitimate. Having a Nature-Centered spirituality Chaplain would allow the spirituality to be legitimate, and therefore be accepted into the broader military community, bringing about a state of equality with the other major spiritualities and religions of the world.

All of this begs the question, why is there not yet a Nature-Centered Chaplain?

Dr. Oringderff explained:

The reason there's not a chaplain yet, is because of the change of regulations since 1998. That's strictly administrative, procedural, backstabbing thing in command chaplain policies and politics. [...] Are you familiar with the story of Don Larson? Back in 2006 he wanted to switch from an evangelical sponsorship, to us and be a Wiccan chaplain.

The main problem with, the reason we're not having a pagan Chaplain, is because of the endorser system, and the stranglehold, and the way that works. A chaplain doesn't work for the Army, a chaplain works for his endorser, whether he's a brand newly accessed chaplain, or he's the Chief of Chaplains of the Army. A brand new chaplain has to have his endorsement renewed every year for the first three years, and then from then on and throughout his career, it's got to be every three years. At any time, the endorser can pull that endorsement, and the chaplain is out of a job, he's got no protection. (David Oringderff, Army, Greencraft/Traditional Craft Wicca)

The story of Don Larson is cited over and over again as a primary example of injustice done against the community to keep them in a place of inferiority.

Don Larson, as the story goes, had filed his paperwork to switch his ecclesiastical endorsement, one of the prerequisites for chaplaincy, from an Evangelical Christian denomination to Wicca. Right before the Wiccan paperwork was approved, Larson's Evangelical endorsing agency retracted their support. Because having an ecclesiastical endorser is required to be a chaplain, as soon as the evangelical group pulled their support, Larson was no longer a chaplain.

DFGL Maltiok Shiroshi believes the current reason the community cannot get a chaplain is because of the practices and philosophies and Nature-Centered spirituality and because the military community is not ready for a Nature-Centered Chaplain.

The chaplain community is made up of Christians, Muslims, Jew, and generally there are very few Buddhist chaplains. There is only a small group of chaplains. The majority of the chaplains are Christian. It makes sense. In the United States there's well over 25,000 churches so it would make sense that it would exist that way. What you run into is that the chaplain community is not ready to have a Wiccan chaplain. It's too different. It's too against their idea of what the military is. I think it will be another decade before we come close [to having a Wiccan chaplain.] (Maltiok Shiroshi, Army, Neutrality)

Another service member felt that this was also the reason why there had not been a Wiccan or Nature-Centered chaplain and declared that it was far more likely that he would have a brain aneurism before there was ever a Wiccan Chaplain.

According to Jane Mansbridge, for a community to have an oppositional consciousness, it must have an, "empowering mental state that prepares the members of an oppressed group to undermine, reform, or overthrow the system."³³ While there is a resounding sense of frustration among military Nature-Centered community members,

³³ Mansbridge. "Oppositional Consciousness," 4-5.

that frustration has not turned to hopelessness over the past two and a half decades of struggle. The sense of perseverance in the community is fueled by a sense of righteousness and injustice. Mansbridge also writes that oppositional consciousness is formed through both communal and personal injustice, both of which are present in the Nature-Centered military community.

Obtaining a chaplain has been, and continues to be, a decade long struggle for the military Nature-Centered community. Through the progression of this process obtaining a chaplain has become, to many, synonymous with instant equality. It is almost like, for many of my interviewees, that if there were to ever be a military Nature-Centered chaplain, all of the difficulties of the community would be moot. I interpret this as a stubborn optimism from the community. These same interviewees that have this optimism also seem to be aware that, should there ever be a Nature-Centered chaplain, things will not change overnight.

In their chapter “Social Movements and Oppositional Consciousness,” Aldon and Braine explicitly state that in order for a space to be a safe space it must not be monitored by the dominant group.³⁴ This brings us to the second issue I see with the on-base open circle, which is that the circles are run by DFGLs who, ultimately, answer to a Chaplain, who is a member of the dominant group. This is not to say that every Chaplain has the “thou shalt not suffer a witch to live” attitude. On the contrary, for every negative interaction with a Chaplain I recorded in my fieldwork, I recorded a positive one. However, when looking at the positionality of the community, the idea that Nature-Centered DFGLs answer to, in most cases, Abrahamic Chaplains, creates a faux-safe

³⁴ Ibid.,

space. Therefore, on-base open circles will not truly be safe spaces until there is a Nature-Centered Chaplain.

Conclusion

This chapter explored how the on-base open circles are places that facilitate community, act as a safe spaces, and serve as a way to legitimize communal identity. I have explored the use of on-base circles which create a sense of a faux-safe space, but provide physical boundaries for the community. I have also examined how experiences of the community and community members have led to an oppositional consciousness. Understanding the importance of the on-base circle to the community is vital because it is a central point in the community. It also facilitates the interactions of individuals that share a spirituality.

CHAPTER IV SPIRITUAL LANDSCAPE

Have you ever heard the expression pea soup to refer to that fog in the morning, when you can't see your hand in front of your face? ...Iraq felt like that, but with souls and not happy ones. ...It was so thick with anger and fear and hatred that you didn't want to move for the fear of disturbing somebody. (Joshua Dery, Army, Wiccan)

“When I was over there, I could feel the ground bleeding.” There was hesitation in my interviewee's voice and the moment suddenly felt deeply personal, as he described a direct encounter with something not of this world. This was not a numinous experience in the way that Rudolf Otto defined it in *Das Heilige*; while this was a moment of non-rationality, it was non-sensory, outside the self, and was simultaneously fascinating and terrifying, but there was no realization of the divine in a traditional sense. This shocking spiritual experience that my interviewee had was not a solitary occurrence, according to my fieldwork. I found as I collected narratives of other similar experiences. What was unique is that these experiences all occurred while my interviewees were deployed to the Middle East with the U.S. military.

When Lieutenant Colonel (Retired) Ron Schaefer wrote the article “Witches, Wizards, and Warriors—Oh My!: The Old Religion and the U.S. Military ” in 2010, he wrote that there were between three and eight thousand Nature-Centered practitioners serving in the U.S. military. When we spoke in February 2015, he estimated that that number had grown to twelve thousand. This is a significant number because it means that there are now more practitioners of Nature-Centered spiritualities in the U.S. military than there are practitioners of Judaism and Islam.

Within any given on-base circle there can be numerous Traditions, differing fundamentally in the Gods they venerate, the rituals they perform, and the way they interact with the world around them. Despite the diversity of Nature-Centered Traditions, there is common

ground between them in the form of spiritual experiences, which are central to Nature-Centered spiritualities because it demonstrates a connection to the Otherworld, or the spirit world, as well as a sense of intuitiveness. As Susan Greenwood writes, being intuitive is essential to being a good practitioner.¹ Yet, I believe the spiritual insights gained through these experiences can be used to illustrate the spiritual practice of military practitioners by offering insights into how this small minority group within the U.S. military understands environment.

With looking at the military Nature-Centered community and environment, several key concepts move to the forefront including deployment which this chapter focuses on. Deployment takes the practitioner out of the place that he/she is comfortable in and into a place where they are not only the invading force but the occupying one. Deployment also restricts access to spaces; service members are either set within strictly enforced boundaries or, if they are outside the wire, they are traversing the land in heavily armored vehicles while having to protect themselves or while aggressing others. Deployment also means that the service member's relationship with the place is temporary but it's a temporary place that is not inherently safe; there are seen dangers but there are also unseen dangers such as Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs). All of these things point towards the idea that a military practitioner's relationship with their deployed environment will be different than their relationship with their state-side environment.

In the previous chapter I looked at the importance of the on-base open circle. My focus was on circles situated on domestic military installations. However, for service members serving in the military at the time of this research when the U.S. is embroiled in multiple overseas

¹ Greenwood, Susan. *Magic, Witchcraft, and the Otherworld: An Anthropology*. Oxford International Publishers Ltd: New York, 2000. 1

conflicts, eventually the time when come when they receive their deployment orders and that service member will have to deploy with their unit. When this occurs, there may or may not be an open circle on the base where they are stationed. With deployment comes many unknowns for the service member; some of these they can prepare for and others they cannot. What I found in the fieldwork was that one of the things military practitioners could not prepare for was the spiritual landscape of their place of deployment.

Environment

One of the types of stories that came to light during my fieldwork was narratives that involved strong feelings of negativity. One of these came from Ron Schafer, Lt. Col. (Ret), who identifies as Wiccan. Schafer said, “There’s powerful energy, and I think powerful magic in those austere desert environments but they are not human friendly.” Or this interpretation from 34-year-old Drill Sergeant, Greenwood:

The actual area felt drained, devoid of life, just negative. Always had just a bad feeling around it no matter any kind of cleansing or whatever else was going on, anything that we would do to try and make the area feel better just did not work. (Michael Greenwood, Air Force, Wiccan)

Or this narrative from a 37-year-old Marine Corps veteran who spiritually identified as pagan/nonspecific-shamanism,

It felt heavy. It wasn’t just the heat. It was heavy, almost to the point where I was exhausted by the end of the day. [...] It was exceedingly heavy. It’s a heaviness that...it’s spiritual. (Dreamer, Army National Guard, Non-Specific Pagan/Shamanism)

Other Nature-Centered service members described it as always feeling uneasy, that there was always a feeling that something ominous was behind them, or just around the corner. These narratives speak to the intangible aspect of the land because the service members are having spiritual experiences that they are then associating with the environment around them.

After Dreamer finishing speaking to the spiritual experiences she was having, I asked her to put her experiences into a broader perspective. She laughed and answered, “I would definitely put the devil card on that one.” After another prompt from me, she explained:

The reason why I say I would throw the devil card on that one is that the devil card is not specifically a bad card. It’s about self-imprisonment, and there’s a lot of self-imprisonment...we bound ourselves to that war...we bound ourselves to do what we’re doing to that environment. Especially with us going down there...I call it the ultimate devil card, *especially* with military personnel having to be down there. We’re bound to military laws, with the people who live in that environment, we’re bound to their land. They could let it go anytime that they want to, but they choose to live in that conflicted place and they don’t allow the land that’s around there and the people within that land to heal. Ultimately, it will be that consistent...it will always be that way until people leave there and allow the land to heal itself.

Dreamer tied the intangible experiences she was having to the tangible effects of war. She recognized that the unit she came with, and the military that that unit belonged to were an occupying force; that it was war.

Environment is formed through both the history of the base and the consistent rotation of service members stationed there. This can be explained in terms of space and place as outlined by scholar Yi-Fu Tuan. In *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*, Tuan argues that in order to have space there has to be movement from one place to another place; similarly, in order to have place there must be a space. This results in the notion that space and place are co-dependent. However, the distinction between the two is that space has a temporal connotation, whereas place is suggestive of having physical positioning.²

Further, Tuan argues that space can become place when meaning is applied to the area by the individuals occupying it.³ Therefore, when a service member arrives on a new base, he or

² Ibid., 161

³ Tuan, Yi-Fu. *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977. 136

she will begin to apply meaning to the base; this meaning often comes in the form of significant events in the service member's life. For example, a service member is always able to list off the bases where he/she has been stationed and any major events in both their personal life or in the nation that occurred while he/she was there. The association of personal meaning and location can come to define the service member's time at the base. When these definitions and meanings are combined with other service members' ideas of the base, a communal base environment is formed. Therefore, the climate of the military base is crafted by the service members stationed there.

Another factor that contributes to the crafting of base identity is the land that the base sits on because the land plays a key role in both the construction and sustained environment of the base. In "A Place in the World?" Geographer Doreen Massy discusses the relationship between land and identity. However, I believe her argument can be applied to military bases and environment. Massy writes that land cannot be permanently settled or enclosed because it acts as "a meeting place, the location of the intersections of particular bundles of activity spaces, of connections and interrelations, of influences, and movements."⁴ Consequently, land acts as a nexus for environment, which facilitates the development of space and place. However, even with this facilitation the environment of a place is never set, it is something that is constantly evolving.⁵ Therefore, the environment of military bases continues to evolve as service members continue their base-to-base movement.

⁴ Massy, Doreen. "A Place in the World." In *A Place in the World?: Places, Cultures and Globalization*, edited by Jess Massy, Pat Jess, and Doreen Massey, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996. 58-59

⁵ Ibid., 58-59

This intersection of physical space, place, personal meaning, environment, and the inherent culture of the military, which bring with it a way of doing things, speaking, and rituals, is reminiscent of Keith H. Basso's *Wisdom Sits in Places*, in which Basso explores the relationship between location, cultural symbolism, and place name. After working with the Western Apache tribe in Arizona Basso draws four conclusions through the four chapters. In "Quoting the Ancestors" he emphasizes that places are not simply defined by their geographical locations but more defined by the people who utilize them. He makes it a point to explain that because it is defined by people that the meaning assigned to changes over time. In "Stalking with Stories," Basso focuses on how the Western Apache use place names to associate a location with stories and symbols. In "Speaking with Names," he demonstrates how place names are used to communicate lessons within the community. And finally in "Wisdom Sits in Places," Basso explains that wisdom is acquired by learning about the land; not just its geographical features but its intangible features as well.

To condense, Basso considers the relationship between history, symbols, language, and people. Utilizing his research with the Western Apache in Arizona, Basso argues that in order to understand the wisdom of a place, an individual must know the space in a holistic way. To do this, one must gain an understanding of each of these elements of history, symbols, languages, and people first as singular entities and second in how they relate to one another. In understanding these elements, meaning is created.⁶

To this holistic understanding, I would emphasize an understanding of the spiritual landscape of place; this exploration is something Basso touches on in his discussion but I feel is

⁶ Basso, Keith H. *Wisdom Sits in Places: Landscape and Language among the Western Apache*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1996., 108

vital to understanding Nature-Centered practitioners' view of place. Returning to Massy's idea of place as facilitating interactions, I would add that while these interactions can occur between individuals, they can also occur between individuals and the spiritual landscape. For Nature-Centered practitioners, having a sense of the spiritual landscape of a place binds them to the land but also anchors their spirituality through a sense of rootedness and a spiritual understanding of the ground they walk on.

Land

One of the most compelling instances of the land in Iraq facilitating spiritual interaction came from Army Staff Sergeant Joshua Dery. "Have you ever heard the expression 'pea soup' to refer to that fog in the morning, [when] you can't see your hand in front of your face?" This was the question he posed to me on February 2, 2015. When I answered with an affirmative, Dery continued, "Iraq...felt like that, but with souls and not happy ones. [...] it was so thick with anger and fear and hatred that you didn't want to move for the fear of disturbing somebody." (Joshua Dery, Army, Wiccan)

Narratives involving land spirits includes Dery's story and this explanation of what the spirits were from John Dover, a 26-year-old Army Specialist who defines his spiritual path as Warrior Wiccan.

[The spirit folk] are everywhere. [In Iraq] it's mostly the...not really so much the spirit folk, but there were spirit bugs a lot. They are tiny collections of spirit energy that pretty much feed off the background; any spiritual residue left, they are things that feed on it. They may or may not achieve a state of spirit folkiness where they achieve some level of self-awareness. Usually don't. But sometimes they do. (John Dover, Army National Guard, Warrior Wiccan)

This narrative does not involve the disembodied souls that permeated the environment in Dery's narrative, but Dover's account of the spirit folk is interesting because it alludes to the idea that

the spirit folk appear differently in Iraq and survive off the “spiritual residue.” If the spirit bugs can thrive off of the residue, this indicates that spiritual interactions in Iraq are frequently occurring if not abundant.

For Nature Centered adherents, the land has an innate sacrality. This stems from a belief held by some practitioners that the earth is the body of the Goddess. However, I would assert that this belief is derived from pantheism, which is held by much of the Nature-Centered population. Pantheism is the belief that the divine is immanent in nature and cannot be separated from it.⁷ This alludes to a worldview that believes everything is interconnected. David Ray Griffin writes:

The reality of spiritual energy is affirmed but it is felt to exist within and between all nodes in the cosmic web of interconnections. It is thus dispersed throughout the universe, not concentrated in a source wholly transcendent to it. Postmodernists who speak of God generally affirm a naturalistic pantheism, according to which God is in all things and all things are in God.⁸

For many practitioners the concept of the Goddess is similar because the divine feminine is not separate from nature but found within it. Influential pagan author Starhawk writes that pantheistic interconnectedness is, “the awareness of the world and everything is alive, dynamic, interdependent, interacting, and infused with moving energies: a living being, a weaving dance.”⁹

Often paired with pantheism is the notion of animism or the belief that beings who are not generally thought to have a soul—such as trees, mountains, rivers—are imbued with a spirit or a sense of being. Prominent pagan author Margot Adler posited that animism was a word

⁷ Adler, Margot. *Drawing Down the Moon: Witches, Druids, Goddess-Worshippers, and Other Pagans in America Today*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1979. 25

⁸ Griffin, David Ray. "Introduction: Sacred Interconnections." In *Sacred Interconnections*, edited by David Ray Griffin, Albany: State University of New York, 1990. 2

⁹ Starhawk. *Dreaming the Dark: Magic, Sex and Politics*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1982.

used to imply a reality in which all things had a soul. Adler continues by explaining that, in the ancient worldview, there was no separation between animate and inanimate objects.¹⁰ In *Drawing Down the Moon: Witches, Druids, Goddess-Worshippers, and Other Pagans in America Today* Adler defines animism as way “to imply a reality in which all things are imbued with vitality.”¹¹ She attributes this to the ancient worldview that did not fathom a separation between animate and inanimate.

The term “land” often evokes images of the tangible elements of a landscape, such as mountains, grass, trees, plateaus, or other visually perceivable features. In the modern western worldview, when one thinks about land it is most often regarding what can be done with it, what ways it can be shaped, constructed upon, reimagined, or transformed into something else. Yet, land can also evoke intangible and dynamic elements like emotion, imagination, nationalism, or identity.¹² This creates a juxtaposition of land as it is visibly perceived and land as it is experienced; an idea reminiscent of Anne Whiston Spirn’s idea of land and landscape being dialogical, because it encompasses both the real and imagined, the perceived and the immaterial, human and non-human:

Landscape is loud with dialogues, with story lines that connect a place and its dwellers. [...] A coherence of human vernacular landscapes emerges from dialogues between builders and place, fine-tuned over time. [...] The context of life is a woven fabric of dialogues, enduring and ephemeral.¹³

¹⁰ Alder. *Drawing*. 25

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 25

¹² Berberich, Christine, Neil Campbell, and Robert Hudson. "Framing and Reframing Land and Identity." In *Land & Identity: Theory, Memory, and Practice*, edited by Christine Berberich, Neil Campbell, and Robert Hudson, 17-42. New York: Rodopi, 1994. 18-19

¹³ Spirn, Anne Whiston. *The Language of the Landscape*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998. 17

This idea that land is not only the visible, physical features that can be observed but is also able to elicit visceral reactions is a concept Nature-Centered practitioners would agree with. For modern practitioners the world is comprised of what can be seen and, sometimes more importantly, what cannot be seen. Whether this be the Otherworld or invisible entities, the existence of the invisible is never called into question.

When the concepts of animism, pantheism, and tangible and intangible land are examined individually it is easy to get lost in what these words encompass and their implications. However, when these words are regarded as a whole, in the context of Nature-Centered spiritualities, a conclusion can be made. That conclusion is that land is imbued with spirit, can facilitate a spiritual connection, and the boundaries of land extend far beyond the physical landscape to the spiritual one. In the Nature-Centered worldview, the land is a living, breathing, spiritual entity that can act as a catalyst to the spiritual realm. Being imbued with spirit and given human-like qualities, land can have a memory.

Magical Practice During Deployment

The Fieldwork revealed an interesting trend of apotropaic action of magic, not to produce these experiences but in reaction to. Bronislaw Malinowski argued that magic satisfies a psychological need because it lessened fear and anxieties while allowing a sense of control when facing unknowable circumstances.¹⁴ For example, I spoke to one interviewee that, before he left barracks in the morning, would write runes down his arms in essential oils and sharpie as a form of protection. This could also be considered apotropaic magic which is a ritualized act based on

¹⁴ Malinowski, Bronislaw. *Sex, Culture and Myth*. New York City: Harcourt Brace, 1962. 188

the belief that if a person performs a prescribed set of behaviors, bodily and/or verbal actions, then he/she will be protected from evil and danger.¹⁵ This allows a sense of safety to the practitioner. When apotropaic magic was performed Nature-Centered service members returned from ritual and moved forward with a sense of trust that the magic would protect them.

At 49-years-old, Mike K. has eighteen years in the Army, is currently a Sergeant First Class, and self-defines his spiritual practices as ‘forms of Wicca.’ While deployed to Iraq, Mike K. was serving as the DFGL at Joint Base Balad, when he experienced such an event:

[I was working in my office] in Iraq, I can't remember exactly what day it was. There was something of a... how to put this... a ripple in the Force, so to speak. It literally [was] like a tsunami right across the base from one side to the other. I felt it. Every other Pagan member on the base felt it. My phone started to ring and it was the guy on the far side of the base, "Did you feel that?" I was like, "Yes, I did." Then the phone rang again, it was somebody else, "Did you feel that?" Within ten minutes, every single Pagan on the base had contacted the other Pagans, knowing something's not right. [...] We all felt it [the ripple], it was amazing, [because it is] a huge base. People from opposite ends of the base felt it. (Mike K., Army, Forms of Wicca/Earth Pagan)

Mike K. never did discover what caused the ripple, or where it had originated, but each interviewee that experienced this ripple was in awe of it even years later. I find it interesting that my informants did not believe it had a malevolent intent, that it simply rippled from one side of the base to the other. In reaction to this, practitioners from across the base gathered to perform ritual that night.

While most of the service members I spoke to did not share their stories with their units, some did and received mixed reactions. One of my interviewees, who did share his experiences with his squad, got a reaction he did not expect from his team who were not Nature-Centered practitioners. Jason Binder, who has been in the Army for fifteen years and identifies as a Shamanic Wiccan, explained that the spiritual landscape in Iraq was not as bad as the one in

¹⁵ Green, Anthony. "Neo-Assyrian Apotropaic Figures," *Iraq* 45, no. 1 (1983). 87

Kosovo, but it still had a negative atmosphere. He recounted when he and his squad were clearing a building that had been a school for terrorists, he described the atmosphere in the building as suffocating with a thick sense of anger; something he attributed to the murals on the compound walls which depicted Iraqis killing Jews. Binder explained that the air had been so overwhelmingly negative that his squad leader asked him to take action and,

...do some words on the door. [...] I did a couple of sickles, they're a personal thing I do, various ones reflecting different things. I had some that were designed for protection and spirits. I worked out a pattern to do around the door for that. (Jason Binder, Army, Shamanic Wiccan)

Binder explained that this action allowed the members of his squad to feel more relaxed. That these service members were practicing protective magic to gain a sense of control tells me that they felt out of control in these circumstances.

During the fieldwork process apotropaic magic is what I noticed the most but it was not the only type of magic I found occurrences of. One veteran practiced Greencraft and explained how he adapted this magical practice to the environment. The Middle East was vastly different from Shane's native Oregon. His magical practice was very much tied to landscape that was not desert. Therefore, when he deployed he went through a period of time when he felt disjointed and out of sync. He explained to me that it is not that Iraq and Afghanistan do not have any trees to speak of, they are just low to the ground and more shrub like. He discovered that when he was out on patrol he could run his hand through these "trees." While it was not the mighty trees of the Pacific Northwest, Shane adapted his practice and learned to gain a sense of spiritual security through that process.

Another example that I collected was from my preliminary interview with Eddie Black. During the interview he was explaining to me his process for when he went outside the wire. For him, it was prayer.

I would mutter my prayer. “Morrígan, Goddess of Death and Battle, please give me a chance to Destroy my enemies. Let me put their heads on spikes and feed your crows.” That was my prayer.

For Eddie, this prayer not said in an apotropaic sense, he did not expect the Morrígan to protect him from death. This was Eddie’s battle cry because if he was die, he wanted to die in battle.

What these examples point it, with the exception of Jason in Kosovo, is that while deployed ritual and the practice of magic becomes centered on the individual rather than the group. This puts it in direct contrast to the on-base open circles which put an emphasis on community. While I am unsure as to why there is such a dramatic switch to the individual when deployed, I reason that it has to do with the loss of everything that is normal during deployment.

Otherworld

In the Nature-Centered worldview land is simultaneously alive and part of the divine; some of my interviewees expressed that they believed the land was acting like a sponge and soaking up all of the violence. Nor is it a leap for Nature-Centered practitioners to believe that land has a memory. The Nature-Centered worldview personifies land, so it can be concluded that the land is holding onto this trauma the same way a person would. If this is the case then what the military practitioner is seeing is a projection of the traumatic experience. Nature-Centered service members are able to perceive the trauma because of the intuitiveness of the community.

The way military practitioners are seeing the manifestation of this trauma is based on their connection to the Otherworld. The Otherworld, according to pagan scholar Susan Greenwood, is a spiritual domain that exists on the other side of what is vernacularly known as the Veil. It is a spiritual plane that is timeless, but it is past, present, and future occurring simultaneously. It is a realm of deities, spirits, entities, and other beings that Nature-Centered

practitioners view as part of a “holistic totality co-existent with ordinary, everyday reality.”¹⁶

Connection to the Otherworld is generally gained through ritual and a self-induced altered state of consciousness.

When my interviewees have had these experiences they were not actively seeking out the Otherworld, which makes these experiences characteristic of the Otherworld bleeding over into mundane reality. With this comes the creation of magical consciousness; a term used to describe a mythopoetic, expanded awareness.¹⁷ Magical consciousness allows the service member to become aware that they are linked not only to the military community but also to the Otherworld and all that resides there. It also allows military practitioners to know when or if the Otherworld is present in the current reality.

The fieldwork also demonstrates several commonalities in how Nature-Centered service members view the world. The first of these is the sacralization of time and place, which is evident in the fieldwork in my interviewee’s explanation of the timelessness of the land. Several of my informants made a direct connection back to the cradle of life and ancient civilizations. That Nature-Centered military practitioners believe that the timelessness of the land speaks to the Otherworld crossing over into reality, and also serves as an interconnected way of viewing time.

Practitioners of Nature-Centered traditions are interested in the folk traditions of European peasants and indigenous peoples because they believe the people of the past are

¹⁶ Greenwood, *Otherworld*. 1

¹⁷ Greenwood, Susan. *The Anthropology of Magic*. New York: Bloomsbury, 2009. 4

repositories of ancient nature-based spirituality.¹⁸ This connection to the past allows the practice to feel spiritually authentic. Being in an environment, like the Middle East, that feels so metaphysically raw is going to be perceived as spiritually authentic because of the practitioner's awareness of the connection to the past.

However these the reactions my interviewees are having are to a more-than-human world. In his book *Spell of the Sensuous: Perception and Language in a More-than-Human World*, David Abram utilizes the term *the more-than-human world* as a way of bridging the gap between humans and nature. His argument is centered on the idea that written language is partly responsible for the slow estrangement of humans from a living, speaking, world around them. However, his emphasis on the idea of the more-than-human world provides a way to talk about that which goes beyond humans because humans are just a small subset of the world. While Abram's main argument deals with the rise of the written language, the book itself provides a sense-based, story-based understanding of the world in which humans are actors but so is the more-than-human world.

This more-than-human world certainly speaks to the idea of the Otherworld which is vast. It also places the human actor at the intersection of the participatory nature of perception and the understanding of time as a horizon and grounded stream. When a military service member has an interaction with the Otherworld, time is non-linear and non-subjective. It is past, present, and future rolled into one. However, there is a participatory nature to the perception of the Otherworld because the individual senses and perceives changes as a result of several factors such as environment, time, and a sense of place.

¹⁸ Magliocco, Sabina. *Witching Culture: Folklore and Neo-Paganism in America*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004. 3

As a final point, I will return to Basso's *Wisdom Sits in Places*. In terms of places interacting with humans, he writes:

So, even in stillness, places may seem to speak. [...] Human constructions par excellence, places consist in what gets made of them- in anything and everything they are taken to be-and their disembodied voices, immanent through inaudible, are merely those of people speaking silently to themselves. And on numerous occasions, audibly enough, their voices are those of people speaking to each other.¹⁹

Basso's concept that the individual is reflected in place is one that can be applied to the Otherworld. As discussed earlier, the Otherworld indicates an intuitiveness or a depth in consciousness that allows military practitioners to be aware of the trauma that the land is holding on to.

If Basso is correct, then the traumatic projection the practitioner sees is partially a reflection of his/ her own narrative. This creates a dialogue between practitioner and land, which is not spoken but rather is part of the imaginative process. Greenwood and Magliocco have both noted the importance of this process in their respective ethnographies. Magliocco writes that the imaginative process refers to the

broad spectrum of thought processes, from memory to creative problem-solving to artistic expression, that rely primarily on internal imagining, rather than on discursive verbal expression or linear logic.²⁰

With this awareness of non-verbal imagery, the boundaries of self are broken because it allows an individual to communicate without words and in a non-rational way. Despite this stemming from the imaginative process, its realness is never called into question.

Furthermore, as Dazzani and Filho point out in the article "Feelings, Imagination, and Self-Understanding," that allows,

¹⁹ Basso, *Wisdom*, 109

²⁰ Magliocco, *Witching*, 97

the individual to devise situations in which...their beliefs, desires and thoughts, appear and interact in a context that is not the current context. This does not mean that beliefs, desires and thoughts of this individual do not have the same force they have in the current context. Rather, this is often an occasion to confront and evaluate our beliefs, desires and thoughts.²¹

In essence spiritual experiences and communication with the Otherworld brings the individual into dialogue with the land. The land is a projection of himself or herself, which implies that the Otherworld is also an inner world that exists for the practitioner in both an external and internal capacity.²² This creates the paradox of leaving oneself to come into oneself.

Conclusion

Being deployed requires that service members leave the relative safety of everyday life and the things that they are familiar with, including their families, their friends, possessions, and the predictability of their civilian schedule. They reside in another part of the world for however long the military tells them to stay, and then they are home again. Being a service member means that there is a constant change in environment and surroundings.

The fieldwork effectively demonstrates that in the Nature-Centered worldview land can be affected by trauma the same way a person can, and in extreme cases, the stress that the land is put through can result in the land reflecting and replaying the trauma and conflict that has been done upon it.

²¹ Dazzani , Maria Virginia Machado, and Waldomiro Jose Silva Filho. "Feelings, Imagination and Self-Understanding."*IntegrPsychBehav* 44 (2010). 221

²² Greenwood. *Magic*. 27

For Nature-Centered military practitioners, the Otherworld and magical consciousness are two things that are always with them despite the environment and the surroundings. Constant movement into new environments means a constant change in perspective, but it also results in a constant change in environment. This impacts how the service member experiences the landscape. This, in turn, affects the phenomenological standpoint of the community.

CHAPTER V
EMERGENT TRADITION

I think everything that we do in life influences our spirituality. (Adams, Navy service member, Gardnerian Wiccan)

In *Chapter 1: A State of Affairs* I wrote about the military's relationship with new Nature-Centered spiritualities. However, there is another group of Nature-Centered Traditions, known as Reconstructionist Traditions, which seek to practice historically accurate restorations of these ancient spiritualities. Amongst the Reconstructionist Traditions are Ásatrú and Celtic Reconstruction. To do this, practitioners piece together historical accounts of the spirituality, as well as scholarly works and literature.

In many of the works that practitioners use to piece together their Tradition, there is an emphasis on the warrior. This can be seen in epics such as *Beowulf* and *Cú Chulainn*. For military reconstructionist practitioners there is a significant emphasis on warriorhood, more so than what I have seen in the civilian community. However, this is not just seen in the reconstructionist practitioners, it is also seen in individuals who declare themselves “wiccan warriors,” or “warrior neo-shamans.”

This is one example as to how the military community has adapted different Nature-Centered Traditions to more suit the military lifestyle and mindset. Nature-Centered Traditions as all traditions are not static; Henry Glassie wrote about tradition:

Folk and lore link people and expression in a functional circle. Epic and nation, myth and society, custom and community—all conjoin communications and groups. The group exists because its members create communications that call it together and bring it to order. Communications exist because people acting together, telling tales at the hearth,

or sending signals through computerized networks develop significant forms that function at once as sign of identity and forces of cohesion.²³

These communications take the form of traditions but it also allows for tradition to evolve and, in some cases, be completely recreated.

In this chapter, I will argue that the Nature-Centered military community has created a Nature-Centered Tradition. Despite the mix of oldness and newness that surrounds the community, I believe that this demarcates the Nature-Centered military community as being an emergent culture.

Tradition

As with most things in Nature-Centered community vocabulary is important. As Berger, Leach, and Shaffer pointed out in *Voices from the Pagan Census: A National Survey of Witches and Neo-Pagans in the United States*, practitioners prefer the term *Tradition* to that of *sect* because it specifically signifies differences in spiritual practice, magical practice, and mythology. However, not all practitioners ascribe to a particular Tradition because it indicates possibilities but also limitations.

...as a term *spiritual path* permits the possibility of some individuals having unique paths that differ from others.²⁴

Spiritual path returns to the idea of spiritual practice as a journey, and where the practitioner stands presently is not always where he/she has been, or where he/she will be. Therefore, a

²³ Henry Glassie, "Tradition," *The Journal of American Folklore* 108 (1995): 400.

²⁴ Helen A Berger, Evan A. Leach and Leigh Shaffer, *Voices from the Pagan Census: A National Survey of Witches and Neo-Pagans in the United States* (University of South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 2003), 89.

practitioner may choose to use the term *spiritual path* when referring to their spiritual journey, as well as their Tradition or how he/she practices.

Some of my interviewees preferred the term *spiritual path* because they believed it spoke to the evolution of their practice. For practitioners spirituality and belief are dynamic and ever evolving; this is something that is amplified by the idiosyncratic nature of Nature-Centered spiritualities because practitioners have total control. This allows them not only to create their own variation of Nature-Centered spiritualities but to name it as well. While I was doing my fieldwork, I always asked the practitioner to self-define their spiritual tradition, a chart of the results can be found the first appendix. While the more popular answers I received are well established Traditions, such as Wicca, I also received Traditions created and named by the practitioner. For example, one interviewee identified as Warrior Wiccan while another identified as a Spiritual Mutt.

The freedom to craft one's own spirituality is, for some practitioners, a huge draw because it provides the practitioner the ability to pick and choose elements from Nature-Centered Traditions, and other religions and spiritualities, while disregarding other features. Practitioners find influence not only in other religions and spiritualities but in lore, history, the arts, and even social organizations like the Society for Creative Anachronism. However, where a practitioner sources information for their practice is sometimes used by the Nature-Centered community to sort themselves.

Sabina Magliocco notes that tradition, as in history and lore, is used by modern practitioners to distinguish themselves from one another. Modern practitioners make the distinction between 'traditional' and 'popular' craft; the distinguishing factor between the two is that traditional craft has a robust and coherent, body of lore, which has been handed down

through the generations, normally through a Book of Shadows or through oral tradition by individuals who act as tradition bearers. Popular Craft, on the other hand evolved more freely, and is diffused widely through pagan authors, the internet, movies and television, and through word of mouth, but lacks a consistency in its lore. The Nature-Centered spiritual Traditions do share some common ground. Magliocco believes this communality lies in a reverence for nature, a view of the universe as interconnected, and the belief in divinity that includes a feminine aspect. Where the Traditions begin to differ from one another are the deities and mythology.²⁵

Despite their differences, practitioners maintain a certain level of respect for other Traditions because of an underlying understanding of the multiplicity of truth within the community. As T.M. Luhrmann explains in *Persuasions of the Witches Craft: Ritual Magic in Contemporary England*, one of the defining characteristics of the community was the ability to accept diversity.

[...] they tolerate a surprising spiritual diversity. Central to the ethos is the notion that any path to a religion is a path to a spiritual reality, and whatever symbols and images one chooses are valid. Groups and their practices are creative, syncretic, their rites often amalgam of Egyptian headdress, Celtic invocation and Greek imagery. The only dogma, they say, is that there is no dogma, and feminist witches, kabbalistic Christians and neo-Nodic shamans socialize well together.²⁶

The multiplicity of truth is another topic that could have an entire book dedicated to it. Within these truths Tradition and tradition are intertwined.

“Tradition” is one of those words that can be utilized in a variety of ways and by a variety of people. It can be used by the individual as a way of justifying his/her action or by a group as a

²⁵ Sabina Magliocco, *Witching Culture: Folklore and Neo-Paganism in America*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 69.

²⁶ T.M. Luhrmann, *Persuasions of the Witch's Craft: Ritual Magic in Contemporary England* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), 7.

way of creating group cohesion and abiding by social norms. In this way, as Martha C. Sims and Martine Stephens point out, tradition expands far beyond the boundaries of the customary idea of tradition and mainstream definitions which conjure ideas of traditions which have been passed down through the generations. Yet, the authors also write,

[t]raditions may perhaps even be invented within a group as a way to convey and express beliefs to other members of the group or other groups.²⁷

This exemplifies the dual nature of tradition to both inform the group yet also allows a certain amount of flexibility within.

Folklorist Henry Glassie writes that “tradition is a temporal concept, inherently tangled with the past, the future, with history.” He argues that tradition is a way of extracting the future from the past, much like one would skim the cream off the top of whole milk. Yet, Glassie also argues that tradition is where history, culture, and the human-as-actor meet.²⁸

History, culture, traditions, and humans-as-actors collide and take the shape of religion. There are also elements of emergence in religious naturalism. In this context, ‘religious’ describes spiritual or religious emotions, such as gratitude or humility, while ‘naturalism’ is used to designate the perception that the natural world exists because humans have no reason to believe otherwise, while simultaneously questioning the belief of that which exists independent of the natural order, like deities.²⁹

²⁷ Martha C. Sims, and Martine Stephens, *Living Folklore: An Introduction to the Study of People and Their Traditions* (Logan, UT: Utah State University Press, 2011), 69.

²⁸ Glassie, "Tradition," 399.

²⁹ Loyal Rue, *Nature is Enough: Religious Naturalism and the Meaning of Life* (State University Of New York P: SUNY Press, 2011), 91.

Folklorist Dan Ben-Amos wrote about tradition versus creativity in his article “The Seven Strands of Tradition: Varieties in Its Meaning in American Folklore Studies.” He first defined tradition as the canon of the group before adding that creativity is the act of the individual.

While creativity is necessary for the survival of tradition, it brings about its change, modifying the continuity of the past into the present. Tradition is the frame within which the creative folk artist can form but from which he must not deviate.³⁰

This is exemplified by the Nature-Centered traditions. The traditions provide the practitioner with a general outline, which allows the practitioner to be creative in their practice and customize it to their liking.

Separation and Emergence

For many of the service members who discovered the spirituality while they were in the military, there is a keen sense that, had they not been in the military, they may not have discovered Nature-Centered spiritualities.

If it wasn't for me being in the military, I wouldn't really have found...I probably would have found out about Wicca a lot later. [...] I do think it is important to acknowledge both how it has affected me and how I have learned from it also. The military can be a very honorable pursuit. I don't agree with a lot of the principles, but there is brotherhood in there and that is very important. [...] If there are pagans within that brotherhood, who need brotherhood within their religion, hopefully they will find it. They will be hurt or they'll find glory. Hopefully they learn from that hurt and they grow and they become something more than what they were in the past. (Dreamer, Army National Guard, Non-specific Pagan/Shamanism)

This hurt that Dreamer refers to is the point of conflict during which the individual, their spirituality, and their occupation clash.

³⁰ Dan Ben-Amos, "The Seven Strands of Tradition: Varieties in its Meaning in American Folklore Studies," *Journal of Folklore Research* 21, no. 2-3 (1984): 113.

One of these sources, especially for Wiccan troops, can be the Wiccan Rede, which instructs followers to ‘harm none.’ When I spoke to Mike K, former DFGL, I asked specifically if the Rede was ever discussed in the open circles that he facilitated, and how participants handled the potential conflict discussed in the introduction. When he answered the question, he answered in the 2nd person.

They still follow guidelines, “Do whatever you want to do, unless it hurts someone else.” I believe that, as more of a creed, and a way to follow your every-day life. When you put on the uniform, you have to take into account that you might have to kill somebody. Or, you might have to do something that you wouldn’t normally do. You have to balance that out. When you put the uniform on, you understand the differences. You’re not actually going against your faith, you’re basically protecting your way of life. There’s got to be a balance in that. (Mike K., Army, Forms of Wicca/Earth Pagan)

While Mike K. has found a way to reconcile this conflict and blend together his occupation with his spirituality, for some service members, it is not always as straightforward, and brought about an end to their service.

It made me not want to bring harm on to other people. It made me more self-aware. It made me look outside the box. It made me more resistant towards certain orders. [...] With paganism, it does make you a little bit more self-aware and it makes you question too. Once you start to question, it tends to conflict with your military side also which is another reason why I felt that I couldn’t do it anymore. (Dreamer, Army National Guard, Non-specific Pagan/Shamanism)

For Dreamer, the conflict between her spirituality and occupation caused such an internal struggle that she left the military. I found this solution to the conflict to be one of the more extreme cases I documented. Since leaving the military, Dreamer has crafted a lifestyle in which her previous profession and spirituality blend while perusing an education.

Yet this is not the case for every service member. Randy Banner found that his military service had only strengthened his spirituality.

I think my military service has led me to be more disciplined in my spiritual practice. I always do something to acknowledge every holiday, full moon, season change, and life

progress. I think it has taught me to take my faith and service more seriously. [...] It has taught me to never stop learning or expanding my horizons. ...My spirituality actually led to my military service in part. (Randy Banner, Army National Guard, Eclectic Wiccan)

While Randy had a positive experience overall, he allowed there to be an open dialogue between occupation and spirituality, eliminating any conflict between the two.

Other service members had to adapt the spirituality to avoid conflict. For example, many Christian holidays are also marked by Federal holidays. However, in the practice of Nature-Centered spiritualities, the eight major holidays, that are recognized by many Traditions, do not generally fall on federal holidays. Within the military community there is an understanding that the mission must always come first; but if there is no conflict with a mission, a service member may ask for a day or two to celebrate.

Normally that wasn't a problem in my unit [to get a 3-4 day pass], but sometimes when I tried, I wasn't taken seriously and my pass was denied. (Alex Whisler, Army, Earth-Based Paganism)

In cases where their pass was denied, a service member may choose to celebrate the holiday at a later date.

Or the service member may need to adapt their celebration to their environment. As was the case with submariner, John Idaho, who adapted his practice to the inside of a submarine.

It can be difficult at some times. The military is very good about allowing people to practice their faith. It always comes with the caveat of 'if the mission allows.' When you're really trying to explore more or branch out more, active participation in religious groups can be difficult. (Andrew Lund, Army, Celtic Pagan)

John's key to success was using his bunk and headphones to create a space for his practice, while tuning out of the activity around him.

Practicing becomes difficult during deployment. While many bases abroad host an open circle, there are still many challenges the service members must overcome while deployed. The

submariner, John Idaho, spoke to me about the challenges of finding a quiet space for spiritual practice:

Usually, on the way in, on a plane or whatever, if I want to practice spirituality, I pretty much just go in my head, or if I can find a quiet place or something by myself, I have an expectation of being interrupted or eavesdropped on or something like that which is hard on a submarine. (John Idaho, Navy, Shamanic)

While Dreamer spoke to working with the Iraqis who worked on-base:

When it came to being there, I had to keep my mouth shut about my spirituality. You never tell an Iraqi that you're a witch. All you have to do is just look at these guys and know automatically you don't tell them anything. You just sit there. If they assume that you're Christian, you just go, okay, because they have at least some respect for it. (Dreamer, Army National Guard, Non-specific Pagan/Shamanism)

Being deployed and practicing poses some unique challenges that I discussed in chapter three:

Spiritual Landscapes.

The combination of spirituality with occupation does not always have to be difficult. For many service members the fusion of the two is simple. For DFGL Greenwood, the passage of time means a smoother connection between the two, "Early on, when I was younger it was a problem, but later on I was able to incorporate my spirituality into everything I do." (Michael Greenwood, Air Force, Wiccan). Seamless incorporation is exactly what the bulk of my interviewees were able to accomplish.

This became accomplishable through various means. For John Dover, the incorporation of his occupation and spirituality was not something that he gave active thought to, it was a seamless process.

I guess people have this weird dichotomy in their head where you either are or you aren't stuff. I guess that could happen but I am who I am. (John Dover, Army National Guard, Warrior Wiccan)

On the other hand, some service members actively pursue combining the two. Such was the case for Joshua Dery who found a way to incorporate his spirituality with his morning physical training (PT).

[During PT], if you push your arms out to the sides as you're coming down instead of just letting from fall [from an overhead stretch], it almost exactly an LBRP (Lesser Banishing Ritual of the Pentagram) and so for years other Wiccans are doing PT the first thing in the morning and I'm doing a LBRP right there, in front of everybody, and nobody has a clue. And I'm getting tons of spiritual benefit out of it. (Joshua Dery, Army, Wiccan)

Finding a way to incorporate a bit of spirituality into military practice was the key to success for Joshua Dery.

When there is a cohesive fusion of spirituality and occupation, it takes on the qualities of an emergent tradition. Emergence in traditions is not uncommon. If there was not emergence in traditions, traditions would be stagnant, become dated, and ultimately become irrelevant.

Without emergence, it could be argued that there would be no new lore, music, art, or traditions.

Creativity within canon is acceptable in modern Nature-Centered Spiritualities, if not expected.

In *Eight Words for the Study of Expressive Culture*, Henry Glassie's explains this. He writes,

if tradition is a people's creation out of their own past, its character is not stasis but continuity; its opposite is not change but oppression, the intrusion of a power that thwarts the course of development.³¹

This allows both the individual and the tradition to be actors in the creation of emergent traditions. Therefore, traditions are altered by the actions of individuals but so too the individual is altered by the tradition.

In the article, "Verbal Art as Performance" Folklorist Richard Bauman discusses the emergent qualities of performance. Bauman argues that the emergent quality of performance exists where communicative resources, individual competence, the goals of the participant, and

³¹ Glassie, "Tradition," 117.

the situational context overlap. The article which focuses on the performance of narratives, believes that fixed texts and novel texts represent two stationary poles but between these two fixed points there is room for emergent text structures.³² It understands performance of oral narratives as a process rather than a static entity.

In “Emergent Nature Spirituality: An Examination of the Major Spiritual Contours of the Contemporary Pagan Worldview,” author Dennis D. Carpenter seems to suggest that what he terms modern Paganism is emergent for two reasons: first, that it is resurging, and second, that this resurgence has taken on a distinctly post-modern context.

When discussing emergence in the article, “The Nature and Culture Debate in Popular Forms of Emergent Spirituality in America,” Michael York writes, “in the contemporary emergence in popular form of spirituality in America, the conflict between nature and culture is often a—if not *the*—central issue.”³³ York is writing about the resurgence of contemporary paganism, and other goddess-spiritualities, particularly about how the beliefs of modern paganism are contrary to Freud’s ‘civilization thesis.’ Ultimately, he concludes that culture is situated within nature, and that the two do not have to have an antagonistic relationship. While York’s main argument is interesting, and makes a good point, his assumption of modern paganism as an emergent tradition is of interest to me because he argues that the resurgence is the product of the clash between nature and culture. This is again the creation of paganism, and Nature-Centered spiritualities, by combining two or more things.

³² Richard Bauman, "Verbal Art as Performance," *American Anthropological Association* 77, no. 2 (June 1975): 320-321.

³³ Michael York, "The Nature and Culture Debate in Popular Forms of Emergent Spirituality in America," *Critical Studies* 15, no. 1 (2001): 278.

With the Nature-Centered military community, I believe the creativity applied to the different Nature-Centered Traditions has been done in a very structured way that is reminiscent of the observations made by Albert Lord in *Singer of Tales*. As previously stated, Lord believed that the ability of the singer to remember epics that were thousands of lines long were due, in part, to the singer's creativity and the ridged structure of the individual lines of the epic. As long as the singer followed the structure, the performer had a certain level of creative license.

With the Nature-Centered military community, practitioners are working between the very structured framework of the military and the semi-structured framework of their chosen Nature-Centered Tradition. The Nature-Centered practitioner is, upon resolving any conflicts that exists between the two, weaving these two separate structure into a singular spiritual framework.

This is being done on a large scale, with focal points being the on-base open circles. In the circles service members are not only sharing their experiences, but sharing how it is they have created their spiritual framework that fuses spirituality and occupation. Because this is being done on such a large scale, it points to hybridization and emergence.

Conclusion

In the military, countless number of recruits have been told that there is a right way, a wrong way, and an Army way to do things. Throughout a service member's career, they learn military slang, marching chants, and participate in ceremonies that have been crafted through the centuries. In Nature-Centered spiritualities, practitioners educate themselves on the tradition of their choice, learn the vernacular, learn the mythology of that tradition, and perform rituals that have both an oldness and newness to them.

This process of learning has created an emergent quality to how Nature-Centered spiritualities are practiced in the U.S. military. Over the decades, military practitioners have discovered a way to effectively weave together their occupation and their spirituality. Due to this, I believe that the community is close to creating their own, autonomous, Tradition.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

While Wicca is not practiced by every military practitioner, and therefore the Rede is not followed by every practitioner, it is a common topic of conversation in the on-base open circles. Those who do practice Wicca and follow the Rede are trying to balance the two, while those who do not seem to view it as an interesting conversation in ethics. This, along with the idiosyncratic nature of the spiritualities, their emphasis on the circular structure, and other features of Nature-Centered spirituality put military practitioners somewhat at odds with their occupations. While their occupation, and the way that some have incorporated their practice and occupation sometimes puts military practitioners at odds with the general Nature-Centered community. The result is a community that is held together by their shared belief and shared occupation.

This thesis has examined some of the distinctive features of military Nature-Centered practitioners and their community. As a group, these individuals feel a connection to other practitioners despite the differences in their personal practice. Further, the practitioner's spirituality links them to a community that it is hard to be a part of because of their belief. However community is an integral part of life for members of this population, and as such has taken on several meanings. It seems that each member of the community has their own idea about what community is. Despite this, there is a resounding feeling of togetherness.

This thesis also examined some of the defining features of the community. In chapter 1, I provided a brief overview of the history of the community. In chapter two, I looked at the military Nature-Centered community and the way the on-base open circle helps to facilitate community, create a faux-safe environment, and serve as a space to speak about the need for a chaplain. In chapter three, I examined the magical consciousness of the community and how that

manifests depending on where and when the service member is located. Spiritual landscape becomes extremely important when the service member is deployed. Finally, in chapter four I looked at the community as an emergent tradition. For practitioners, their spirituality and their occupation have an influence on each other, the result is that their spirituality is emergent.

I believe that there is still room for this project to grow. I specifically chose not to include chapters on ritual and magic in this thesis because I did not believe that I had enough time in my final year to do them justice. While I sometimes reference magic and ritual in the fieldwork in the chapters included here, there is more that could be done with the data collected. Furthermore, I believe a chapter on material culture and tattoos could also be included in the future. Almost all of my interviewees wore some symbol of their spirituality on their person while in the military, whether that be a necklace under their uniform or a patch on their backpack; questions such as why these symbols and what these symbols mean to the practitioner could be addressed. The same questions could be asked about the tattoos that many of my interviewees had. However, I noticed during the fieldwork that many of my interviewees had coded their tattoos with esoteric knowledge so that only other military practitioners would recognize the symbolism.

Lastly, if this is a project that I continue on with the next step I will take is the distribution of this thesis to the community members that I interviewed. During this process I was fortunate enough to talk through my ideas and preliminary conclusions with a handful of community members. However, I believe that sending this thesis out to the participating community members would make sure I have represented them, and the military Nature-Centered community as whole, in a way that they feel is true.

When I first began this project I had several interviewees explain to me that they do not feel as though they are visible to the general military community. While this was an isolating factor practitioners feel a connection to each other in spite of their perceived invisibility, despite the differences, despite sometimes broad differences, in their personal practice. Additionally, the practitioner's chosen spirituality connects them to a community that it is difficult to be a member of because of their belief.

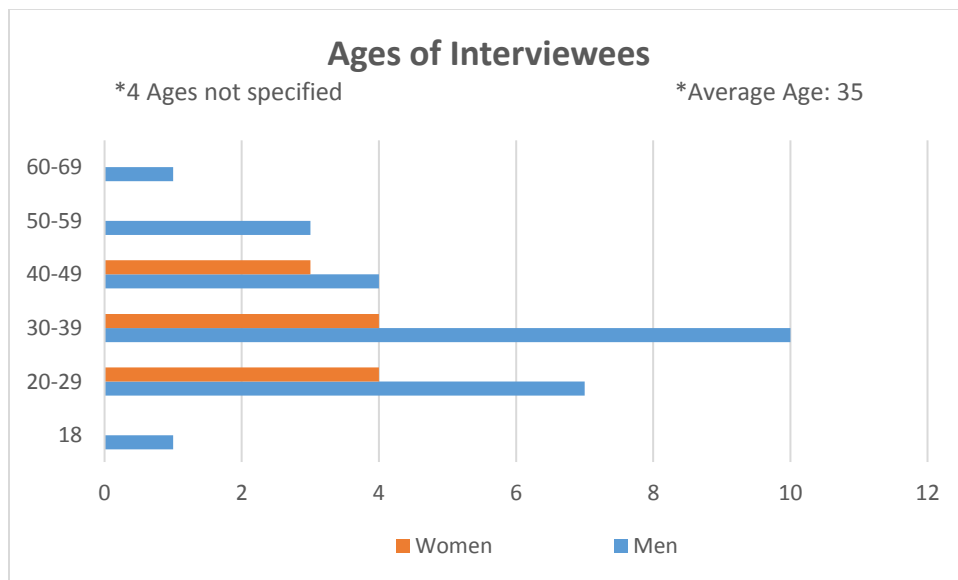
Appendix I:
Interviewees

Name Age, Male/Female	Interview Date Method	Military Branch, Status, Years in	Paygrade, Military Rank	Spiritual Path/Years practiced
Adams 29, M	Phone December 3, 2014	Navy, Active, 4.5 yrs.	E-5, Petty Officer 2 nd Class	Gardnerian Wicca, 8 yrs.
Alex Whisler 24, M	Skype January 30, 2015	Army, Inactive Ready Reserve, 4 yrs.	E-4, Specialist	Earth-Based Paganism, 10 yrs.
A Jane 23, F	Email January 15, 2015	Army, Reserves, 6 yrs.	E-4, Specialists	Draconic Witch, 10 yrs.
Anden Jade 26, F	Phone January 19, 2015	Army, Active, approx. 4 yrs.	O-2, First Lieutenant	Undeclared, interested in Druidry, 10 yrs.
Andrew Lund Not specified, M	Phone January 21, 2015	Army, Reserves, 18 yrs.	E-5, Sergeant	Celtic Pagan, yrs. not specified
Autumn Intomé 21, F	Email January 30. 2015	Air Force, Active, 2 yrs.	E-2, Airman	Wicca, 14 yrs
Carrie Binder 33, F	In-Person February 7, 2015	Dependent, Spouse- Army service member	N/A	Panentheist, 13 yrs.
Cody 21, M	Phone January 19, 2015	Army, Discharged, 2 yrs.	Not Specified	Eclectic/Wicca, 10 yrs
C. Gilmore (omitted), M	Email January 21, 2015	C. asked for this information not to be disclosed because he believed it would be too easy for his superiors to figure out who he was.		
David Oringderff, Dr. 65, M	Skype February 11, 2015	Army, Retired, _	O-4, Major	Greencraft/ Traditional Craft Wicca, approx. 30 yrs.
DMM, 38, F	Skype February 3, 2015	Dependent, Spouse- Army service member (Retired)	N/A	Alexandrian Wicca/Traditional Craft Wicca, 14 yrs.
Donovan 18, M	Phone January 20, 2015	Navy ROTC	N/A	Celtic Polytheism, 4 yrs.
Dreamer 37, F	Skype, January 29, 2015	Marine Corps, Discharged, 7 yrs.	E-5, Sergeant	Non-specific pagan/shamanism, 13 yrs.

Name Age, Male/Female	Interview Date Method	Military Branch, Status, Years in	Paygrade, Military Rank	Spiritual Path/Years practiced
		Army, National Guard, 4 yrs.		
Eddie Black 30, M	In-Person May 10, 2014	Marine Corps, _, 5 yrs. National Guard, Active, _	E-5, Sergeant	Stoicism, not specified
Greenwarden 42, M	Email March 11, 2015	Air Force, Active, 19 yrs.	O-5, Lieutenant Colonel	Pagan/Wiccan, 8 yrs.
Grey Ghost	Email	Dependent	N/A	
Hunwolf 47, M	Phone January 19, 2015	Navy, Retired, 21 yrs.	E-7, Chief Petty Officer	Wiccan, 8 yrs.
Jason Binder, 35, M	In-Person February 7, 2015	Army, Active, 15 yrs.	E-6, Staff Sergeant	Shamanic Wiccan, 22 yrs.
Jessica McDurmon 32, F	Email January 22, 2015	Navy, Active, 13 yrs.	E-5, Petty Officer 2 nd Class	Wicca, Hedge Witch, 15 yrs.
John Idaho 38, M	Phone February 2, 2015	Navy, Active, 14 yrs.	E-7, Chief	Shamanic, 5 yrs.
John Dover 26, M	Skype January 28, 2015	Army National Guard, separated, 6 yrs.	E-4, Specialist	Warrior Wiccan, 5 yrs.
John Rahl 38, M	Email February 18, 2015	Army, Active, 19 yrs.	E-5, Sergeant	Druid, 20 yrs.
Joshua Dery 36, M	Phone January 22, 2015	Army, Active, 18 yrs.	E-6, Staff Sergeant	Wiccan, 15 yrs.
Justin 20, M	Skype January 23, 2015 January 30, 2015	Army, Active, 3 yrs.	E-4, Specialist	Paganism, 2 yrs.
Luke 35, M	Phone February 2, 2015	Air Force, Active, 18 yrs.	E-7, Master Sergeant	Eclectic Wiccan, 22 yrs.
Lynn Wiggins 20s (not specified), F	Skype January 18, 2015	Navy, Active, not specified.	E-4, Petty Officer Third Class	Wicca, not specified.
Maltiok Shiroshi 24, M	Phone Interview	Army, Active, 5 yrs.	E4, Specialist	Neutrality, 14 yrs.

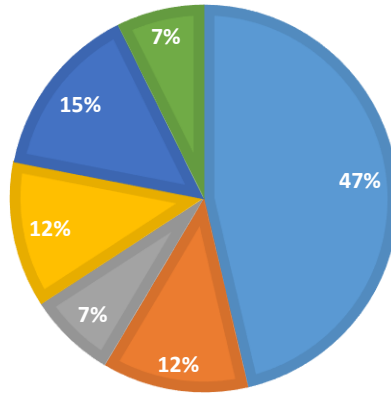
Name Age, Male/Female	Interview Date Method	Military Branch, Status, Years in	Paygrade, Military Rank	Spiritual Path/Years practiced
	February 1, 2015			
Michael Greenwood 34, M	Skype February 1, 2015	Air Force, Active, 15 yrs.	E-5, Staff Sergeant	Wiccan, 20 yrs.
Mike K. 49, M	Phone February 5, 2015	Army, Reserve, 18 yrs.	E-7, Sergeant First Class	Forms of Wicca/Earth Pagan, 20 yrs.
Penny Dex 27, F	In Person March 15, 2015	Army, Discharged, not specified	Omitted	Cascadian, not specified
Rachel Lichtenberger 40, F	Skype February 2, 2015	Dependent, Spouse- Army service member	N/A	Not eclectic but studying: Greek, Celtic, and Druidry, 6 yrs
Randy Banner 35, M	Email January 21, 2015	Army, National Guard, Active, 11 yrs.	E-6, Staff Sergeant	Eclectic Wiccan
R.S. 37, M	Skype January 25, 2015			
Ron Schaefer 59, M	Phone February 4, 2015	Air Force, Retired, 26 yrs.	O-5, Lieutenant Colonel	Wicca, 16 yrs.
Shane Nelson 32, M	In-Person January 30, 2014 June 8, 2014	Army, Medically Discharged, 10 yrs.	E-5, Sergeant	Spiritual Mutt, 18 yrs.
Shay Toretta 42, F	In-Person February 7, 2015	Dependent, Spouse- Army service member	N/A	Witch, 22 yrs.
Tim Denne 22, M	Phone January 26, 2015	Army, National Guard, Reserves, 5 yrs.	E-5, Sergeant	Wicca, 6 yrs.
Tom Zoll 51, M	In Person November 9, 2014	Marines, discharged, 3 yrs. Army, Retired, 21 yrs.	E-6, Staff Sergeant	Non-specific pagan, 6 months
Tony Gatlan 52, M	Phone July 28, 2015	Marine Corps, discharged, not specified Air Force, Retired, not specified Total time in: 29 yrs.	O-5 Lieutenant Colonel	Earth-Based Faiths/Wicca, 16 yrs.

Name Age, Male/Female	Interview Date Method	Military Branch, Status, Years in	Paygrade, Military Rank	Spiritual Path/Years practiced
Trevor Madison 44, M	Skype January 21, 2015	Army, Active, 20 yrs.	E-6, Staff Sergeant	Wiccan, 15 yrs.
Willow 42, F	Skype February 11, 2015	Dependent, Spouse- Army veteran	N/A	Wicca 12 yrs



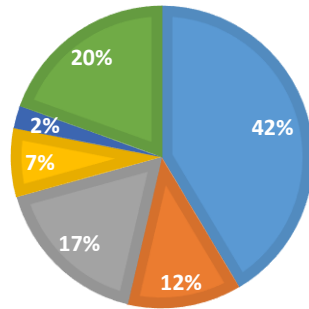
MILITARY BRANCHES OF INTERVIEWEES

■ Army ■ Air Force ■ Marine Corps ■ Navy ■ Dependant ■ Omitted, N/A



MILITARY STATUS

■ Active ■ Reserves
■ Discharged ■ Retired
■ Dependant ■ Other (omitted, not specified)





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