

**Satanism vs. Pseudo-satanism:
Disambiguation and argument against conflation from within Satanism as a New
Religious Movement**

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Abstract

There are numerous diverse forms of Satanism globally in terms of religion, which include theistic, atheistic and even non-theistic forms, and using different archetypes and deistic identities within their beliefs and practices, including Satan, Lucifer and Set, et al.

Numerous examples of “occult experts” exist, who deliberately distort Satanism, Satanic literature, or perceptions of these, in order to conflate Satanism as a new religious movement with the Christian-created self-fulfilling prophecy and archetype of “mythical” or “pseudo-satanism”.

In South Africa, claims of “Satanic Ritual Abuse” are still regarded as the purview of law enforcement in a front-line sense rather than as an issue to be addressed by the mental health profession first and foremost, as is the practice in other countries such as the USA, and UK. Christian clergy holding influential positions within law enforcement have historically worked to separate the perception of Satanism in South Africa from that of other countries, which they describe as “law-abiding” and “harmless”, in order to demonize and persecute local Satanism as “harmful religious practice”, “anti-God” and “a belief system which leads to crime”.

Instead of being interpreted through the lens of mental health as in other countries, alleged “satanic crimes” committed by criminals adopting the “devil made me do it” defenses are instead taken at their word and discussed and interpreted through religious views of an elite religious police “occult related crimes unit”.

From a view internal to Satanism as a new religious movement, the disparities between religious forms of Satanism and the specter of so-called “occult-related crime” as pushed forward by persecutors of Satanism, are glaringly obvious.

In spite of a tendency by supporters of “Satanic Panic” conspiracy theory to conflate religious Satanism and “pseudo-satanism” with each other, the differences between Satanism as a new religious movement and the Christian-created and promulgated tabloid-prophecy-fulfilling myth called “pseudo-satanism” are many and clear, and their origins and adherents exist in a totally separate manner, as discussed in this paper.

In spite of this clarity to those close enough to the subject to perceive these differences for themselves, many others not suitably placed to perceive these differences, seem to have difficulty in separating or differentiating Satanism in its religious forms from the archetype of “pseudo-satanism”. Many even reject attempts to correct the misconceptions and assumptions under which they operate.

Once the clear key differences between Satanism as a NRM and the archetype of “pseudo-satanism” are more widely understood, this could only lead to the end of a perpetually threatening and omnipresent recurrent religious moral panic - the specter of “Satanic Panic” hysteria, elements of which is still evident in South Africa even today.

Keywords: Satanism, New Religious Movements, conflation, pseudo-satanism, satanic-panic, hysteria, misconceptions, satanic ritual abuse, occult related crimes unit, South Africa.

Satanism vs. Pseudo-satanism:

Disambiguation and argument against conflation from within Satanism as a New Religious Movement

For many years, debate has raged around Satanism in the public arena, with the fires of hysteria, suspicion and fearfulness being stoked, heightened and intensified by accusations of ritual abuse in a Satanic sense (Wallace, D. 2006) most prominently when this discourse is prompted by those placing the blame for perceived abuses on Satanism, exacerbated by supporting sensationalist media (e.g. SAPA, 1 November 2011; Beeld, 27 July 2012) and support from within law enforcement agencies (e.g. Breytenbach, J. 25 September 2008; Ross, K. 21 August 2008).

Likely origins of the Christian perception of “Satanism”

Prior to the 20th Century, Satanism as an organized religion did not exist, but was claimed to exist by Christian churches, primarily as an accusation by various Christian groups toward perceived ideological opponents, rather than a self-identity. The terms “Satanism” and “Satanist” first appeared in English and French during the sixteenth century, when they were used by Christian groups to attack rival Christian groups (Medway, G. 2001). In this context, the term “Satanism” was not used to mean that people literally worshipped Satan, but presented the view that through deviating from Christian orthodoxy, they were understood to be influenced by Satan, or “in league with the devil” (Van Luijk, R. 2016).

Perceptions of “Satanism” differed, varied and evolved through the ages, as we will examine.

The idea that an organized cult of Satanists existed to worship the Christian “devil” in secret first emerged during numerous moral panics in Europe during the late Medieval – early Modern periods (Goode, E.; Ben-Yahuda, N. 1991; Jenkins, P. 2004; Sjöberg, R. 1997; Frankfurter, D. 1994).

It wasn’t until the 15th century that an archetype of organized satanic witchcraft began to take root (Bailey, M. July 2, 2020) Bailey adds that “In the 1430s, a small group of writers in Central Europe – church inquisitors, theologians, lay magistrates and even one historian – began to describe horrific assemblies where witches gathered and worshiped demons, had orgies, ate murdered babies and performed other abominable acts.”

Having been presumably raised on a diet of these stories as a child, aged clergyman Heinrich Kramer published *Malleus Maleficarum* (Hammer of Witches) in 1486. This horrific book sold more copies than any other except the Christian Bible until 1678 (Guiley, R. 1989) and was based on the Biblical command in the book of Exodus: “Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live” (Robbins, R. 1959). It was used as guidebook by which inquisitors and judges conducted themselves and which subsequent writers used as a foundation for their own works on the topic of witchcraft and devil worship (Guiley, R. 1989).

In a move eerily reminiscent of evangelicalists in more recent times, 15th century Christian reformers used the idea of a satanic conspiracy working in secret to corrupt Christianity as a realistic perceived threat to rally believers in their call for spiritual revival.

“Over time, more people came to accept this new idea. Church and state authorities kept telling them it was real.” (Bailey, M. 2003).

The harm of this practice of deliberate disinformation may appear self-explanatory, but viewed in the context of the contemporary fall-out, it is truly horrific – around 50,000 people, mostly women, were executed on accusations of witchcraft between the 1400s and 1700s (Bailey, M. July 2, 2020) by Church authorities operating various inquisitions in Western Europe and in European possessions elsewhere. The implication of this is that the incitement and proliferation of a moral panic against “Satanists” by Christians represents a threat of deadly consequences.

Although most European nations gradually ended and outlawed practices related to Inquisitions after the beginning of the 19th century, the last recorded execution of the Inquisition occurred in Spain in 1826, in which a school teacher was garroted for teaching heretical views in class (Law, S. 2011). The last known case of inquisitorial interference took place in 1857, when the inquisitor of Bologna had a six-year-old boy named Edgardo Mortara removed from his Jewish family to be raised as a Catholic (Kertzer, D. 1997).

Beyond this, a healthy, realistic skepticism appears to have returned to the fore in the perception of claims of satanic conspiracy, coupled with the increasingly common practice of adopting a secular approach to law and the interpretation of crime.

The period after the gradual, final ignominious end of the Inquisition’s reign of terror was characterized by a marked increase in personal freedoms, particularly in Western societies, to exercise freedom of religion without fear of being persecuted (or prosecuted) on accusations of “Satanism”. By the early 19th century, fear of and belief in magic as a supernatural phenomenon had been minimized to a point where illusionists once again re-emerged as entertainers, which led to the elevation of stage magic from tricks being performed at fairs to a performance art that the public paid to see at the theatre (Milbourne, C. 1991; Dawes, Edwin A. 1979). Illusionists, commonly referred to as “magicians” or “conjurers” were also not of necessity viewed as “Satanists” or practitioners of witchcraft during this period, although they were sometimes suspected by some of actual supernatural magic.

In this atmosphere of renewed personal freedom, particularly in the USA and Britain for example, many felt safe enough to return to the ancestral beliefs and practices of their ancestors (i.e. folk magic, herbal remedies etc.). This era was characterized by a surge in public interest in occultism, spiritualism and mysticism (Braude, A. 2001; Britten, E. 1884. Freemasonry featured strongly around the turn of the 18th century, expanding around the world with British colonialism through the 19th century (Vicente, F. 2008; Gleaner. 10 December 2017).

It didn’t take very long however, for Freemasonry in particular to become the target of conspiracy theories, which accuse Freemasonry of being “an occult and evil power” (Morris, S. 2006). Some Christian denominations – the Catholic Church (Canon 2335. 1917) and Free Methodist Church (Snyder, H. 2006) and the Orthodox Church of Greece (OCoG. 1933) – to name just a few, had high-profile negative attitudes to Masonry, banning or discouraging their members from being Freemasons, some of which still remain in effect to this day. While the orthodox side of Christianity focuses mainly on matters of heresy and “*beliefs inconsistent with Christianity*”, some Christian critics of Freemasonry, often evangelical

Christians, have fervently insisted that Freemasonry involves the worship of Satan (Chick, J. 2011; Daniels, D. 2011) in contradiction to an enduring absence of proof.

The period after widespread Christian persecution of people for “heresy” under the Inquisition ceased, was characterized by the relatively unhindered emergence of new religious movements (such as reconstructed religions based on extinct religions such as Wicca, founded by Gerald Gardner in 1954). This trend in turn also gave rise to the academic identification and understanding of New Religious Movements as a subject of study called “New Religions Studies” (NRS).

“A new religious movement (NRM), also known as a new religion or an alternative spirituality, is a religious or spiritual group that has modern origins but is peripheral to its society’s dominant religious culture. NRMs can be novel in origin or they can be part of a wider religion, in which case they are distinct from pre-existing denominations. Some NRMs deal with the challenges which the modernizing world poses to them by embracing individualism, while other NRMs deal with them by embracing tightly knit collective means.” (Clarke, P. 2006).

The prevailing academic view of NRMs appears to be that this term should be applied to religions which are more recent in formation than large, well-established religions like Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism, which all date back several thousand years (Oliver, P. 2012). NRMs are believed to number in the tens of thousands worldwide, with most of their members living in Asia and Africa. According to Eileen Barker, most NRMs only have a few members, some of them have thousands of members, and a few of them have more than a million members (Barker, E. 1999).

However, right up until 1966, no religious movement, new or otherwise existed which presented itself as overtly satanic, up to and including the name of Satan in its name to give Christian would-be inquisitors and conspiracy theorists pause – but that was something that was about to change.

The myth seemingly made real – Satanism emerges as a new religious movement

Up until 1966 the satanic conspiracy theory which Christian churches had once used to fill their pews and unite their groups in spiritual revivals had seemed to have had no basis in reality. There were no religious groups known to identify with the image of Satan – but that changed with the founding of the Church of Satan on April 30, 1966 by Anton Szandor LaVey, who is thought to be directly responsible for the genesis of Satanism (Fritscher, J. 2004; Dyrendal, A.; Lewis, J.; Petersen, J. 2016).

Suddenly, Christians were confronted with the news that Satanism had a real presence in the world, a name: “The Church of Satan”, a face – that of the enigmatic Anton Szandor LaVey, an address in San Francisco, and three years later, a “bible” as well. LaVey wrote “The Satanic Bible”, published in 1969 (Lewis, J. 2003). The Satanic Bible was heavily criticized by numerous Christian figures and organizations since its release, and banned in several countries shortly afterwards, including South Africa, where it was banned between 1973 and 1993 (BFFE. 1993), particularly during the 1980’s period of “Satanic panic” (Versluis, Arthur, 2006), by Christian figures (e.g. Harpur, T. 5 March 1989) and by proponents of the belief that “Satanic Ritual Abuse” was related to Satanism as a new religious movement.

Since its emergence as a new religious movement (NRM), Satanism as a milieu identifying as Satanism (Dyrendal, A.; Lewis, J.; Petersen, J. 2016) has been met with consistent and overt hostility from Christians in particular, in the sense that Satanism has been historically reviled and warned against as the embodiment of all that is evil, harmful and portrayed as such in Christian mythos, tradition and scripture (Medway, G. 2001; La Fontaine, J. 2016; Introvigne, M. 2016).

This calls into question the perception of Satanism as a new religious movement held by Christians post-1966. Do they understand it as it explains itself through numerous publications, public statements and appearances of its founders and representatives – or are their perceptions shaped by moral panic and conspiracy theory?

In the early 1980s, the first modern claims of “Satanic Ritual Abuse” which characterized the now familiar “Satanic Panic” appeared with reference to child-care centers. (Charlier, T; Downing, S. 1988; Victor, J. 1993). At first, the alleged perpetrators of such crimes were referred to as “witches”, which was soon supplanted by the term “Satanist” as a favored alternative (La Fontaine, J. 2016). The phenomenon itself came to be called “the Satanism Scare” (La Fontaine, J. 2016) or “Satanic Panic” (Victor, J. 1993).

Jeffrey Victor described the characteristics of the “Satanic Panic”:

“Again and again we are told – by journalists, police, and fundamentalists – that there exists a secret network of criminal fanatics, worshippers of Satan, who are responsible for kidnapping, human sacrifice, sexual abuse and torture of children, drug-dealing, mutilation of animals, desecration of churches and cemeteries, pornography, heavy metal lyrics, and cannibalism. This popular tale is almost entirely without foundation, but the legend continues to gather momentum, in the teeth of evidence and good sense. Networks of ‘child advocates’, credulous or self-serving social workers, instant-expert police officers, and unscrupulous ministers of religion help to spread the panic, along with fabricated survivors’ memoirs passed off as true accounts, and irresponsible broadcast ‘investigations’. A classic witch-hunt, comparable to those of medieval Europe, is under way. Innocent victims are smeared and railroaded.” (Victor, J. 1993).

Satanists suddenly found themselves at the center of law enforcement attention in the USA, and through the power of modern news media, the phenomenon spread like proverbial wildfire, appearing in several other countries as well, including the UK, Australia, and South Africa. The hysteria endured long after the initial and subsequent claims of “Satanic Ritual Abuse” and alleged “occult related crimes” were debunked in the USA (Lanning, K. 1992) and the witch hunts ended.

In the UK, the British government took the problem so seriously, that a study was commissioned to examine the phenomenon. The result was “Speak of the Devil” by Jean La Fontaine, a professor of social anthropology at the London School of Economics. Her report concluded that in Britain there was not a single piece of evidence to suggest that Satan worshippers were involved in any macabre and violent rituals. Similarly, she concluded that survivors’ testimonies were implanted by fanatical therapists. (Duguid, S. 30 July 2004)

In contrast, in South Africa, a special police unit was established in 1992 (Ivey, G. 1997; Falkof, N. 2012; Duguid, S. 30 July 2004) to persecute perceived Satanists, and which

still exists today, albeit in a less aggressive substantially muted form (Teppo, A. 2009; Steven, D. 25 April 2013). This exemplifies a deep penetration of Christian fundamentalism into South Africa's government institutions, most pertinently management of the SA Police Service, even in spite of human rights, equality and freedoms guaranteed by the new post-Apartheid South African Constitution.

As a consequence of this institutionalized hostility towards Satanism in Christian-dominant societies, whatever opposition emerges in response to it, and manifests in the form of attempts to correct misconceptions coming from religious scholars, academics, neopagans, Satanists, and even Christian moderates – is all too often ignored (e.g. SAPRA Feb 26, 2014) and most likely interpreted as attempts to deflect suspicion of criminality by “Satanists” away from themselves, or as attacks on Christianity and its integral focus on the dichotomies of good versus evil – and which might appear motivated to assert that “Satanism does not exist”.

This perception is based upon a misunderstanding – firstly in the misinterpretation of the nature and identity of Satanism, as viewed through the lens of Christian tradition, and secondly, a misinterpretation of the motives of parties attempting to correct misconceptions of Satanism based on the original misunderstanding, as being “hostile to Christianity”.

Organized Christianity is authoritarian, oligarchic and patriarchal in nature (Stopler, G. 2005) which has created the viewpoint that “the church” has the full moral right to criticize and moralize whomever it chooses, but that it is simultaneously above reproach and exempt from criticism itself (SMOCWTCOL, 2004) even from its own members who are morally subject to “pistis”, or “*faith and obedience*” (Williams, S. 1987).

In addition, Christianity has a long history of viewing those external to it with suspicion, as immoral and therefore untrustworthy and treating them with disdain or outright hostility, with the precedential tone set by gradual purges of Paganism from Europe and the wholesale annihilation of Mesoamerican civilizations by the Spanish Conquistadores in the name of Christianity (Hughes, P. 1949; Herrin, J. 2009) to the violent rivalries between different Christian factions and “denominations” (Barker, J. 2003; Gilmour, I. 1988) to say nothing of the Inquisition (Murphy, C. 2012) even up to the present day (Bilhartz, T. 1986).

Modern Christianity has evolved from a history of zealously trying to eradicate opposing beliefs or views, either by eliminating the beliefs, or in a heavy-handed manner, eliminating those who hold them – either by killing or converting them (Hamilton, B.; Amnesty Int'l.; Read, P. 1981).

The implication therefore, is that whatever outsiders have to say about Christian views, beliefs or practices – or how they affect others – would most likely fall on deaf ears. This in turn has had the effect of creating an institutional sensitivity to criticism within Christianity, sometimes referred to as a “*Christian persecution complex*” (Hoover, L. 2015) and also an “*Evangelical persecution complex*” (Noble, A. 2014-08-04).

This is relevant in the sense that, for example, some Christians tend to feel persecuted if prevented by secular law from acting in accordance with their beliefs that LGBT equality for example, is “being forced upon them”. External viewpoints critical of Christian bigotry tends to be categorically rejected and/or viewed as hostile to Christianity based simply on whom – or *perceptions* of whom – such criticism appears to come from.

Often those responding to Christian misconceptions and misunderstandings surrounding Satanism, neopaganism and occult beliefs or practices, might respond understandably with anger and hostility, which doesn't make them or the information they provide wrong, and neither is there ire necessarily unjustified, but it does make it harder for those on the receiving end who are already prejudiced to be objective or receptive to suggestions.

It's therefore understandable that someone who doesn't understand the difference between Satanism and something else which they believe to be "Satanism" might view attempts to rectify their statements or views on "Satanism" as a denial that "Satanism" exists.

There is however, no doubt whatsoever that Satanism exists – that is, post 1966 as a new religious movement. Starting with the registration of the Church of Satan in 1966, there has been a verifiable history of registered Satanist organizations worldwide, which are openly associated with the religious practice of Satanism. In addition to the Church of Satan, numerous other examples exist, such as the Temple of Set (founded in 1975) and most recently, the Satanic Temple (founded in 2013).

What *is* contested however, are claims that "Satanism is a belief system which leads to crime" (Breytenbach, J. 25 September 2008; Ross, K. 21 August 2008) or that Satanism is linked to "Satanic Ritual Abuse" – an archetype which relies on portraying Satanism and Satanists in a harmful light, as dangerous criminals who commit ritual abuses such as pedophilia, rape and animal and human sacrifice in the name of Satan, as well as insinuating support for a global, sinister underground "satanic" conspiracy theory (Lanning, K. 1992) dating back to before the start of the "Satanic Panic".

To place this into a South African context, in 2020, the South African Satanic Church (SASC) co-founded by Adri Norton and Riaan Swiegelaar, was officially registered as a religious organization (NPO: 246-643). The co-founders launched a website and Facebook Page (SASC Website.; SASC FB Page.) and YouTube channel (SASC YouTube Channel) to provide information about Satanism to the South African public in an effort to dispel misunderstandings. Regular public debates between church members and outsiders have been a feature of this effort to educate the public, or to openly answer their questions about Satanism since its founding. The SASC also has a physical office in Century City, Cape Town.

News of the SASC attracted perhaps predictably hostile attention. Hysteria has been a feature evident in most reactions to the SASC, which seems predominantly to emanate from Christians – many of whom reacted badly. In one particular case, a petition was raised against the existence of the SASC (Bhengu, C. June 25, 2020) on the premise that "allowing the church to exist means South Africans are accepting 'evil as something that is good for our society when in fact it is not'" which only serves to illustrate the effects and depth of this misunderstanding around Satanism as a religion.

In another instance later the same year, public threats of death, rape and assault were made against one of the church's clergy (Coetzer, M. Oct 12, 2020) and his family by alleged Christians, apparently without finding any of this behavior inconsistent with the tenets of their own faith. Several photos and videos disclosing the location of the reverend's home were also shared on social media, as though to invite physical harm.

Ironically, those who indulged in this hypocritical behavior seemed unable to grasp, or unwilling to hear explanations that “Satanism” in the context of the Christian doctrine they espoused is dissimilar to Satanism as a New Religious Movement. The explanation for this might well be that this unwillingness or poor ability of these Christians in particular to handle information contradictory to their beliefs, provides an example of “Christian persecution complex” as discussed previously (Hoover, L. 2015; Noble, A. 2014-08-04).

Many of the misconceptions people have of Satanism result chiefly as a consequence of decades of propaganda put forth by Christian figures and organizations alleging the harmfulness of Satanism and claims that “Satanism is a belief system which leads to crime” (Breytenbach, J. 25 September 2008; Ross, K. 21 August 2008). In spite of this there is insufficient evidence to connect the practice of Satanism as a religion with this belief (Lanning, K, 1992) and in South Africa there is a noticeable absence of statistics (Louw, P. 19 March 2013) to qualify the level of attention lavished on the activities of the “Occult Related Crimes Unit” up to the present day, or the hysteria evident in the statements of high-level government representatives discussing Satanism (e.g. Swanepoel, E. 19 March 2013; Davis, R. 23 April 2013).

It is therefore an underlying institutional historical prejudice which defines the Christian misunderstanding and taints its perception of modern Satanists and Satanism as a new religious movement, which goes a long way to explain the ignorance, fear and hostility many Christians express on the topic. Furthermore, if inaccurate – as Satanists themselves insist it is – how can this misunderstanding be corrected and the ambiguity surrounding Satanism be clarified so that everyone can understand *why* it is a misunderstanding?

Background Issues Relevant To The Discussion

In the modern sense – that is in the sense of “Satanic Panic Hysteria”, the majority of fears, superstitions, accusatory statements and materials surrounding Satanism have relied upon a conflation of Satanism with so-called “occult related crime”, which has little or nothing to do with Satanism – but more demonstrably with an artificially created religious hysteria or “moral panic”, more specifically a “satanic panic hysteria”, centered around a related phenomenon called “Satanic Ritual Abuse”.

This phenomenon of “Satanic Ritual Abuse” in itself is troublesome because it relies heavily on conjecture and imagination and the assertion that belief outweighs the need for evidence, the absence of which is habitually ignored, or used to substantiate the idea that some sort of massive well organized conspiracy is at work and trying to cover up its tracks (Lanning, K, 1992); and at the core of which lies the belief that a sinister global underground conspiracy of devil worshipers works to undermine and infiltrate Christian churches, and commit atrocities such as rape and ritual murders.

In the course of playing on the deep-seated fears of many Christians about such a conspiracy, there is a tendency to arbitrarily conflate religious Satanism as a separate New Religious Movement with the traditions, mythos and imagery of the traditional Christian belief regarding the archetype of Satan – in so doing, perpetuating a self-fulfilling prophecy called “pseudo-satanism”.

This provides a point of origin for the misunderstanding perpetuated by those who espouse the belief that Satanism is inexorably linked to so-called “occult-related crime” – in

which they describe “pseudo-satanism” – i.e. not Satanism in the sense of the New Religious Movement, but another identity entirely which was birthed by Christianity.

Who Should Define Satanism, If Not Satanists?

This is an important relevant question which raises a point which for a long time has been evident in the context of the public understanding of Satanism: people who have no visible expertise, qualifications, standing, background or experience *in* religious Satanism or occult practices or beliefs, and with no demonstrable contact or interaction with or participation in occult communities, appear to be actively defining – from *outside* perspectives, and in a generally disdainful, even hostile fashion – how Satanism is to be perceived, regarded and treated by the outside world.

It’s a conspicuous view evident from within Satanism in general that voices in opposition to the negative light in which they are portrayed or associated with criminal activities – in particular those of Satanists themselves, tend to be conspicuously absent, muted, ignored, or portrayed by mainstream academia and religious (particularly Christian) academia, in a manner which lessens their significance or validity – in favor of their own external views.

In the process, adherents of Satanism tend to be portrayed as sinister people, as criminals with a propensity for abusive, even self-destructive behavior, and as having poor moral values. This of course fits neatly within the dogmatic polarized Christian worldview of diametrically opposed opposites, in which Christianity embodies all that is good and that Satanism by virtue of its association with Satan, is adversarial, “blasphemous” and so therefore “obviously” representative of the polar opposite or reverse (Solimeo, S. July 16, 2016; Schock, P. 1995; Schwarz, H. 2001; Griffin, D. 2004). This in part explains why this viewpoint is so readily argued, especially by evangelicalist Christian figures, and so readily accepted by their followers, and propagated by both.

Further, the act of ignoring objections or attempts to correct misunderstandings of Satanism as a new religious movement coming from within Satanism, creates the public impression that Satanists have either not responded to these accusations at all, or that nothing they’ve said is sincere, reliable, or worth repeating – with favor shown to Christian converts claiming to be former Satanists who provide “testimony” containing fodder for their confirmation bias.

The basis for “Satanic Panic” and “Satanic Ritual Abuse” is belief in a vast secret “Satanic conspiracy” – a belief which has been fostered and promoted by Christian religious figures, the lay-public and often too, from within law-enforcement (Lanning, K. 1992) and which takes form as a modern day witch hunt in which government representatives, religious figures and organizations, law enforcement agencies and news-media play a very prominent role in either stoking the flames of hysteria, or in dousing them.

This brings to the fore the importance of who gets to define Satanism as a religion, because this implies that those who control how Satanism is perceived by the public, also have control how the public reacts to Satanism.

This in turn raises the implications of cause and effect – in that when so-called “tabloid prophecy fulfillers” swayed by the prevailing negative portrayals of Satanism put

forth by those who promulgated it, fulfill this self-fulfilling prophecy – where the responsibility and accountability should rest.

Instead of the responsibility for so-called “occult crimes” being laid at the feet of those who created and disseminated a false understanding of Satanism, these crimes are framed to serve as ratification of the belief in satanic conspiracy theories.

This has been the measure so in South Africa as well, and for decades by the SAPS’ “Occult Related Crimes Unit”. This belief – in particular that of the ORCU’s founder, Kobus Jonker (Duguid, S. 30 July 2004) rests on an understanding of “Satanism” which is inconsistent with Satanism as a new religious movement, but which describes what practicing Satanists, occultists, and neopagans (who have also historically been conflated with accusations of “Satanism”) understand as “pseudo-satanism”.

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, South Africa was subjected to a moral panic coupled with hysterical and biased media reporting in which Satanism was portrayed as a large-scale conspiracy of evil involving rape, murder, cannibalism and ritual atrocities involving virgins, animals, and babies (Falkof, N. 2012). “Satanists, South Africans were told, were everywhere, and were as great a threat to their nation as communists.”

The confusion and deliberate conflation of Satanism and “pseudo-satanism” persisted beyond Jonker’s tenure at the SAPS. Colonel Attie Lamprecht, the most recently known commander of this specialized police unit, believes that *“unlike Satanism in other countries which is predominantly about self-worship, Satanism in South Africa is characteristically against Jesus Christ. Therefore, it is against all that is good.”* (Breytenbach, J. 25 September 2008).

This view is problematic for so many different reasons. It is mistaken, firstly because it demonstrates a desire to differentiate Satanism in the South African context from that found abroad in order to justify the unwarranted focus of law-enforcement agencies on a religion which is recognized and legally practiced within South Africa, while drawing on the stereotypical misunderstandings inherent to “pseudo-satanism” and “Satanic Panic” in order to do so.

The most telling of Lamprecht’s statements in this context was to assert that *“although Satanism is not a crime, it is a belief system that leads to crime”*. In spite of this fallacious claim – and three decades of the ORCU investigating so-called “occult related crimes”, the SAPS still has produced no statistics at all to substantiate this view of Satanism as a new religious movement, and it seems, not even shared these with other government departments lingering under misconceptions of the “Satanic Panic” hysteria (Louw, P. 19 March 2013). Are these a closely-guarded secret – or do they simply not exist?

Further, statements of authority made by figures who hold positions of influence such as within secular law enforcement while simultaneously holding influential positions within one or more Christian organizations, creates the impression that these individuals are credible witnesses and “experts” on the topics of crime and criminality – with the implied view that they are relaying believable facts about Satanism.

In setting themselves up as “occult experts” or “experts on Satanism” however, from the perspective of those possessing personal experience in or a working knowledge of

Satanism as a religious movement, these self-appointed “experts” fail utterly to convince. They repeatedly demonstrate an embarrassing and complete lack of working knowledge of Satanism, to the point where they are unable to differentiate between Satanism as a religion and the archetype of “pseudo-satanism”, and this explains why they tend to unwittingly conflate both.

The potential for harm implied by government representatives perpetuating misconceptions of social, ethnic or religious identities (which are protected in the Constitution, Bill of Rights and the Promotion of Equality Act (2000)), in a fearful, hysterical manner as to inflame public fears and sentiments, is enormous, and should be discouraged by any responsible government which has concern for the welfare of its citizens.

Reported Cases Of “Satanism” In Crime In South Africa

While the embers of “Satanic Panic Hysteria” were occasionally fanned back into life by sensationalist news reporting, between 1990 and 2013 a plethora of criminal cases were reported on in South African media as having been related to Satanism, despite the fact that no credible evidence of this ever came to light, including:

1. Gert van Rooyen (Pretoria, 1990)
2. Dawn Orso (Cape Town, 1992)
3. Allison Bothma (Port Elizabeth, 1994)
4. Maurice Smith (East London, 1997)
5. Gunther Walter Brandstetter (East London, 2002)
6. Charles Jacobs (Paarl, 2005)
7. The Lotter case (Durban, 2008)
8. Morne Haremse (Krugersdorp, 2008)
9. Michael van Eck (Welkom, 2011)
10. Kirsty Theologo (Johannesburg, 2011)
11. Overcomers Through Christ ministry (Gauteng, 2012)
12. Kyle Mudaly (2012)
13. Keamogetswe Sefularo (Randfontein, 2013)

These cases were “linked to Satanism” or to “the occult” speculatively in the media, while not a single one provided demonstrable proof that any alleged “satanic conspiracy” existed beyond the activities of those who were held accountable for the crimes, or that these crimes were in any way linked to religious Satanism proper or as a new religious movement.

1. Gert van Rooyen (disappearances of teenage girls, Pretoria, 1990)

In the infamous van Rooyen case, five teenage girls were kidnapped by Gert van Rooyen and his lover Joey Haarhoff, who died in a murder-suicide at the end of a police pursuit in Pretoria in 1990. The bodies of the missing girls were never found, in spite of their home being completely demolished and the land excavated in search of evidence (SAPA¹. SAPA². SAPA³. SAPA⁴. May 13 1996).

When van Rooyen’s son was later charged for the murder of a local girl while he was in military service, he made bizarre claims about his father’s activities. These were investigated and subsequently found to be false.

“Six years were added to his sentence in 2001 for perjury after he made some bizarre claims about his father’s notorious paedophile case. These claims included how his father dissolved the bodies of the girls he kidnapped in acid in a Satanic ritual, the acid supposedly supplied by Flippie from Iscor where he worked at the time.” Dobson, J. (22 April 2008).

2. Dawn Orso (murder, Cape Town, 1992)

In March 1994 the daughter of Dawn Orso, who had been murdered in 1992 Angelique and the daughter’s boyfriend Lawrence van Blerk were convicted of the murder in which the accused adopted a “the devil made me do it” defense. The judge rejected claims that they were acting involuntarily under the influence of demons (Falkof, N. 2012; Beeld, 22 March 1994.). Angelique Orso received an 11-year prison sentence and van Blerk received an 8-year prison sentence.

3. Allison Botha (abduction, attempted murder, Port Elizabeth, 1994)

In December 1994 Alison Botha was abducted, raped, stabbed and disemboweled by Frans du Toit and Theuns Kruger. She was left for dead but survived the attack.

Her attackers were described as “Satanists” in the media. One of the attackers, Du Toit, used the “devil made me do it” defense and said he was “possessed by a demon”. He underwent an “exorcism” in June 1995 in an attempt to prove it, which was also given media publicity. Both accused received life sentences in August 1995 and Satanism was not considered a mitigating factor in their sentencing. (Dunbar, D. 2012; Reddy, T. Dec 02, 2006; IOL. January 17, 2012.)

4. Maurice Smith (murder, beheading, East London, 1997)

In September 1997 Maurice Smith and two schoolboy accomplices murdered and decapitated a homeless man in East London. The schoolboys testified as state witnesses against Smith, who claimed to be a Satanic high priest. Smith said he killed the man to obtain a human skull to give him power. Smith received a 30 year sentence (Duguid, S. 30 July 2004; City Press. January 01, 1998; Mail & Guardian. January 01, 2002). Kobus Jonker, commander of the ORC unit, said this murder “gave the SAPS their first concrete evidence of human sacrifice” in Satanism.

5. Gunther Walter Brandstetter (murder, East London, 2002)

Gunther Walter Brandstetter (21), the murder victim in this case, was one of two brothers involved in the Maurice Smith case. According to police, Brandstetter had a history of being involved in Satanism and was involved in a ritual killing in 1998 with his brother while they were still at school. Neither was prosecuted in that case since they turned state witness. Smith is also described as a “self-confessed high priest of Satan” convicted of the earlier murder (News24. May 06, 2002). Just three days later, the SAPS dismissed the involvement of “Satanism” as playing a role in the killing of Brandstetter (News24. May 09, 2002). No public record exists to indicate whether this murder was ever solved.

6. Charles Jacobs (murder, Paarl, 2005)

On 31 October 2005 (Halloween), a custodian of a Mormon church in Paarl, Charles Jacobs was killed. The scene of his death had been staged as a crucifixion and the word “Satun” [sic] had been written on the floor in blood. Two DVD players were found to have been stolen from the church office.

Although police described the murder as the consequence of a “botched burglary” not an occult related murder, the killing was described as “Satanic” and “occult-style” in the media. None of the four suspects arrested and charged with murder and robbery with aggravating circumstances were convicted for the murder. One of the four suspects was convicted of theft while another was convicted of receiving stolen property, and both received suspended sentences (Breytenbach, K. 8 November 2005; Breytenbach, K. 19 October 2006; Schroeder, F. 20 September 2007; Schroeder, F. 21 September 2007).

7. The Lotter case (murders, Durban, 2008)

Johannes Petrus Lotter and his wife Maria Magdalena Lotter were murdered in their home in Westville, Durban. Shortly afterwards, their daughter and son Nicolette and Hardus and Nicolette’s boyfriend Mathew Naidoo, were arrested. The accused expressed a desire to mount a defense of being under the influence of Satanism, but in 2009 another sibling, Christelle Lotter, dismissed these claims. The murder trial commenced in October 2011, and involved references to God, the Bible, Satanism, a tokoloshe, demons and witchcraft, at the end of which, in March 2012 all three accused were convicted of the murder. Nicolette was sentenced to two 12-year concurrent prison sentences. Hardus received two 10-year concurrent prison sentences. Mathew Naidoo, whom the siblings said they believed to be the “third son of God” was found to be the mastermind by the judge, and received two life sentences. The judge said that a belief in witchcraft and the occult could not be used as an excuse for people to escape liability for their crimes (Broughton, T. 12 March 2009; Rousseau, J. 23 November 2011; News24. 19 March 2012).

8. Morne Harmse (murder, assault, Krugersdorp, 2008)

A teenage boy, Morne Harmse (18) took a sword to his Krugersdorp school, and killed fellow pupil Jacques Pretorius and injured several others. Several things done and said by Harmse during or shortly after the attack were seized upon by police and media to portray Harmse as a Satanist and his actions as a “satanic crime”, namely that during the attack he wore a mask resembling one worn by the lead singer of the band Slipknot. He also is alleged to have told witnesses that Satan had told him to carry out the attack.

Harmse’s parents claimed he’d been the victim of school bullying and remarked that “it seemed he had experimented with Satanism”. Speculation about a Satanic motive was dismissed as simplistic by an SAPS psychologist, and during early court proceedings it was revealed that the teen had told a doctor a ghost had told him to become a Satanist. In his subsequent admission of guilt to murder and attempted murder Harmse said he’d done it to make an impression. Kobus Jonker later testified as expert witness the evidence did not suggest he was a Satanist. Harmse received a

20-year prison sentence in September 2009 (Foss, K. 2 September 2009; Langer, M. September 10, 2009).

9. Michael van Eck (murder, Welkom, 2011)

Michael van Eck was murdered in a Welkom graveyard by Chane van Heerden and Maartens van der Merwe. Danie Krügel, a former police officer and founding member of AUKSANO (a spiritual warfare/deliverance ministry featuring several former SAPS ORC members) labeled the murder as “Satanic”. Welkom police spokesperson Stephen Thakeng, who is also an ordained Christian minister, said gruesome discoveries on the couple’s property confirmed the police’s suspicion about their involvement in Satanism.

In contrast, people close to the couple testified that they were Christians and denied any link to Satanism. The Satanism link was later dismissed by expert witnesses and van Heerden herself during her trial. An SAPS psychologist testified that aspects of the murder indicated it was a “psychologically motivated crime”. Van Heerden was declared a dangerous criminal and received a minimum prison sentence of 20 years, to be re-evaluated after 20 years. Van der Merwe, a 24-year-old high-school dropout who had reportedly been diagnosed with schizophrenia as a teenager, received a life sentence (News24. (November 21, 2011; Allan, E. 8 July 2011).

10. Kirsty Theologo (murder, Johannesburg, 2011)

In October 2011 two teenage girls were seriously injured after being doused with gasoline and set on fire. One of the girls, 18 year old Kirsty Theologo died from her injuries a week later. The incident was described as a “Satanic ritual” in the media, and six youths aged 16 to 23 were charged with murder and attempted murder.

In 2012, two 18-year-old boys, one of whom was the son of a Christian pastor, entered into a plea bargain with the state in return for a 17-year prison sentence, five years of which was suspended. In the trial of the four other accused, it emerged that the ritual, which was described as a “sacrifice” based on it being seen as described that way in magazines, was based on a Bible verse with “Satanic elements” added later.

A defense attorney revealed that Theologo’s friends were curious about Satanism but did not really understand what it entailed. In November 2013 Lindon Wagner and Robin Harwood were convicted of assault, murder and attempted murder. Wagner was sentenced to life imprisonment for Theologo’s murder plus 18 years’ imprisonment for attempted murder, while Harwood was sentenced to 20 years’ imprisonment for Theologo’s murder (Moeketsi, S. 25 April 2013; City Press. February 12, 2014).

11. Overcomers Through Christ ministry (murders, Gauteng, 2012)

Between July 2012 and October 2012, two women and a male pastor with links to “Overcomers Through Christ” (OTC) a spiritual warfare/deliverance ministry, as well as one of the women’s neighbors, were stabbed to death. Friends and the media speculated that the deaths were linked to “Satanism”. One of the women victims was an OTC trainer who converted Satanists to Christianity and worked with alleged

former Satanists. This was explored as a motive for the killings by the media. Later, in December 2017, six members of OTC were arrested for the four murders and also in connection with another seven murders believed to have been committed by the group. The killings turned out to be the result of a factional split within OTC members (Hosken, G. October 12, 2012; News24. July 27, 2012; van Zuydam, L. July 28, 2012; Steenkamp, T. (December 10, 2017).

12. Kyle Mudaly (suicide, 2012)

After the suicide of Kyle Mudaly (16) a black hexagram found on his bedroom wall fueled media speculation that a “satanic cult” might have been somehow involved in his death. The boy’s parents insisted that Kyle had been a practicing Christian, but this didn’t stop the media from parading text-book “pseudo-satanist” myths and drawing on the fantasies of Kobus Jonker in articles covering this case.

“These parents suspect their children could be involved in satanic activity or cults. Their fears should be taken seriously,” [Jonker] said. “Satanism is a reality. People must not shy away from it.” (Nair, Y. 7 September 2012).

“Jonker said the six-pointed star with a circle around it was a ‘witchgram’ used to mock Jews and Christians.

‘It’s a very powerful symbol used at witch festivals when they use white magic, and they use it to evoke the spirits. They make blood sacrifices and pacts with the demons and they drink the blood to get power,’ Jonker said.

‘Sometimes close to exams they believe they can evoke the spirit to help them and of course if they strike luck and do well they will do it more and it could end up in tragedy. It is all about choices in life. It’s a wrong choice and it can kill you,’ Jonker said.” (Comins, L. September 15, 2012).

These fantastical “rituals” and practices might exist within “pseudo-satanism”, but there is no such practice within Satanism as a religion. And to finally settle the argument, there is no Satanic church or organization in South Africa which will accept children under 18, or in some cases, under 21, as members – so how can anyone claim with apparent authority, that a group of children acting out pop-culture rituals that have nothing to with Satanism as a religion, is conclusive proof of Satanism?

13. Keamogetswe Sefularo (murder, Randfontein, 2013)

A 14-year-old girl, Keamogetswe Sefularo from the Mohlakeng township in Randfontein was fatally stabbed on her way home from school by a 15-year-old girl from the same school. Before dying, Sefularo allegedly told her mother her attacker and two others present had said they were attacking her because “*she hung out with Satanists*”. Other family members alleged the attackers had declared they were Satanists, and the stabbing incident and attackers were labeled “Satanic” in the media.

Police found no evidence of a Satanic group or occult-related crime in the area. In October 2013 the teenage accused confessed to the murder and said she committed the murder to be promoted within a cult after Sefularo had decided to leave the cult, and that she had been attracted to the cult by the prospect of financial gain. She was

sentenced to 10 years suspended for 2 years (Louw, P. March 06, 2013; SAPA. October 11, 2013).

“They are part of a Satanic clan. They call themselves devil worshippers or something like that. Part of their initiation from their leader is that they must kill someone, drink their blood and probably, if they can, get a body part and bring it to him.” (Flanagan, L.; Mtshali, N. (March 05, 2013).

This again fits the “Satanic Ritual Abuse” stereotype endemic to the mythical form of “pseudo-satanism” created by Christian hysteria and conspiracy theories, and demonstrates nothing at all in common with Satanism as a religion.

Rather, these cases together serve to demonstrate that the beliefs of investigators and sensationalist reporting combined to create a link between straight-forward crimes and perceived “satanism” in the minds of the public, even in cases which were later announced to have “no relation to the occult” i.e. Mudalay and Jacobs, while in others the perception was created that these crimes were motivated on the grounds of the victims or perpetrators involvement in Satanism (Van Rooyen, Orso, Botha, Brandstetter, Lotter, Smith, van Eck, Haremse, Theologo, Sefularo), when on closer inspection the issue of relevance is “pseudo-satanism” and “legend tripping”. In at least three separate examples (Botha, Lotter, and Smith) this false impression was strengthened by the accused employing a “the devil made me do it” defense to contest or mitigate charges against them.

Further, and of equal importance, it is evident in such cases in which the accused claim to have been “Satanists” in order to adopt a legal defense of reduced culpability or in order to mitigate sentencing, that these individuals suffer from the same sort of general misunderstanding of Satanism as a religion both in the acts of a) committing crimes, and b) in pleading for leniency when being held accountable.

It’s important to realize, given the urgency with which the idea that “Satanic Ritual Abuse” and satanic conspiracy theory should be more readily viewed as a realistic danger as put forward by Christian critics of Satanism, that in the span of three decades concerning crimes purportedly involving “Satanism”, there is a distinct shortage of evidence in terms of legal precedents to support this view.

What does exist, by contrast, is the complete opposite – a litany of cases spanning thirty years, demonstrating the use of “pseudo-satanism” to scapegoat religious Satanism for horrific criminal acts committed by people whose beliefs, influences and allegiances at the time had nothing to do with Satanism.

The matter of who is telling the truth about Satanism, or more to the point, who is to be believed over whom – lies at the core of the public perception of Satanism and so-called “occult related crimes” – external voices posing as “experts” in a NRM in which they have no quantifiable intrinsic expertise – or representatives of Satanic religious organizations and churches, who present the tenets of their beliefs publicly for inspection?

Refutations By Religious Material And Prominent Leaders In Satanism

The conflation of Satanism proper and “pseudo-satanism” becomes all the more absurd when viewed in the context of religious materials, writings and philosophies in use

within Satanism. There is a stark absence of elements which hysterics claim Satanism is all about – such as infiltrating and undermining Christian churches, kidnapping, pedophilia, or animal or human sacrifice.

There is nothing in contemporary Satanic literature, convention or beliefs in the mainstream which requires these things on the part of Satanists. It simply does not exist.

Statements From Within Satanist Religious Material

The main and perhaps obvious answer to the question of why it doesn't exist, is because it goes against the grain of foundational Satanic beliefs such laid out in pertinent guides to Satanism such as "The Satanic Bible", "The Satanic Rituals", "Satan Speaks!", etc. as written by Anton LaVey.

"Satanism does not advocate rape, child molesting, sexual defilement of animals, or any other form of sexual activity which entails the participation of those who are unwilling or whose innocence or naïveté would allow them to be intimidated or misguided into doing something against their wishes." (LaVey, A. 1969) "The Satanic Bible", Page 38).

While the voice of Anton Szandor LaVey and the Church of Satan is arguably the loudest definitive voice within modern Satanism, although admittedly it does not define or represent *all* Satanists since not all Satanists are atheistic, it clearly enshrines the protection of children and animals – the two main go-to's for those swept up in accusations of "Satanic Panic Hysteria".

Aside from "The Satanic Bible" there are other similar works written by Satanists (e.g. "The Satanic Narratives: A modern Satanic Bible" and "The Satanic Praxis: Living the Narratives" by Damien Ba'al, "The Happy Satanist: Finding Self-Empowerment" by Lilith Starr, L., and "The Satanic Scriptures" by Peter Gilmore et al. to name just a few) which serve to describe and embellish on the framework of Satanic beliefs, practices, rituals and ideology, both in a theistic sense as well as in the atheistic sense, and which – most importantly – do not advocate criminal activities in the context of "Satanic Ritual Abuse".

Theistic Satanist, Diane Vera, addresses harm to animals and children in "Introduction To Satanism":

"In what there is of a Satanist subculture (for serious occultists), nobody advocates sacrificing animals or babies, sexually abusing children, or other horrific activities described in fundamentalist propaganda." (Vera, D. 2006).

Criminals-in-the-name-of-Satan, she asserts, are likely to have derived their ideas from pop-culture images of Satanism or from the perceptions created by "Satanic Panic" scaremongers, rather than from any actual Satanist tradition.

It is clear from this that a system of ethics enshrining the inviolability of children and animals and condemning unwanted sexual advances towards others is clearly established in the writings used within Satanism – a fact borne out in the widespread distribution, discussion and use of these writings within Satanism. Furthermore, access to these published Satanic scriptures is not restricted to Satanists, but is available to anyone.

A Failure To Understand In Spite Of Easy Access

So then, in spite of this ease of access to material which broadly defines and describes Satanic beliefs and practices, why are so many people seemingly unable to recognize “Satanic conspiracy” claims as fraudulent? The two most likely reasons for this is that Christians discourage each other from reading occult material, or buying it for fear that they might support Satan financially, or probably even that they might invite ‘demonic possession’. Many Christians adopt the viewpoint that they “don’t need to know” what Satanist literature contains on the assumption that their clergy will relay this to them accurately.

Consequently, not many Christians – or in point of fact many non-Satanists – are well-versed or knowledgeable about Satanism as a religion at all. The main reason why so few seem able to tell fact apart from fiction when exposed to misinformation about Satanism, it can be inferred, is that it would take a level of personal experience, knowledge and involvement in Satanist religion to be able to realize this.

Those who made accusations of rape, kidnapping, human trafficking, human or animal sacrifice against Satanism as a religion, have historically failed to objectively demonstrate the worth of these accusations or a tangible connection to Satanism as a religion (Lanning, K. 1992). Further, those who made up their receptive audience, in the sense of having no background in religious Satanism to draw on either, lacked this knowledge as well and were unable to form an accurate conceptualization of Satanism, rendering them susceptible to misunderstanding.

This in itself serves to illustrate the inherent dangers of the hysteria surrounding conspiracy theories and claims of “Satanic Ritual Abuse”, in that sentiments are swayed against Satanism and religious diversity in a manner which results in illegal and dangerous behavior, including the issuing of threats of violence, death and physical and psychological intimidation (Coetzer, M. Oct 12, 2020).

This paradigm by which individuals use their self-described status as “occult experts” to perpetuate misconceptions and distortions of Satanism could be compared to a geologist preaching about the “evils of immunology”, while having no first-hand experience or knowledge about the subject, to an audience of novice geologists who also have no experience in that subject either.

The Abuse, Distortion & Suppression Of Satanic Literature

Numerous examples of “occult experts” deliberately distorting Satanic literature, or perception of Satanic Literature, and also of ignoring or dismissing it outright, exist.

Kobus Jonker for example, authored and co-authored several books on Satanism during his police career which Danielle Dunbar describes as “alarmist anti-Satanist literature” (Dunbar, D. 2012) in which deliberately distorted notions of Satanism were presented as fact. Jonker was known for deliberately conflating Satanism with other occult religions such as neopaganism (Wallace, D. 2006). Although Jonker apparently expressed acknowledgement that Satanism in the USA and UK was not inherently criminal in nature (Duguid, S. 30 July

2004) he worked to portray Satanism in South Africa as being uniquely inseparable from criminality.

South African pastor, Adele Neveling serves as a prime example to demonstrate this point, having used her claims of being a “former Satanist” to rise to fame in Christian circles, and to build a “deliverance ministry” focusing on Satanism (Bradbury, N. 2018). Two books in Afrikaans, one translated into English), and aimed at teens and young adults, retell Neveling’s claims of “Satanic Ritual Abuse” appeared in 2014 (Van Nieuwerk, F; Geldenhuys, C.; et al. 2014) and (Van Nieuwerk, F; Swart, U; et al. 2014).

Also during 2014, Neveling is described as a “police consultant” in so-called “occult crime” in an article (Scarcella, F. Aug 5, 2014) in which she spouts the most outrageous bullshit imaginable, which appears to be taken at face value.

“‘The relevance to satanism in the Pennsylvania case is that important satanic dates are usually dictated by **the satanic calendar**, but each satanist’s birthday is also regarded as an important day in satanic celebrations,’ Neveling said Thursday. ‘It can include anything from blood and sex rituals to death rituals.’”

Here Neveling refers to the so-called “occult calendar” – a device not created by Satanists, but by Christian activist the late David Balsiger in 1988 (The Alternative Religions Forum, 2013) – which has so many flaws that it is at best, nonsensical. So flawed is it, that it lists Christian holy days as “satanic” and flagrantly conflates days of significance to multiple religions with “satanism” and days upon which “Satanists” (or witches, depending on which version is in circulation) alternately commit ritual murder, prepare to abduct victims for human sacrifice, make animal sacrifices, or indulge in sex orgies while somehow finding time to live outwardly ordinary lives.

This example provides a clear demonstration of the use of “pseudo-satanic religious material” – material claimed to be used within Satanism but which was fabricated by Christian anti-Satanism activists themselves, and used in order to lend credence to attempts to turn virtually any crime into “occult-related crime” in the minds of attentive law enforcement or the public, simply by virtue of the date on which it occurred. It’s important to note this, because no such material is to be found within Satanism (The Alternative Religions Forum, 2013).

But Neveling’s absurd claims didn’t end there.

“‘*Only people who are really serious about satanism own a copy of ‘The Satanic Bible,’ Neveling said.*” (which is about the only thing she said which is even remotely true – even if she clearly doesn’t understand that, but then she went on to demonstrate even more of her ignorance about Satanism by adding “‘*The weapon of choice in satanism is a sword. However, if a sword can’t be used, then a long knife, cane or staff may be substituted, according to ‘The Satanic Bible.*’”

It’s very clear here that Adele Neveling tried to justify the absurd belief that Satanists practice ritual human sacrifice by saying “The Satanic Bible” prescribes what implements should be used to commit murder!

All of this, while conveniently not mentioning or not knowing for herself – that “The Satanic Bible” by Anton Szandor Lavey she pointedly referred to in totality voids every absurd and

outrageous claim she has ever made about Satanism and her self-claimed “expertise” as a “former Satanist”!

LaVeyan Satanism is atheistic, therefore there is no “blood-thirsty” deity in atheistic Satanism to demand sacrifice – and furthermore, if anyone (including most especially Adele Neveling) made the effort to read “The Satanic Bible” themselves, they would see that it expressly opposes abuses against animals and children, unwanted sexual advances and physical violence towards others!

How could Neveling – as an “expert in Satanism”, as she claims to be, possibly not know that?

By September 2014, the “Craigslist Killers” referred to in the case Neveling had offered her “expertise” in muddying the waters on, were convicted on one murder without allegations of “Satanism” playing any apparent role. Nor did law enforcement find any evidence to substantiate Miranda Barbour’s claims that she had killed more than 22 people, or that she had belonged to a Satanic cult in Alaska. Miranda Barbour was described as “a compulsive liar” by her family, while her husband and co-accused described her as being “possessed by a demon”. Both she and her husband were convicted and received life sentences without the possibility of parole. (Gilger, M. 17 February 2014; Theriault Boots, M. February 18, 2014; BBC News. 18 September 2014).

In 2020, Rev. Riaan Swiegelaar, co-founder of the South African Satanic Church made a video in which he highlights and discusses the inconsistencies in claims made by Adele Neveling (married surname, Vrey) regarding her supposed personal involvement in Satanism.

In examining the timeline given by Neveling herself in her various statements and her books, Swiegelaar stated:

“If indeed Adele was ever a Satanist, she must have been between the ages of 15 and tops, 21 at the time. So that also brings another question to mind...” “...How does devil worship get perceived by a child? Of the ages 16, 17, 18? To ask ‘is this legitimate Satanism?’ As you all know – or don’t know – that any Satanic organization, or church, international – not just us (SASC) – will not take any members younger than 18, sometimes younger than 21 years of age. These claims of Satanists then targeting the youth are also false, and again, Christian propaganda.” (Swiegelaar, R. May 6, 2020).

In contradiction to her claims of having been a Satanist, her story and the inconsistencies therein wholly contradict everything which Satanism as a religious movement describes itself as, or stands for, and the only logical conclusion must be that her recollections and subsequent “spiritual war on Satanism” are based upon a complete misconception – and in fact, a case of mistaken identity.

Although these sorts of inconsistencies and incongruities are not unique to Neveling, her work certainly provides a good recent example of a tendency demonstrated by Christian figures hostile to Satanism to reject the value of Satanic religious material, which could prove useful in improving the understanding of Satanism among Christians.

In spite of Satanic beliefs, practices and refutations to “Satanic Panic” hysteria being within reach of the curious in the form of religious material used by Satanists, this material has been actively suppressed, with a prominent tendency to distort it, misrepresent it, quote it out of context, or ignore it entirely.

Satanism And Pseudo-satanism: Disambiguation

Many people who are made aware that the “satanism” they were taught to believe in is “pseudo-satanism”, in particular Christian scholars and clergy and laypersons, seem to have difficulty in separating or differentiating Satanism in its religious forms from the archetype of “pseudo-satanism”.

Those who struggle to understand this difference (or that there *is* a difference) can be at first forgiven for it – primarily because it inverts many people’s predefined concept of the world around them. Why would any good person identify with (in their view) all that is evil?

In working to understand why this is, it’s necessary to briefly discuss religious Satanism, which I will do here in a general, broad sense.

What is Satanism?

There are numerous diverse forms of Satanism globally in terms of religion, with at least five identified by the Alternative Religions Forum (“Satanism: The Acid Test”, 2013) which include theistic, atheistic and even non-theistic forms, and using different archetypes and deistic identities within their beliefs and practices, including Satan, Lucifer and Set, et al.

While by no means representative of Satanism as a whole, LaVeyan Satanism (founded by Anton LaVey in 1966) is the most familiar group within atheistic Satanism, which is probably the most well-known form of Satanism. Atheistic Satanism uses the character of “Satan” as an allegory for the empowerment of the self. In atheistic Satanism, the self is the central deity or “higher power”.

LaVeyan (and atheistic) Satanism in the modern sense grew out of the founding of the Church of Satan in 1966, and is generally characterized with a familiarity with LaVey’s writings and philosophies, being chiefly “The Satanic Bible”, which is also viewed as important in other atheistic Satanist groups, such as “Independent Satanism”, “Spiritual Satanism” and “Symbolic Satanism” to varying degrees. It’s also not unheard of to find LaVey’s tome in use in some theistic Satanist circles.

In terms of theistic Satanism as a distinct group within Satanism – that is, Satanism which venerates the character of Satan as a deity and an actual extant being, there are organizations which are as prominent within theistic Satanism as LaVeyan Satanism is within the arena of atheistic Satanism. In the case of theistic Satanism, there is the Temple of Set, founded by Michael Aquino in 1975 in Santa Barbara.

The Temple of Set (ToS) uses a religious scripture called “The Book Of Coming Forth By Night”, which was written by Aquino himself at the founding of the organization, followed by numerous others, including “The Temple of Set”. The philosophy of the Temple of Set, which is based upon the writings of Aquino, may be summed up as “enlightened individualism”: enhancement and improvement of oneself by personal education, experiment,

and initiation. Set is an ancient Kemetic or Egyptian god, which is equated to be an aspect of Satan or Lucifer.

In either case, theistic or atheistic, Satanism is a philosophy which focuses on self-development and which promotes the taking personal responsibility for one's own actions while foregoing all the oppressive puritanical guilt and piety which Satanists believe deprives Abrahamic religions of a fuller happier life. This is another reason why people who cry "the devil made me do it" are viewed with such incredulity by Satanists.

Even in a theistic sense, where theistic Satanists revere the character of Satan as a real, extant deity and living being, he is viewed as a champion of the downtrodden, a helper of humanity (Aquino, M. 1975), which clearly contradicts "reverse-christian" portrayals of Satan/ Lucifer/ Set et al. as a blood-thirsty deity demanding human lives and blood as offerings of supplication.

Satanism as a religion reveres children and abhors violence directed towards both children and animals – this is evident in "The Satanic Bible" written by Anton Levy, among other writings central to Satanism, both theistic and atheistic. To claim that a legitimate Satanist would conduct animal or human sacrifices – especially to bring harm to a child – demonstrates an embarrassing ignorance about Satanism.

What is Psuedo-satanism?

Pseudo-satanism is also otherwise referred to as "mythical satanism", "Hollywood Satanism", "legend tripping", "tabloid prophecy fulfillment" and "reverse-christianity".

Pseudo-satanism can be forthrightly described as an identity based upon the Christian belief that people who identify as Satanists worship the Judeo-Christian character of Satan as a literal deity and ascribe to beliefs that Satan demands animal and human sacrifice in return for rewards of wealth, power or other favors, and are inspired by portrayals of these beliefs in popular culture and media in a way which appeals to impressionable teenagers and mentally compromised individuals, all coming together to act out a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Pseudo-satanism is at its very core "reverse-christianity" because its beliefs and actions are literally based on the polar opposites of Christian tenets, symbolism and ritual.

The upside-down cross popularized in pop-culture as a "satanic symbol" is a prime example of this notion in that its physical inversion – to the pseudo-satanist – signifies an inversion of the meaning of the upright cross in Christianity, being salvation from sin. Similar "reverse-christian" practices such as reciting the Lord's Prayer backwards, belief in a Satanic "black book of death" in contradiction to the Christian "book of life", idolizing heavy metal bands such as Slipknot, ACDC and KISS, drawing pentagrams on things, vandalism, or wearing black clothes, or having black candles in their bedroom – and indulging in shocking behavior precisely for its shock value, all serve the same purpose in the "pseudo-satanist" archetype.

This touches on the key issue inherent to pseudo-satanism – that of an unfamiliarity of alleged "Satanic Ritual Abuse Survivors" with beliefs, practices, symbolism and terminology used within Satanism. The terminology presented by "former satanists" (for example, local evangelist Adele Neveling) is inconsistent with Satanism. Like Neveling, other self-described

“occult abuse survivors” describe alleged “satanic” groups they claim to have belonged to as “covens”.

“Coven” is not a term typically used by Satanists, locally or internationally, to describe a Satanist group. The Satanic Church of South Africa uses the term “chapter” to describe a regional part of its membership within South Africa. In contradiction, Neveling uses the word “coven”, mispronounced as “coh-vin”, to describe her involvement in “satanism”.

Looking back further than the 2020 founding date of the SASC also reveals no sign of the word being used by Satanists belonging to religious organizations within Satanism. The Church of Satan (established in the USA in 1966 and which has a global membership) for a short time (in the 1960’s) used terms like “grotto” and “pylon” to differentiate between home groups of CoS members and their broader regional hierarchy, but this practice was ended by LaVey himself. It was reinstated briefly in 1995, but quickly fell away again. (The Alternative Religions Forum, 2013). The Church of Satan has no official groups or chapters, just individual members who identify with the church itself.

In the case of neopagan religious groups in South Africa, “coven” is often used by Wiccans, although not exclusively. Some groups use names which evoke nature, such as “circle of” or “grove” etc. (The Alternative Religions Forum, 2013).

The only people who claim to be Satanists who use “Coven” to describe the groups to which they belong are believers in “satanic conspiracy theory” – those who begin the aforementioned circle – and those who close it. People like Neveling – “tabloid prophecy fulfillers” – who close the circle, and in her case, as a propagator of conspiracy theory, begin it again.

To further demonstrate this lack of working knowledge of Satanism in “SRAS”, the inverted cross so clearly “linked” to Satanism is not a satanic symbol at all. Rather, it is the Cross of St. Peter (the Petrine Cross) and is associated with the martyrdom of Peter the Apostle. (Rest, Friedrich). The Catholic tradition holds that when sentenced to death, Peter requested that his cross be upside down, as he felt unworthy of being crucified in the same manner as Jesus. The Petrine Cross is also associated with the papacy to indicate that the Pope is the successor of Peter as Bishop of Rome. It is purely a Christian symbol, yet it is misidentified by believers in “satanic panic” as a Satanic symbol in a way in which those using it are portrayed as “genuine” Satanists.

The use of inverted crosses is common. You can buy them off Wish in all shapes, sizes and colors. Many people wear these as jewelry, or draw them on walls or school desks – but that is more likely for shock value, and because the image of the upside down cross has become so associated with Satanism through the weight of material creating the archetype of pseudo-satanism. In the face of this, the question “are those who wear it actually Satanists?” is often dismissed out of hand, because this tends to be taken for granted. In reality, it’s highly unlikely that a Satanist would wear this device, because to a Satanist, doing so it would imply that “they aren’t worthy” – and since Satanism is a hedonistic philosophy of self-importance and self-glorification, this would be incongruous with Satanism.

It's far more credible that pseudo-satanists act out these behaviors and adopt these practices and symbols because they understand them as defining Satanism and being integral to it.

Much of this sort of behavior – often referred to by Christian clergy and historically by law enforcement during the “Satanic Panic” as “things to look out for” in helping parents to determine if their child is “dabbling in the occult” – is also key in helping to identify the source of “pseudo-satanism” and its most likely origin – that of teenage rebellion.

Deon Maas, a former columnist for the Rapport wrote an article in November 2007 entitled “666 is net ‘n syfer” (“666 is just a number”) in which he stated:

“In terms of religion, Satanism has always received the short end as far as the media is concerned. Simultaneously, it has been the best friend Christians ever had in that it has kept the Church open for business. The power of attraction thereof, especially to teenagers, is naturally that it is the necessary head-on collision with the ideas propagated by their parents and therefore presents such an attractive option.” (Maas, D. 2007).

On a related note, for interest's sake, Deon Maas was fired shortly afterwards as a direct result of a conservative Christian reaction to his article – in a country in which freedom of religion (including Satanism) is guaranteed in the Constitution.

Why Pseudo-satanists are called “Tabloid Prophecy Fulfillers”

The premise being put forth in the explanation of “pseudo-satanism” is that impressionable individuals – including teenagers, those who do not understand the underlying archetypes, and likely also people suffering from mental illness – are attracted to the mythos of “satanism” being so readily provided to them in warnings coming from perceived authority figures such as the police, in churches, and in the media.

This implies that a cycle begins, in that impressionable people who believe warnings about “satanism” (pseudo-satanism) adopt the presented archetype and act out what they've been told is expected of “satanists”; later, when pseudo-satanists are brought to light in sensational media reporting, the originators of the warnings about “satanism” feel vindicated, stoke the hysteria some more, and the cycle repeats (The Alternative Religions Form, 2012). The Alternative Religions Forum also describes a “Satanic Ritual Abuse Hysteria Triangle” based upon the fire triangle used in fire-fighting to illustrate the circular relationship between heat, oxygen and fuel in order for a fire to exist. In order to starve a fire, one or more of these items needs to be removed. In the case of “Satanic Ritual Abuse Hysteria” ignorance, fear and blame ensure the continuation of “Satanic Ritual Abuse Hysteria”:

- “In order for there to be a Satanic Ritual Abuse hysteria, there must be:
- 1) IGNORANCE of occult religions, absence or distortion of facts or educational material, or an institutionalized refusal to accept facts, clarifications or educational material by occult religions about occult religions.
 - 2) FEAR that adherents of occult religions commit crimes incorrectly attributed to occult religions or followers as part of their religious observances.

3) BLAME – the scapegoating and placing of blame for perceived problems on occultists by hostile groups, biased & false reporting, fear and lack of knowledge (ignorance).”

Like the fire triangle, in order to break the vicious circle of “Satanic Ritual Abuse Hysteria”, one or more of these factors needs to be mitigated or removed.

Opinions in support of the idea that pseudo-satanism appeals to impressionable people exposed to misinformation was corroborated by secular activist Jacques Rousseau who said “Having said that, we are talking about confused people, so it is entirely possible that some poor kid could swallow the version of Satanism (or the typically vague ‘occult’) promoted by Jonker, and aspire to live up to those fabricated standards” in an article in the Star in 2009.

In his 1997 PhD thesis (The psychology of Satanic cult involvement), Gavin Ivey addresses the phenomenon of pseudo-Satanism informed by cultural paranoia:

“The first group hardly justifies the satanic label, and these individuals are referred to in the literature as ‘dabblers’ (Greaves, 1992; Tate, 1991). They are generally white adolescents who, sensitive to the cultural paranoia surrounding Satanism, rebel against authority figures by professing loose allegiance to diluted satanic ideology, and engage in behaviour that conservative authorities misconstrue as satanic: participating in the Heavy Metal music subculture, wearing black clothing, drawing satanic icons, participating in fantasy and occult games, etc. Their naive understanding of Satanism, the lack of organised expression, and the general anti-establishment motive of gaining identity by rebelling against traditional norms, set this group apart from Satanism proper. Because of its social visibility, this group is largely responsible for the public misperception that the incidence of Satanism has reached epidemic proportions” (Ivey, Gavin, 1997).

The “naive understanding of Satanism” is a point invariably brought up by practicing Satanists and occultists with reference to the lack of working knowledge of religious practice, belief, deities, doctrine, terminology, scriptures or ritual demonstrated by alleged criminals portrayed by the media and law enforcement as “Satanists” – and consequently, of those doing the misidentifying.

The outcome of these scenarios is that these invariably turn out to have no ties or relationship to religious Satanism as a NRM and who identify more closely with “pseudo-satanism” have been repeatedly misidentified with a generally law-abiding religious community, which has been for decades demonized, defamed and slandered, and whose members have endured the consequences of this misidentification in perpetuity.

Comparative Disambiguation

The most distinct difference between religious Satanism and “pseudo-satanism” (the beliefs of “tabloid prophecy fulfillers”) is that while (theistic and atheistic) Satanists identify with the archetype of Satan/Set/Lucifer as an Adversary to piety, ignorance, authoritarianism, suffering and injustice, et al, they do not believe in the archetype of “the devil” as viewed from within the Judeo-Christian context of a blood-thirsty deity demanding sacrifice or that actions be taken against other religions or their adherents in order to pacify or “convert” them.

The core statement of disambiguation at the center of this whole paper is thus:

Satanism is a religion created *outside* of Christianity and which conducts its business independently of the influence of Christianity; while “pseudo-satanism” is a cult-like phenomenon based on myths propagated *about* Satanism created *within* Christianity and which appears to be obsessed with bringing about the downfall of Christianity.

“Pseudo-satanists” can be concisely described as “reverse-christians” because they draw on Christian sources for their rituals, beliefs, identity and practices, specifically basing their own on the information they find within Christian propaganda about “satanism”.

Finally, Christianity and its perceptions of “Satanism” have been around for over 2000 years, while Satanism is a New Religious Movement (NRM) which has only existed in its present form since 1966. It is a modern construct which draws on ancient imagery, folklore and beliefs found in Christianity, but there is no evidence to show that Satanism existed continuously in an organized form alongside Christianity throughout its history.

Nevertheless, the sense of mystery and gothic appeal of Satanism is probably one of the reasons why so many people are easily confused by its image and relativity to Christianity – to “pseudo-satanism”, and ultimately, to the “Satanic Panic”.

Implications

What are the implications of this disambiguation?

The disambiguation of Satanism as a NRM and “pseudo-satanism” – if understood and accepted to the broadest extent by all concerned: by academia and educators, and by religious and cultural leaders who influence how other religions are perceived outside of Christianity and generally by modern society – it could only lead to a defusing of a perpetually threatening and omnipresent recurrent religious moral panic, marked by very real incidents of abuse and violent crimes and crimes of intimidation and scapegoating – and that would be beneficial for all concerned.

Historically speaking, propagation of the misunderstanding that “pseudo-satanism” and religious Satanism are one and the same, has caused much unnecessary strife, tension and discomfort for all parties concerned, and if left unaddressed, is likely to do so in perpetuity.

By demonizing a NRM by connecting it to crime is not only erroneous; it is also slanderous and incites to hostility which results in more far-reaching negative consequences for society at large.

This belief in a “satanic conspiracy theory” serves to encourage the “Satanic Panic Hysteria” cycle of tabloid prophecy propagation and tabloid prophecy fulfillment to continue, which also implies that more people will be hurt or killed by “tabloid prophecy fulfillers” *and* as a result of consequent prejudice against perceived Satanists on the basis of this misunderstanding.

Those wishing to end the incidence of so-called “occult related crime” which they blame on Satanism, hold Satanism and Satanists at the center of their focus – when instead,

the best, most effective way for them to address the problem of “tabloid prophecy fulfillment” is for them to switch their focus to addressing the spread of “pseudo-satanism” by Christians.

After all, if the archetype of “pseudo-satanism” stopped being perpetuated, there would be no “self-fulfilling prophecy” for impressionable teens to latch onto and to fulfill.

Together, the effort required to keep this cycle going as well as dealing with the resultant fall-out represents not only a perpetuation of institutionalized injustice, but an unnecessary waste of resources; for example US law-enforcement spent eight years (Lanning, K. 1992) “chasing ghosts”. In the local arena, South Africa’s own “Ghost Busters” – the “Occult Related Crimes Unit” – in the span of three decades, came up with the same thing: absolutely no evidence of “Satanic crime” to show for it – only, people like Jonker, Lamprecht, De Jager, et al. appear to have spent all that time avoided admitting it at all costs.

The only logical way to stop these needless tragedies from happening over and over again in future is to break this cycle of misinformation and fear-based hysteria *at the source*.

This change would be far reaching, and would be set in motion by the realization and acceptance of the truth – that the root of the problem is a simple case of mistaken identity – and the perpetuation of a self-fulfilling prophecy which has ruined countless lives.

Further, the apparent lack of faith which South Africa’s law enforcement system appears to display in the value of psychiatry when addressing perpetrators of so-called “occult crime” needs to be addressed.

This needs to be brought more in line with the scientific, realistic approach in use in the USA and UK, where the first line in dealing with accusations of “Satanic Ritual Abuse” is scientific, psychology-based and unbiased, with law enforcement playing a secondary role which deals solely with non-religious crimes – unlike in South Africa, where law enforcement in the form of a specialized unit consisting of inherently prejudiced clergy wearing police uniforms, abuse a media spotlight to slander, intimidate or oppress others – has hogged the whole table.

Satanism is a legitimate, registered religious community in South Africa. In the face of this indisputable fact, the question has to be asked: Were Satanism in any way, shape or form to have resembled the myths of what purveyors of “Satanic Panic” claim it to be, how would Satanism ever have been allowed to practice in South Africa – or a Satanic church to register officially as a religious organization?

The problem, it seems, which exists between Satanism and those outside of Satanism, is ignorance. Ignorance breeds fear, and people grow to hate and react against that which they fear. The solution to this problem is enlightenment – because once people become educated about the thing they fear, they begin to understand that thing better – and also to understand their fear of it, which is reduced or expunged.

Academics, Christian scholars, clergy, media and other leadership figures (and general society in turn) could only benefit from having a more informed ability to assess what “pseudo-satanism” is (as an archetype and its associated fallout created from within Christianity) and what Satanism is (as a New Religious Movement).

Thus, the confusion of those who have traditionally created and perpetuated the problem of “Satanic Panic Hysteria” will be empowered and encouraged to minimize, reduce and even end it entirely – should they of course wish to do so.

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