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**QANON AS A VARIATION OF A SATANIC
CONSPIRACY THEORY: AN OVERVIEW***Miroslav Vrzal***Abstract**

This text deals with the phenomenon known as “QAnon” as a variation of a Satanic conspiracy theory. This form of conspiracy operates with evil forces and their agents on Earth in secret Satanic networks. In the case of QAnon, it is mirrored in the narrative which says that prominent Democrats, certain celebrities, financiers and other influential figures are a part of a secret global Satanic and paedophile ring which rules the world. The U.S. president Donald Trump is considered to be secretly fighting against this conspiracy and plans to arrest the evil elites during an expected event known as “The Storm.” With a generalized enemy that is Satanized and considered dangerous (as a threat to the American nation) and amoral on the one side, and Trump as a messiah-like hero on the other side, QAnon resonates primarily with the Republican movement. This enemy also became part of a political struggle. QAnon mobilized some Republicans and their supporters in the campaign for the re-election of Donald Trump in 2020 by turning the Q followers into warriors to fight in this important battle of the QAnon cosmic war between good and evil. Nevertheless, QAnon is only one instance of this kind of mobilization in the United States against the imagined inner secret Satanic enemy. Another powerful mobilization could be observed in the connection with the phenomenon of Satanic panic. Some similarities include the narratives about ritual abuse of children by secret Satanists, which took place especially in the 1980s and 1990s. At the same time, it is important to point out that these narratives have a much older origin and are based on Christian dualism and demonology regarding the idea of the need to fight subversive groups (devil-worshippers, witches, and secret organizations) who have formed a pact with Satan and intend to harm the society. For a large part of American society that nurtures strong belief in both God’s and Satan’s influence in the world, secret devil-worshippers have traditionally been one of the prominent internal enemies of the American nation. The notion of the need to fight the forces of evil led by Satan and his earthly minions is deeply ingrained in American conspiratorial thinking and in a large part of the American society influenced by Christian fundamentalism and is likely to continue to emerge in other variations, similar to QAnon.

Keywords

QAnon, conspiracy theory, evil elites, construction of an enemy, cosmic war, Christian dualism and demonology, Satanism, paedophilia, children ritual abuse, Donald Trump, U.S. president election

* * *

1. Introduction

THIS text deals with the relatively new conspiracy theory known as “QAnon,” which has gained considerable influence in the USA over recent years. QAnon partly rests on the narrative that there is a secret Satanic and paedophile conspiracy of liberals and celebrities. Hillary Clinton, Barrack Obama, George Soros, Tom Hanks, the Rothschild family¹ and many others are all said to be involved in this conspiracy. An important role in the QAnon conspiracy theory is also played by the 45th President of the United States, Donald Trump, who allegedly leads a secret struggle against this conspiratorial network, as well as the secret structure that rules the country, known as the Deep State².

Although QAnon combines many different conspiracy theories and theses³, this text will focus primarily on the connection between QAnon and the idea of a secret Satanic conspiracy. Although for many the idea of a Satanic paedophile conspiracy within the QAnon world may seem absurd, it is, and has long been, a key part of the American conspirative mindset related to the fight against an inner Satanic enemy. QAnon is based on the concept of Christian dualism, where in the cosmic war (see Juergensmeyer 2000), the forces of good on the part of the Christian God and the forces of evil led by Satan oppose each other (see also Thomas 2020). The need to engage in this struggle in the United States is mediated mainly by fundamentalist Christian circles, which have historically had a great influence on American society, including the political sphere. As will be shown, QAnon is merely one variation on the mobilization into “battle” in the age-old struggle against the forces of evil and the inner Satanic enemy, which in the end may not even really exist.

I will primarily proceed from the text “From Evil Others to Evil Elites: A Dominant Pattern in Conspiracy Theories Today” by Véronique Campion-Vincent (2005). The next chapter will discuss the concept of conspiracy theory delimitation, referring to Michael Barkun (2016). Next, I briefly describe the QAnon ideology

¹ Sometimes referred to as the leaders of the Satanic cult. It can be linked to the centuries-old trope “about an international banking conspiracy, claiming the Rothschild dynasty is funding an evil global plot” (Trickey 2018).

² In the text I understand Deep State as a conspiracy theory concerning the existence of a hidden government secretly ruling the USA. Trump backers’ essential argument is that “there are entrenched forces deep within the American government that are working to sabotage the nascent administration, preventing them from enacting policy agenda.” (Hafford 2017).

³ For example, one says that CIA installed Kim Jong-un as the leader of North Korea to control him (see Caffier 2018) or financier J. P. Morgan sank the Titanic to assassinate his supposed rival millionaires (Trickey 2018).

as a mode of conspiracy thinking which resonates with American Republicans. I will also show QAnon to be a variation of the Satanic conspiracy theory, which is a continuation of older narratives about devil-worshippers. Specifically, I will interpret QAnon as an extension of the themes and motives that emerged in the Satanic panic in the United States in the 1980s and 1990s. These narratives are currently important for the Republican-oriented side in the fight against the internal enemy, into which the liberal/Democratic part of the political and social spectrum in the USA is also projected. Thus, through the association with Satanism and paedophilia, liberals/Democrats were demonized and therefore discredited in view of the recent Presidential elections, pitting the Republican Donald Trump and the Democrat Joe Biden against each other. It can therefore be said that QAnon helped mobilize Republicans to vote against the “Satanized” Democrats.

2. Conspiracy theory

Conspiracy theories involving evil elites are not a recent phenomenon. Conspiracy thinking and various related conspiracy theories are common in Western history. In addition to conspiracies concerning demonized minorities such as Jews, Romani people, people suffering from leprosy, etc., who were blamed for harming society (Campion-Vincent 2005, 113–14; Victor 2015, 693; Di Nola 1998, 309–11; Ginzburg 2003: 49–81), there have also been conspiracy theories which centre on evil elites, for example, in the form of aristocracy trying to harm ordinary people (Campion-Vincent 2005, 108–9) or to cover-up crimes committed by elites (i.e. aristocrats). A good example of the latter is a theory concerning the identity of Jack the Ripper, claiming that he was a grandson of Queen Victoria and the Royal family covered it up (Kilday and Nash 2018).

According to Michael Barkun, conspiracy theories are modes of thinking. They provide “templates imposed upon the world to give the appearance of order to events.” (Barkun 2016, 1) Barkun continues:

These mental constructs assert that some small and hidden groups have through special means, powers, or manipulations brought about visible and evil effects of whose true cause most people are unaware. Only the conspiracy theorists, with their claim to special knowledge, are said to know the truth. (Barkun 2016, 2)

Campion-Vincent states that conspiracy theories help to explain complex problems, and random, negatively perceived or feared phenomena by a simple causality. They are based on the idea that specific people or organized groups of people are behind these phenomena. They work secretly and conspiratorially with the interest of acting on these phenomena (such as catastrophes, diseases, poverty, etc.) and possibly profit from them (Campion-Vincent 2005, 107, 113–14). Some examples are the conspiracy theory regarding the alleged attempt to chip people in order to seize control by a narrow group of powerful individuals (such as Bill Gates), or the conspiracy theory that imagines a reality in which the spread of COVID-19 is an artificially induced problem meant to cause fear, which is a plot of governments and pharmaceutical companies who would make huge profits from selling a vaccine. The idea of a government being in the hands of secret societies, such as the Illuminati, whose goal is to bring about a New World Order where everything and everybody is controlled by secret elites still survives in the society as well.⁴

Currently, conspiracy theories are experiencing great expansion in the Western cultural area, from the Flat Earth theory to various theories about the causes of the spread of COVID-19. This boom in conspiracy theories, as well as of other forms of disinformation may be partly explained by the transformation of the media. Traditional media such as printed media, radio and television have ceased to be the main source of information for many people. They have largely been replaced by more participatory media such as social media (see McQuail and Deuze 2020, 5–7), where various conspiracy theories spread very effectively across large parts of society.⁵ As Ethan Zuckerman states, it is currently possible to observe the “emergence of spaces where non-professional individuals can report what’s happening in their communities, amplify stories that might have otherwise been missed, and demand attention towards subaltern narratives” that were “previously ignored because they have little overlap with consensus reality,” which results in creating and maintaining alternative realities. (Zuckerman 2019) Conspiracy theories have

⁴ Various conspiracy theories and disinformation have been adopted by some politicians and celebrities, too. It significantly contributes to the spread of conspiracy theories and disinformation among the public. For example, one of the most popular singers in modern Czech history, Karel Gott, believed in and publicly spoke about Illuminati and other secret societies and mystical/occult orders ruling the world. According to him, nothing happens by coincidence because secret societies define scenarios in history and manage all important historical events such as wars, including the decision of who will be the victor (Machalická 2019).

⁵ Although social media such as *Facebook* or *Twitter* have been trying to prevent this, especially in 2020, which was also connected with the influence of QAnon (see Iyengar 2020 or O’Sullivan 2020).

always been present; what is new is the echo that the stories of conspiracy theorists produce in the general public today (Campion-Vincent 2005, 113).

At the same time, conspiracy theories currently have a significant impact on how people perceive the world around them, and on how they act within it. For example, the question of who people will support in elections and who will rise up in protest is deeply affected by conspiracy theories. Conspiratorial thinking, for example, can also be linked to protests against economic globalization and, in particular, against the International Monetary Fund, where the idea that financial elites have agreed to exploit the world stands out. “These elites are consistently depicted as ‘enemies of the people,’ linked through malevolent conspiracies, and aiming to throw the powerless into the clutches of ‘the free market’” (Campion-Vincent 2005, 111). Popular conspiracy theories also work in popular culture, which, as Christopher Partridge shows, also plays an important role in the way we look at the world around us (Partridge 2004, 4). For example, *The X-Files*, which worked with the idea of a conspiracy by the U.S. government and the secret services to conceal the existence of extra-terrestrial life in connection with UFOs and their presence on Earth, had a strong influence on conspiratorial thinking in the American society (Campion-Vincent 2005, 112–13).

As Campion-Vincent also demonstrates, another important aspect of conspiracy theories is that they serve to mobilize the masses against an enemy. They “reinforce the in-group’s cohesion through the designation of enemies.” Here, the conspirators act as a threat to the whole of society as well as the nation itself. They are seen as a deviant element, one that should be expelled from the national “body,” and an enemy to be united against and fought (Campion-Vincent 2005, 106–7). This enemy can be internal or external, real or just supposed. As Juergensmeyer (2000) shows in his analysis of religious violent/terrorist acts, the enemy is also Satanized.

Attributes that indicate danger to members of a community and disruption of the social or even divine natural order are assigned to the enemy. At the same time, the enemy is shown to be highly amoral and is assigned behaviour that is far beyond social norms and taboos (see also Campion-Vincent 2005, 107). This enemy is also perceived as the oppressor of a certain group of people or even entire nations. These elements can also serve to legitimize violence against the enemy, such as terrorist acts (Juergensmeyer 2000). In certain cases, not only extremists but also political elites or members of the general population may take part in it. The Holocaust was an example of mass extermination of the internal enemy in the form of the Jews. The Jewish conspiracy was directed against the German people and the German

race⁶ (see Goodrick-Clarke 2004; Partridge 2005, 323). However, theories of a Jewish conspiracy were widespread outside Germany and long before the advent of Nazism. Hundreds of years before Hitler, for example, it was believed that “Jewish magicians [were] kidnapping and stabbing children for evil rituals. The blood produced from these rites was rumoured to be ritually consumed as drink or mixed into matzo” (Thomas 2020).

Essentially, the deep-rooted idea of a global Jewish conspiracy (associated sometimes directly with the fictive document titled “Protocols of the Elders of Zion” from the 1900s, including a link of a Satanic Jewish cabal to the Antichrist) can also be connected to QAnon which outlines a conspiracy of powerful elites of the world (see Thomas 2020).⁷ Nevertheless, Zuckerman points out that although the cabal is supposed to include rich financiers with Jewish roots like George Soros and the Rothschild family, the theory is more anti-elite than explicitly anti-Semitic (2019). In spite of that, QAnon is often designated as a far-right conspiracy theory (see Amarasingam and Argentino 2020, 37). According to Amarasingam and Argentino, it is possible to find “resonance with other far-right extremist movements, such as the various militant, anti-government, white nationalist, and neo-Nazi extremist organizations across the United States” (Amarasingam and Argentino 2020, 39). Zuckerman speaks about an “overlap behind the ‘traditional values’ preached by some QAnon patriots and the revanchist anti-feminists of the pickup artist scene” (2019).

3. About QAnon

QAnon is a conspiracy theory (or a bounded set of conspiracy theories and conspirative claims) which outlines the existence of a cabal of Satan-worshipping paedophiles operating in a global child sex-trafficking ring, one that is also ruling the world.⁸

⁶ The reiteration of the conspiracy theory of a global Jewish conspiracy is still an important part of the neo-Nazi scene to this day, where it is embedded for example in the idea of a world ruled by the ZOG (Zionist Occupation Government) which posits that the U.S. government is a Jewish-controlled puppet regime. (Goodrick-Clarke 2002, 19).

⁷ FBI also indicates that QAnon is a threat to national security because, as a specific ideological base, it can stimulate extremists to violence (Winter 2019). For violent crimes linked to the QAnon conspiracy see Amarasingam and Argentino (2020, 39–41).

⁸ It is important to mention the Pizzagate conspiracy theory from 2016 as a predecessor of QAnon. According to it, the pizza restaurant *Comet Ping Pong* in Washington, D.C. was supposed to be a centre of secret child sex trafficking ring and the place of Satanic child abuse rituals. Hillary Clinton and other prominent Democrats were supposed to be related to that ring. The theory alleged that there were codes and Satanic symbols in hacked John Podesta’s (chair of Hillary Clinton’s 2016 U.S. presidential campaign) emails pointing to the *Comet Ping Pong* and child sex ring. It resulted,

This ring supposedly consists of top Democrats including Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama, financiers such as George Soros, and celebrities such as Oprah Winfrey, Tom Hanks, and Ellen DeGeneres. As it is seen as a global conspiracy, it also involves conspirators from other parts of the world, including several prominent religious figures such as Pope Francis and the Dalai Lama (Roose 2020).

According to Zuckerman, in the main narrative “The Cabal,” global elites aim to undermine American democracy, destroy American freedom, subjugate the nation, and advance their own nefarious agenda. Based on the conspiracy theory, the U.S. president Donald Trump actively (but secretly) fights against these forces which are also connected with the idea of the Deep State as a hidden U.S. government which is supposed to be working against the American nation. In this war, Donald Trump cooperates with Robert Mueller (lawyer and ex-director of FBI, in 2001–2013) to arrest Hillary Clinton, Barack Obama, and other members of the Deep State during the expected event called “The Storm” (Zuckerman 2019). For this reason, the re-election of Donald Trump as the U.S. president in November 2020 was crucial because, according to the conspiracy theory, he is the One who can put an end to the operations of the Satanic and paedophile ring which rules the world and which includes politicians, the media and Hollywood (Rozsa 2019). As to why, according to the theory, children are abused in Satanic rituals, Thomas writes the following:

The conspiracy claims that deep-state politicians and the “Hollywood elite” are involved in a large child abduction network that harvests the chemical compound adrenochrome – which is obtained from the oxidation of adrenaline – from sexually abused children subjected to satanic rituals.

QAnons say that adrenochrome is consumed by some Democratic politicians and Hollywood elites for its psychedelic and anti-aging effects and is more potent when harvested from a frightened victim. (Thomas 2020).

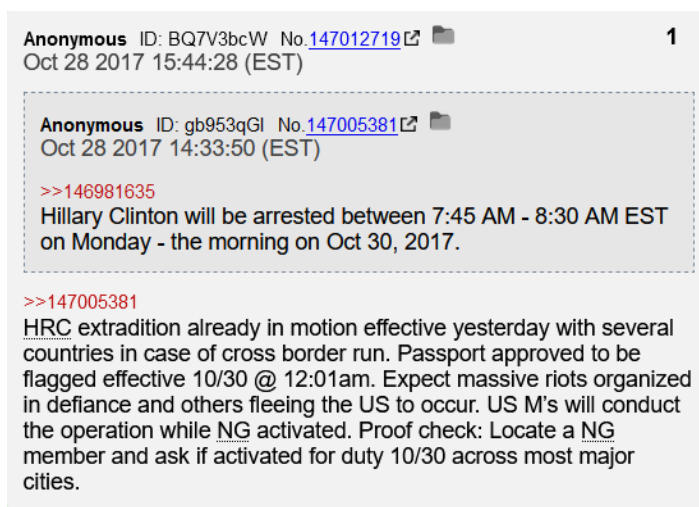
QAnon began on 28 October 2017 in the anonymous internet forum *4chan*. In a thread called “Calm Before the Storm,” an anonymous user “Q” posted that “Hillary Clinton will be arrested between 7:45 AM - 8:30 AM EST on Monday - the morning on Oct 30, 2017” (Amarasingam and Argentino 2020, 37),⁹ which was followed by other posts of Q in *4chan* and *8chan* (latterly *8kun*)¹⁰.

for example, in an armed assault on the restaurant by Edgar Welch, who wanted to rescue children potentially being trapped in the restaurant. See for example Amarasingam and Argentino (2020, 37–9).

⁹ This prediction, similarly to other QAnon predictions, never eventuated.

¹⁰ Q (also as “Q Clearance Patriot”) continued posting messages over the following 3 years and is currently still active. There is still no consensus on the original Q’s identity and who currently manages Q’s account (Amarasingam and Argentino 2020, 38). Nevertheless, over different periods, there has probably been more than one person writing Q’s posts (Gilbert 2020).

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Source: <https://qanon.pub/>.

In their posts, “Q” claimed to be a high-level government insider who has ‘Q level’ clearance at the United States Department of Energy which grants them access to top secret information (Amarasingam and Argentino 2020, 37–8).

Several followers of Q started to analyse and interpret the posts. The number of Q’s followers increased over time and they also established new online communities and related accounts in other platforms and social medias (e.g., *Reddit*, *YouTube*, *Twitter*, *Facebook*). As Zuckerman describes, QAnon’s spread is heavily based on the active participation of its followers, who do not only want to read the messages but want to be active in the process of uncovering the real “truth” and sharing this “truth” with others. These active Q followers (called “bakers”) built upon the central narrative by adding new elements to support its claims. They developed a complex (un)reality and a closed universe of mutually reinforcing facts and interpretations.¹¹ As Zuckerman also points out, what is interesting about QAnon is also that it may “be the first conspiracy to have fully embraced the participatory nature of the contemporary internet” (2019).

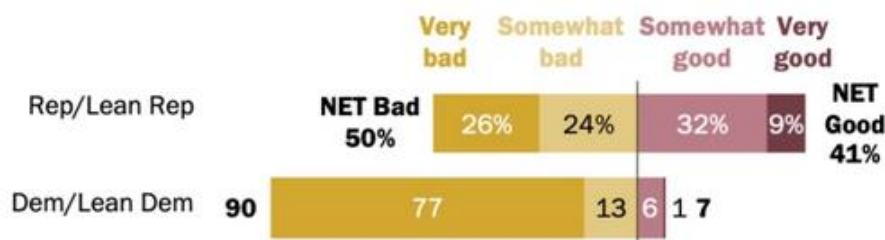
The public visibility and influence of QAnon rapidly grew during 2020. According to PEW Research Center, in March 2020, 76% of survey participants had never heard of QAnon (PEW Research Center 2020a). However, in September 2020, that figure had dropped to 53% of the participants (Pew Research Center 2020b). The survey also showed that “An overwhelming majority of Democrats

¹¹ It well illustrates the fact that the special knowledge of conspiracy theorists (see Barkun 2016, 2) is not static. This knowledge about the real “truth” is dynamically constructed. It also means that conspiracy theories can be very flexible and are able to evolve and adapt in new conditions.

who have heard something about QAnon (90%) say it is at least ‘somewhat bad’ for the country, including 77% who say it is ‘very bad.’” But 41% of Republicans who have heard of QAnon say it “is somewhat or very good for the country, modestly fewer than the 50% who think it is at least somewhat bad” (Pew Research Center 2020b).

About four-in-ten Republicans who have heard of the QAnon conspiracy theories say QAnon is a good thing for the country

Among U.S. adults who have heard or read about QAnon, % who think it's a ___ thing for the country



Source: Pew Research Center 2020b.

As the figures above show, QAnon mainly resonates with Republicans. A considerable number of Republican candidates to U.S. Congress in the 2020 elections had also spread messages from the QAnon platform or expressed some degree of support for QAnon¹² (e.g., Republican QAnon supporter Marjorie Taylor Greene, Thomas 2020). Donald Trump himself retweeted a number of posts from the *Twitter* accounts connected to QAnon (Nguyen 2020). Nevertheless, he denied knowing anything about QAnon besides his knowledge that QAnon fans like him, which he appreciates, and that they “love our country” and “they are very strongly against paedophilia” (Breuninger 2020; Gabbat 2020). But the fact is that during 2020 a huge network of QAnon accounts¹³ (for example QAnon *Facebook* pages alone boast 3 million followers, Thomas 2020) were spreading disinformation and pro-

¹² Alex Kaplan lists 97 U.S. Congress candidates “who have endorsed or given credence to the conspiracy theory or promoted QAnon content”: 89 from them were Republicans, 2 Democrats, 1 Libertarian, 1 member of the Independent Party of Delaware, and 4 independents. (Kaplan 2020).

¹³ According to Wong “The largest Facebook groups dedicated to QAnon had approximately 200,000 members in them before Facebook banned them in mid-August. When Twitter took similar action against QAnon accounts in July, it limited features for approximately 150,000 accounts” (2020).

Trump propaganda on social media, especially on *Twitter*, which was closely connected with Trump's re-election campaign (Porter 2020).

QAnon definitively helped mobilize a part of the Republicans and their adherents before the Presidential elections in November 2020 by constructing, designating and Satanizing the enemy which in their minds is simply seen as directly responsible for the "evil" in America and in the world. As it will be explained in the next chapter, this was accomplished by maintaining the connection of the enemy with Satanism and child abuse as a potent mobilization aspect against the enemy in American society.

4. QAnon as a Variation of Satanic Conspiracy

In QAnon (un)reality, supporters of Donald Trump assign him a messianic role in the war against the secret elite, and connect him with the expectations of "The Storm" and "Great Awakening"¹⁴ of the American nation¹⁵. The enemy in this war is portrayed as a secret global ring of Satanic paedophiles: but why *secret Satanic paedophiles*?

The answer lies in the setting of American society itself. The "secret Satanic enemy" is one of its most prominent internal and external enemies. It is comparable for example to the "Communists" as a category of internal "social deviant" groups which were imagined and believed to be a threat to American society, especially during the anti-Communist Red Scare of the 1950s (Victor 2015, 693). The whole Communist Bloc during the Cold War was conceptualized as a powerful external enemy – as a party of evil in a dualistic view of the world (Di Nola 358–9; Partridge 2005, 321) – while "Communists" in USA were thought to be internal agents of evil. The fear of "Communists" as a threat to the nation is still perceptible in American society today, and the stigmatizing label "Communists" was also frequently used by the Republicans and their supporters during the 2020 presidential elections to demonise the Democrats. For example, Donald Trump himself commented on the Democratic vice-presidential nominee Kamala Harris in this way: "She is a Communist. She's not a Socialist. She's well beyond a socialist. Take a look at her views. She wants to open up the borders to allow killers and murderers and rapists to pour into our country" (Press Trust of India 2020).

¹⁴ In QAnon "Great Awakening" is connected with a "mass realization about the truth of the world" (Amarasingam and Argentino 2020, 40).

¹⁵ For its millennialism, eschatology, and reiteration of Biblical narratives, QAnon can also be seen as a kind of new religious movement of the current digital era (see Argentino 2020).

Another way to demonise opponents in the American society is to refer to them as devil-worshippers, which is also a very influential stigmatization. This kind of demonization of the enemy is heavily based on the Christian dualist worldview where the American nation (i.e. the moral part) is on God's side¹⁶ and the enemies are forces of evil on Satan's side (Di Nola 1998, 358–9; Argentino 2020). However, this Christian dualism is not a strict dualism because the two forces are not equal and balanced. It is because the forces of good triumph over the forces of evil in particular events in the end (Partridge and Christianson 2014, 2), such as the Apocalypse in the Bible (or the “Storm” in the QAnon theory). For many Americans, the struggle between the forces of God and the forces of Satan comprise a metaphysical dimension and the battles form a part of their religious view of the world. The majority of the American people believe in the real existence of God and Satan (Partridge and Christianson 2014, 11–12), which differentiates USA from most European countries (Muchembled 2008, 291–2). For example, in the PEW research (2015), 63% of Americans were absolutely certain about the existence of God, while 20% were fairly certain about the existence of God.¹⁷ According to Statista research from 2016, 61% of Americans believed in the Devil (Statista Research Department 2016).

Historically, Christian dualism in American society was rooted in the Protestantism of the American settlers (mainly Calvinism, and specifically puritanism) and their fears of the forces of evil around them and within their communities (resulting, for example, in the Salem witch trials). Calvinism was the main religious stream in modern American history and Protestantism, and Christianity in general, is still dominant in the current religious American milieu (Václavík 2013, 32–3; Hutchinson 2003). According to the PEW research, 65% of American adults described themselves as Christians in 2019, 43% of adults identified with Protestantism, and 20% with Catholicism (Pew Research Center 2019).

Christian fundamentalism and conservatism formed in many denominations, organizations, and movements such as Christian Right has had a huge impact in American society and is traditionally closely connected to the political sphere, mostly to the Republicans (see Václavík 2013, 43–4). As Christian dualism and demonology, including references to demonic evil forces acting in this world, are the core of American Christian fundamentalism (see Partridge 2005, 220), such a setting logically results in conspirative thinking claiming there are hidden forces

¹⁶ See for example declaration “In God we trust” as the official motto of USA.

¹⁷ 88% of evangelical Protestants was absolutely certain about the existence of God (Pew Research Center 2015).

of evil with secret human agents on the Earth who harm, or intend to harm, American society and the nation as a whole (Partridge 2005, 316–25). As Partridge describes: “Conspiracies about dark networks of individuals plotting world domination overlap with eschatological discourse about the rise of the Antichrist because both deal with the problem of powerlessness in the face of widespread evil” (Partridge 2005, 324). This conspirative thinking resulted in the creation of QAnon, which fits well the world view of parts of conservative Christians, as well as Republicans. According to Wong, “QAnon appears to be most popular among older Republicans and evangelical Christians” (2020).

QAnon followers have used a wide range of online tactics, including the making of “documentaries” based on misinformation or hashtags with QAnon messaging (Wong 2020). The campaign which alerted followers to child abuse, sex trafficking, and paedophilia, using hashtags #SaveTheChildren¹⁸ and #SaveOurChildren was very influential. It helped spread QAnon among evangelical Christian social media (Petrosky 2020) and also attracted people from outside of QAnon, such as influencer mothers sharing QAnon’s frightening stories about kidnappings (Jennings 2020).

Nevertheless, the construction of the Satanic enemy is not limited to QAnon, but is a natural part of long-term American conspirative imagination based on Christian dualism and demonology. The Satanic enemy is still present in (re)constructing the American nation, sometimes latently, and sometimes very explicitly. It was clearly visible during the Satanic panic of 1980s and 1990s, which spread globally, but began in the USA and reached very high intensities there. During the Satanic panic in the USA, a broadly shared moral panic emerged about the existence of a secret and conspirative network of Satanists¹⁹ connected to politics, schools, and kindergartens. These imagined secret Satanic networks were blamed for obscene orgies, drugs, cannibalism, bloody sacrifice of animals and humans, and especially for the sacrifice and sexual abuse of children²⁰ during their devil-worship rituals (Bromley 1991; Victor 1990; Victor 2015; Frankfurter 2001). Some proponents of this conspiracy theory assumed that up to tens of thousands of child victims were annually sacrificed by Satanists which was related to the national data of missing children (Bromley 1991, 57). Nevertheless, extensive police investigations

¹⁸ “Save the Children” is a child welfare organization and the use of this name in a QAnon hashtag was unauthorized.

¹⁹ There were even some assertions that this Satanic conspiratorial network is international (Victor 2015, 693).

²⁰ The ritual torture and sexual abuse of children was also supposed to reverse their perception of good and evil, and to brainwash them into becoming part of this secret Satanic cult (Victor 2015, 693; see also Frankfurter 2001, 380).

and court trials did not produce any evidence about the existence of this Satanic conspiracy.²¹ As Introvigne writes:

Not even in one case was a satanic organization or cult discovered by the police and the courts, although in a handful of cases a single individual or a small group mentioned Satanism as a motivation for their crimes. The conclusion was that a very limited number of self-styled Satanists did commit crimes, but there was no conspiracy to systematically abuse children or sacrifice human beings to Satan by organized, international and “multi-generational” Satanist cults. (2016, 453)

As Victor describes, the Satanic cult rumours were derived from ancient legends about “children who are kidnapped and murdered by a secret conspiracy of evil strangers who use the children’s blood and body parts in religious rituals. The legend is an enduring one, because it offers universal appeal to the latent fears of all parents everywhere” (Victor 1990, 60). It is one of the sources of imagination that “purity and innocence is being endangered by powerful agents of absolute evil” (Victor 1990, 60). Because of the children abuse and sacrifice elements, too, the Satanic panic resonated in Christian fundamentalist circles, as well as in the general society.

For example, a lot of parental organizations, psychologists, and psychiatrists took this conspiracy theory very seriously, and trusted the stories of their patients and children about Satanic rituals which (might) have never happened, and which included the evil activities mentioned above. The spread of Satanic panic was heavily influenced by the publication of the book *Michelle Remembers* (1980), co-authored by the psychiatrist Lawrence Pazder and his patient Michelle Smith, who had allegedly been abused in a Satanic cult as a child. As Frankfurter describes, based on this kind of testimonies, mental health experts, who interpreted them as recovered memories, operated with Satanic ritual abuse (SRA) as a category of child sexual abuse typically resulting in such extreme post-traumatic responses such as multiple personality disorder, self-mutilation, and suicide (Frankfurter 2001, 353–4). It is also important to note that the fear of Satanism also grew out of the fear of “dangerous cults” (e.g., mass suicide and murders in Jim Jones’s *Peoples Temple*), who were blamed for using brainwashing on their followers in the previous decade (1970s). As Frankfurter continues:

²¹ The main American Satanic organizations such as *Church of Satan* and *Temple of Set* strictly distanced themselves from the ritual abuse and sacrifice of children.

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The existence of Satanic cults was taken for granted in these circles, partly because such experts found more and more of their patients offering lurid firsthand “testimonies” to Satanist cults – invariably as “recovered memories” – and partly because the culture had been sensitized since the 1970s to anxieties about real alternative religions. (Frankfurter 2001, 353–4)

Partridge points out that “while invested with Christian demonological content, Satanic panic stories include elements which can be found throughout history and in many cultures” and “the letting of blood, sacrifice, cannibalism, and the defilement and murder of children appear in numerous demonologies that societies have constructed in order to demonize those they mistrust” (Partridge 2005, 219). Partridge continues that “in all these cultures, evil is most powerfully attributed to the demonized other by incorporating children into the narrative” (Partridge 2005, 220). These allegations were made about first-century Christians, witches in Europe, as they have been made about Jews (Partridge 2005, 220). In Europe since the Middle Ages, the internal enemy as the demonic other inside Christian culture (Partridge and Christianson 2014, 8–9) is alleged to be in a conspiracy with Satan as the absolute evil and the archenemy of God, as it was also the case of different (real or imagined) heretic movements and groups, witches (Partridge and Christianson 2014, 8–10), Jews, and recently secret organizations such as the Order of Freemasons or the Order of Illuminati (Partridge 2005, 320–1). It is still present in parts of current Christian and post-Christian cultures and conspirative milieus.

QAnon is only an instance of Satanic conspiracies in history (and in the USA) rooted in Christian dualism and demonological paradigm. Following this paradigm, in this specific case, the Democrats, liberal elites, and celebrities are constructed as the Satanic and paedophile enemy. This is still a very powerful construction in the American society and can be effectively used for the stigmatization of opponents. Similar to other Satanic conspiracies, an enemy is simply designated, connected with Satan and evil, and portrayed as dangerous and amoral. In the context of QAnon (un)reality, it specifically means that the forces of evil are associated with the secret international Satanic cabal ring which endangers order (i.e., God’s order) because it works against American society and the nation (see Zuckerman 2019). As described, amoral aspects highlighted by associations with paedophilia and violence against children appear very effective in the construction of an enemy both cross-culturally and cross-historically.

The QAnon narrative also operates with a messianic figure. Like Jesus Christ, Donald Trump is believed to have the agency to triumph over the Satanic arch enemy in a specific event (i.e. “The Storm”). Nevertheless, it will only be one (although maybe final) battle in an ancient cosmic war. As Juergensmeyer describes,

cosmic war is “cosmic” because it evokes great battles related to the metaphysical conflict between good and evil (Juergensmeyer 2000, 146). In Christian dualism it is a matter of God’s forces of good struggling against Satan’s forces of evil throughout human history. As Campion-Vincen points out, the important aspect of conspiracy theories is the mobilization against the enemy (Campion-Vincen 2005, 106–7). Q followers perceived themselves as warriors²² in the cosmic war between good and evil and they mobilized for one of the most important battles of the cosmic war – the re-election of Donald Trump as president of the USA.

5. Discussion

The scope of the article was very limited as it focused only on the Satanic conspiracy aspect of QAnon. Nevertheless, the situation surrounding QAnon is, of course, more complex. It has many aspects, levels, connections and raises many questions which were not discussed in this text. For example, we could ask how much QAnon supporters believe in QAnon narratives and theses.

It is also not possible to assert that all QAnon supporters believe in QAnon claims literally, including the central narrative of the Satanic paedophile ring and its Satanic rituals where children are abused (see Edelman 2020). According to Schaffner’s poll filled also by 350 QAnon supporters the claim that “Democratic politicians and Hollywood stars are part of a global network that tortures and sexually abuses children in Satanic rituals” 62 percent of the QAnon supporters as definitely or probably true. The other QAnon theories in the poll – “Trump is preparing mass arrests, Mueller was secretly ordered by Trump to investigate paedophiles, and celebrities harvest adrenochrome from children” – scored between 44 and 54 percent. (Edelman 2020; Schaffner 2020).

Based on these numbers, questions can be raised concerning the meanings and functions of QAnon for its supporters. QAnon can be seen as a product of the current strong polarisation of American society and the “cultural war” between the Democrats and the Republicans and their different ideals for American society. QAnon represents fears of and resistance to the world that is (in the Republican view) supposed to be brought about by the Democrats, such as fears regarding mass immigration. QAnon also expresses fears about the role of the American nation in the globalised world. These fears are in a conspirative mind usually projected into globalist forces such as international banks, UN or secret societies which supposedly aim

²² As “digital soldiers” who ho want to be part of the Great Awakening (McGahan 2020).

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to create a totalitarian “new world order,” which is in the QAnon (un)reality aimed to destroy the American freedom and independence. In this context the hero status given to Donald Trump by QAnon shows that he is a tribune of the people who wants to “make America great again.” This is also very closely intertwined with the Deep State theory. According to QAnon, Donald Trump is supposed to be secretly fighting against the Deep State, which promises the QAnon followers that the imagined America will be returned to the (right part of the) American nation.

QAnon also grew on substrates of other conspiracy theories working with distrust in the official government, such as the conspiracy theories surrounding 9/11 including theses that there were individuals in the government involved in the September 11 attacks. QAnon can also be seen as one expression of the paranoid style of American Politics described by Hofstadter (1964). He gave examples from American history that showed the paranoid style with the “sense of heated exaggeration, suspiciousness, and conspiratorial fantasy” as a permanent force in American politics and exists on both sides of politics. Hofstadter, referring to Norman Cohn, describes the paranoid style in this manner:

Norman Cohn believed he found a persistent psychic complex that corresponds broadly with what I have been considering – a style made up of certain preoccupations and fantasies: “the megalomaniac view of oneself as the Elect, wholly good, abominably persecuted, yet assured of ultimate triumph; the attribution of gigantic and demonic powers to the adversary; the refusal to accept the ineluctable limitations and imperfections of human existence, such as transience, dissent, conflict, fallibility whether intellectual or moral; the obsession with inerrable prophecies . . . systematized misinterpretations, always gross and often grotesque.” (Hofstadter 1964)

This characterization is an important link for a better understanding and exploration of QAnon and the role of Donald Trump.

In QAnon many things work together. It connected an internal enemy (liberals/Democrats) and an external enemy (“globalists”) with the Satanic conspiracy. It revived the narratives of secret Satanists abusing children which obviously did not die in 1990s. QAnon showed that these narratives are still valid for a part of the American society and created a new Satanic panic (or paranoia) around them. In comparison with the 1980s and 1990s Satanic panic, QAnon interconnected hugely different conspiracy theories about evil elites and hidden forces in the world into one bulk grown in a virtual environment, generalized the Satanic enemy by linking various elites to the Satanic paedophile ring, and extensively used the Satanic paedophile conspiracy topic in the political struggle via digital technologies.

In the current reality, where Donald Trump did not win the presidential election and “The Storm” did not come, it is important to consider how QAnon will continue to operate. At the moment, it seems that it is not the end of QAnon as it adopted a new conspiracy narrative of rigged elections and ballot frauds (see Collins 2020), which was spread by Donald Trump himself (already before the election in November 2020). It will be interesting to see how QAnon morphs in the new circumstances of a Biden presidency and if it maintains its main narrative of conspirative Satanic paedophiles.

6. Conclusion

The article discussed the conspiracy theory known as QAnon as a variation of Satanic conspiracy. Since forming 3 years ago, QAnon has become a very influential conspiracy theory in the United States. Under QAnon, the stigma of the generalized enemy that is Satanized and considered dangerous (as a threat to the American people) and absolutely amoral (references to paedophilia, child abuse and child trafficking) fell upon the Democrats, liberals, some financiers, celebrities, and other well-known figures. They are accused of being members of an international Satanic and paedophile conspiracy that the Republican President Donald Trump has been secretly fighting. QAnon thus logically resonates primarily with the fundamentalist and conservative Christian circles, and some members of the Republican movement.

This Satanic paedophile enemy also became part of a political struggle. QAnon mobilized Republican voters and might have had an impact on the 2020 United States presidential elections. The campaign for Donald Trump’s re-election made it possible for the QAnon followers to identify themselves as warriors in what they believe to be the most important battles in the QAnon’s cosmic war between good and evil. Although Donald Trump narrowly lost the election, QAnon is an example of the influence conspiracy theories can have in both the current political situation and the development of public affairs.

Although QAnon is explicitly political, it is still one example of the mobilization in the United States against the inner Satanic enemy, which is forms a part of American conspiratorial thinking. One example of the way in which such mobilizations could be observed is the phenomenon of the Satanic panic which took place in the United States in the 1980s and 1990s. At the same time, the narratives in the context of the Satanic panic have much older origins and are based on Christian dualism and demonology regarding the idea of the need to combat subversive groups which are deemed to have a pact with the Devil and aim to harm the society.

For a large part of American society, which maintains a very strong belief in the real existence of God and Satan, one of the internal enemies of the American nation have traditionally been Communists, as well as Satanists. QAnon illustrates well how deeply the idea of a secret Satanic enemy is rooted in American society. The notions of the need to fight the forces of evil led by Satan and his earthly minions are deeply ingrained in American conspiratorial thinking and in American society as a whole, and are likely to continue to emerge in other variations, as they have done in QAnon, which can also be viewed as a new Satanic panic of today. As Victor notes, they “will continue well into the future, as long as there are large numbers of people who believe that an evil supernatural entity has human co-conspirators” (Victor 2015, 693).

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