PART 3

WITCHES AND WITCH HUNTERS
CHAPTER VI

MORAL PANIC AND WITCH HUNT

It is very commonly stated in ritual abuse texts, and at seminars where the issue is discussed, that sceptical explanations for allegations of ritual abuse are much more improbable than the possibility that abusive cults are actively perpetrating their crimes (see Greaves 1992: 58ff.). The convener of a 1998 workshop at the Queanbeyan District Hospital derisively claimed that critics were proposing that “a conspiracy of toddlers” was afoot.[1] This phrase had first been used by the journalist Tim Tate in 1991 to ridicule sceptical explanations for the claims of ritual abuse supposedly made by very young British children (Tate 1991: 1). Even though the overwhelming majority of allegations of ritual abuse in Australia were by 1998 being made by adult survivors, both the phrase and the seeming absurdity of such an explanation provoked a degree of mirth among participants at the Queanbeyan workshop.

Those who believe that ritual abuse “really happens” are similarly unimpressed by sceptics’ explanations for the remarkable similarities between contemporary allegations made against Satanists and other supposed perpetrators and those made against “witches” in Europe in the early modern period. Sceptics commonly cite such similarities to support their arguments about the fantastic nature of ritual abuse allegations, the invalidity of the techniques which precipitated them and the questionable motivations of those who champion the view that such allegations are literally true (e.g. Lucire
The similarities between allegations of ritual abuse and historical witch hunts are sometimes disturbingly obvious to other participants in the debate. The NSW politician Meredith Burgmann, who chaired the Parliamentary Ethics Committee Inquiry into the allegations made by Franca Arena, told me that she had found Arena's allegations and the credulous panic they precipitated among many politicians, journalists and others to be reminiscent of the events of seventeenth century Salem. This realisation caused her considerable disquiet (3 June 2002).

Those who believe that ritual abuse "really happens" acknowledge that there are similarities between past accusations against witches and contemporary claims about ritual abuse. Many of them, in fact, use historical data to justify their arguments that the claims of "victims" and "survivors" are true, although there are some differences in the implications which various theorists draw from this data. They argue that history--and the history of medieval and early modern Europe in particular--shows that contemporary claims of ritual abuse cannot be dismissed out of hand (e.g. Tate 1991: 57).

Some theorists of ritual abuse also use historical data in an attempt to show that there are links between the Devil-worshippers once pursued by Inquisitors and witch hunters and the Satanic cults identified as contemporary perpetrators of ritual abuse. These writers commonly argue that in the past, individual magicians, heretical groups and witches' covens held Satanic religious beliefs similar to those of contemporary perpetrators of ritual abuse and committed the same sorts of outrages against children (e.g. Tate 1991: 64ff.; 88ff.; Boyd 1991:109ff.). Although they tend to be vague about the exact relationship between notorious historical Satanists and the secret cults of contemporary times, they suggest that some modern perpetrators of ritual abuse are modern exemplars of a longstanding Western religious tendency--or even that they have revived an underground religious tradition (Boyd 1991: 108, 122, 138; Katchen 1992: 17-8). There are also writers who propose that modern Satanist religious movements, certain-supposedly Satanic--Masonic groups and, especially, the "generational" Satanic cults reported by many survivors are more direct heirs of the Satanist groups of the past (e.g. Ryder 1992:14ff.; Stone and Stone 1992: 179, 183;
Tate 1991: 57, 88ff. 127ff.).

As a general principle, citing the history of medieval and early modern Europe to show that the claims of ritual abuse survivors are possible is a reasonable proposition. The study of these periods--and many others--shows that human beings are capable of immense cruelty. Nevertheless, I do not find these arguments about the witch craze at all convincing. Writers who argue that ritual abuse "really happens" frequently cite very dubious works in their historical analyses and draw some very questionable conclusions. The British writer Tim Tate, for example, dismisses scepticism about ritual abuse by stating that "satanic ritual crime, abuse and murder have been reported, investigated, proven and recorded for more than 500 years" (1991: 57). Tate argues that the "largely scholarly accounts of the French academic De Lancre clearly illustrate the emerging motifs of satanic worship" in thirteenth century France. He acknowledges that these accounts were based on confessions made under torture, but argues that they still contain "useful and seemingly reliable first-hand accounts of genuinely satanic worship" (Tate 1991: 64). What Tate fails to mention is that De Lancre was actually a "witch hunting magistrate [writing] at the height of the great witch-hunt" some four hundred years after the events he describes (see Cohn 1975: 126ff.).

Their arguments are also problematized by the fact that serious historical studies strongly suggest that the types of murderous and inhumane behaviour which resemble the supposed crimes of modern Satanic cults were actually perpetrated by "witch hunters" rather than "witches". Since the mid-nineteenth century, scholars have rejected the idea that historical "witches" actually committed the types of crimes of which they were accused (Cohn 1975: 126). As Parrinder points out, accounts of the witches' murderous and orgiastic activities abound in the historical records of early modern Europe, but these almost inevitably reflect the views of the witch hunters, and they occur alongside references to the horrific ways in which witches' crimes were investigated and confessions obtained (1973: 127ff.; see also Kunze 1987).

I find La Fontaine's arguments about the similarities between the accusations made against alleged perpetrators of ritual abuse in the contemporary West and those made against "witches" in early modern Europe and in non-Western societies more
persuasive. She cites anthropological data and historical studies of the European
witch craze which have been influenced by anthropology and argues that there are
enough similarities between beliefs about "witches" in different societies for them to be
"considered members of one class of social phenomenon" (La Fontaine: 1998: 180). La
Fontaine believes that contemporary beliefs about perpetrators of ritual abuse are
analogous to these "witch beliefs" of other peoples. She sees the sudden outbreak
and proliferation of ritual abuse allegations, and the response they provoked in Britain,
to be analogous to "witch finding" (La Fontaine 1998: 12ff., 156ff., 180ff.).

In Part 3 of this thesis, I will develop La Fontaine's argument--which she used to
analyse certain British cases where children were alleged to have suffered ritual
abuse. I will consider the allegations of ritual abuse made in Australia by adult
survivors as well as those supposedly made by children. I will analyse the similarities
between "crazed" witch-hunting and the spread of the panic about ritual abuse
throughout much of the English-speaking West, and I will demonstrate how the affluent
and high-status people commonly accused of ritual abuse by adult survivors are
actually the kind of "outsiders" typically accused of witchcraft. I will also examine the
historical and cultural peculiarities of the panic about witch-like figures that occurred in
Australia, and show how--at a time when claims of ritual abuse were being greeted
with widespread scepticism--Australian ritual abuse activists were able to incite a
panic about organised, homosexual "pedophiles".

**Moral Panic**

Four years after presenting her sceptical report about ritual abuse to the British
Department of Health, La Fontaine published a more expansive, scholarly analysis of
the issue. Here she sought to explain the allegations and the responses they
provoked by developing Jenkins' theory that they were part of a "moral panic". Jenkins argues that in the 1980s, government officials and authoritative experts believed that children were being abused in new and horrific ways and in remarkably high numbers. This precipitated a "wave of . . . public fear" about ritual abuse which was "out of all proportion to the . . . threat" that such abuse actually constituted (Jenkins 1998: 6, 168). Jenkins argues that concern about ritual abuse was one of a series of panics about the sexual abuse of children that have occurred in the United States over the last hundred years (1998: 15ff.).

Jenkins does not argue that the sexual abuse of children is uncommon or that abuse cannot produce serious effects for its victims (1998: 6). He notes, however, that at different times, there have been varying levels of concern about child sexual abuse and that the source of the dangers faced by children have been perceived very differently (Jenkins 1998: 215-6). Panics typically occur in periods when there is a resonance between the conceptions about child abuse proposed by certain activists and experts, on one hand, and the prevailing social, political and religious climate on the other (Jenkins 1998: 216, 222). The opinions of experts and activists are conditioned both by their particular ideological concerns and by their perceived professional, political and other interests. They tend to overstate the extent of the abuse and its seriousness and to emphasise such factors as the sexual innocence of children, the predatory nature of those sexually interested in them and the inherently abusive nature of all sexual contact between adults and children (Jenkins 1998: 216-20). A climate which is receptive to these views is constructed by various demographic, social, economic and racial factors, and by the way these factors interact at a particular time. Panics are typically triggered by incidents which are especially disturbing and which seem to exemplify the dangers experts and activists have proclaimed (Jenkins 1998: 221ff.) .

According to Jenkins, concerns about ritual abuse evolved from the panic which had first occurred in the United States in the 1970s when discourse about child protection became disproportionately focused on the activities of organised pedophile and child pornography rings (Jenkins 1998: 164-5). Although these rings existed, they did so on a much smaller scale than was popularly believed, were much more loosely organised
and involved comparably less serious criminal activity (Jenkins 1998: 146ff.; Stanley 1991: 22-3). During this panic, the ideas proposed by conservative Christians and others about the inevitable consequences of sexual permissiveness, and by feminists about the nature and extent of sexual assault, were proposed to members of the large and influential generation that had previously championed an ethos of sexual freedom and experimentation. These proposals gained wide acceptance at this time because the "baby boomers" were now parents and because women were participating in the paid work force—and using childcare—in unprecedented peacetime numbers (Jenkins 1998: 163, 224, 229).

In his discussion of the panics surrounding first pedophile and pornography rings, and then specifically ritual abuse, Jenkins expands the classical sociological arguments about the creation of moral panics. Originally, the term had been developed to describe the disproportionate concern about and response to actual events, or the activities of particular individuals or groups (Jenkins 1998: 6; La Fontaine 1998: 20). The panic about ritual abuse, on the other hand, concerned activities which had in fact never taken place. Yet, as Jenkins points out, there is a strong resemblance between this panic and some of the earlier panics about child protection in the United States. The ideas which were disseminated—and widely accepted—about the activities of organised pedophiles and pornographers in the 1970s and 1980s bore virtually no resemblance to what was actually taking place (1998: 146-7, 154). Works of fiction also played an important role in defining these problems and spreading concern about them (Jenkins 1998: 155-6). There was thus considerable concern about abusive activities which had either never been perpetrated or had never occurred to any significant extent.

In the early 1980s, American society was highly receptive to the idea that abusive cults were active and widespread. Many Americans believed that their nation was undergoing a fundamental renewal, driven by the revitalisation of conservative political, social and religious values (Crawford 1994: 1354; Jenkins 1998: 121; Wines 1999). There was a revival of fundamentalist Christian activism and rhetoric and a simultaneous disquiet about the dangerous activities of new religious movements (Jenkins 1998: 172-3). Influential conservatives were warning parents of the dangers
posed by unfamiliar childcare (Faludi 1991: 62-5; Jenkins 1998: 171). There was a heightening of the popular perception of perpetrators of child abuse as "outsiders" who had been improperly empowered by the permissive ethos of the 1960s (Jenkins 1998: 224-5). Although feminism was under sustained conservative assault, there was a continuation of the tenuous alliance which had been forged in the 1970s between Cultural Feminists and moral conservatives on such issues as censorship (Denfeld 1995: 94ff.; Jenkins 1998: 128, 218). The mental health profession continued to proliferate and extend the influential position it had initially carved out in the 1940s, and in the 1980s these professionals developed new theories about the effects of child abuse, as well as new ways of diagnosing and treating these effects (Jenkins 1998: 171-2, 218).

According to Jenkins, the panic about explicitly ritual abuse was triggered by the publication of influential books--principally Michelle Remembers--and by the infamous McMartin case in which children attending a Los Angeles preschool were allegedly abused by the staff (1998: 166ff.). The incredible claims supposedly made by the McMartin children and the dubious ways in which "disclosure" had been achieved were accepted by parents, police, government officials and the media at this time because it had become widely believed that those making claims of sexual assault--especially children--were inevitably truthful, and because of the respect generally accorded to mental health professionals and the diagnoses and treatments they proposed (Jenkins 1998: 171-3). The children's "disclosures" were so bizarre, however, that new explanations for perpetrators' motives was sought (Jenkins 1998: 164-5). These were provided by "anti-cult" and Christian fundamentalist discourse about the activities of contemporary Satanists and from literature about recent--and presumably ongoing--abuse of children in Satanic rituals (Jenkins 1998: 166-7, 172-3).

The McMartin investigation and trials, and the media coverage and expert commentary on them, caused a proliferation of claims of ritual abuse at other American preschools (Jenkins 1998: 168). The issue subsequently became the subject of wider, panic-stricken discourse as mental health professionals, Christians, feminists and others sought to explain ritual abuse to the public, while activists proposed explanations for the lack of unambiguous evidence for Satanists' crimes, and as the media sought
extraordinary news stories (Jenkins 1998: 168ff.). Further proliferation took place as therapists and their adult patients--now thoroughly educated about the activities of Satanists and the effects of ritual abuse--"discovered" that such abuse was not in fact a new phenomenon (Jenkins 1998: 173-4).

Witches and Witch Hunters

La Fontaine regards Jenkins' "moral panic" theory of ritual abuse as very useful, especially in the way that Jenkins provides a credible and methodical explanation for the allegations and the response they provoked (1998: 20). She proposes very similar reasons for the rise of the panic about ritual abuse in Britain. Jenkins' account certainly compares more than favourably with those by writers such as Pendergrast (1995), which suffer from their lack of theoretical organisation, proposing--but not fully pursuing--a wide variety of alternative explanations for the panic about ritual abuse. Wakefield and Underwager, on the other hand, frame their critique of recovered memory within a broad and very questionable argument about the contemporary decline of the Rationalist ethos which American society inherited from the ancient Athenians. The influence of irrational Christians, feminists and prudes, they argue, endangers the status of the United States as "the model for the rest of the world" (1994: 19ff.).

La Fontaine is not, however, fully satisfied with the "moral panic" theory of ritual abuse. She believes that Jenkins' scheme--as outlined in his 1992 work on moral panics in contemporary Britain--fails to adequately consider the role of important factors such as Christian campaigns against abortion and the occult, the activism of feminists, and the revelations of police corruption in creating the panic. La Fontaine also argues that Jenkins does not adequately analyse the specific political goals of activists or the intense political conflicts which the allegations provoked (1998: 21). Some of these criticisms are, as La Fontaine has subsequently acknowledged,
precipitate and "rather weak" (La Fontaine, personal communication). The book that La Fontaine finds unsatisfactory is by no means Jenkins' only work about ritual abuse (Jenkins 1992). In his 1998 work on the "changing conceptions" about child molesters --including perpetrators of ritual abuse--in the United States, Jenkins most definitely considers the role of Christian and feminist campaigns in creating widespread concern about ritual abuse. There are, in any case, critics of Jenkins who have actually dismissed his 1992 work as an attempt to erroneously characterise ritual abuse as one of "a series of 'panics' about male sexual violence generated largely by feminists" and fundamentalists (e.g. Scott 2001: 41). The fact that Jenkins spends comparatively little time examining the political aspects of the panic in Britain is the result of the particular scope and focus of his various works. While La Fontaine has essentially examined the way in which American ideas about ritual abuse were imported into Britain and subsequently modified, Jenkins has been more concerned with the creation of panic about ritual abuse in the United States and its relationship to a number of comparable panics there, as well as its spread to other countries.

La Fontaine's argument that Jenkins underestimates the significance of the "occult" aspects of the panic about ritual abuse is a more reasonable criticism (La Fontaine 1998: 22). Jenkins proposes that activists attempted to explain the incredible claims of children by identifying their more bizarre elements as being part of Satanic ritual (1998: 164-5). Yet he never adequately explains why, in the latter part of the twentieth century, this interpretation was so readily taken up by parents, child protection workers, medical experts, police, prosecutors and, later, the media. This is a troubling omission, especially since many activists quite readily revised their views about ritual abuse when effective criticisms of "occult" explanations were made in the later 1990s. While they still accepted the literal truth of survivors' claims, activists increasingly identified perpetrators as members of various small totalising religious groups or as pedophiles with an interest in arcane or sadistic sex. When Jenkins notes the similarities between some early investigations of ritual abuse and the events in Salem in the seventeenth century, he again fails to consider why events which occurred in such different eras should be so similar (1998: 165-6, 178-9).
La Fontaine proposes that an accurate analysis of ritual abuse must include a more direct consideration of the similarities between the recent accusations made against alleged Satanists in Britain and those made against "witches" in early modern Europe and in non-Western societies. Using anthropological and historical data, she shows how the Britons alleged to have perpetrated ritual abuse were--like "witches"--believed to have engaged in activities that invert proper human behaviour (La Fontaine 1998: 14). She notes that both accusations of ritual abuse in Britain and accusations of witchcraft were made against people who were considered social "outsiders" (La Fontaine 1998: 74). La Fontaine also shows how the fear that profoundly evil--but quite improbable--crimes were being committed in Britain precipitated a kind of "craze", during which suspicions about ritual abuse became rife and accusations proliferated.

La Fontaine is well aware of the problems of using such emotive and ambiguous terms as "witch" and "witch finding"--especially to describe those accused of perpetrating abuse or of attempting to protect children (1998:180-1). Terms such as "witch" and "witch hunter" are common insults, and La Fontaine's decision to use terms like these does seem to jar with her stated intention of analysing "tales of ritual abuse in contemporary England" in a scholarly and dispassionate manner (Baddeley 1999: 17; La Fontaine 1998: 12-3; Larner 1984: 84).

These sorts of terms also create a good deal of ambiguity, even when they are carefully used in scholarly literature. Anthropologists use the term "witch" to identify figures whom people in a variety of societies believe epitomise and personify an inhuman evil (La Fontaine 1998: 14; Larner 1984: 91). Yet ordinary members of these societies may be accused of being such figures, and they may even confess to having perpetrated shockingly evil crimes (La Fontaine 1998: 15-16). To complicate matters, the term "witchcraft" is used in anthropological literature to describe both the activities of these evil beings and the magic practised--for good or ill--by ordinary people (La Fontaine 1998: 15; Marwick 1982 [1970]: 13; Steadman 1986: 106).

Another potential problem with terms such as "witch" arises because of their specifically Western provenance. For this reason, anthropologists who examine the
"witch beliefs" of non-Western peoples, and the responses which the supposed activities of these figures provoke, have always needed to carefully qualify the use of these terms (Douglas 1970: xxviii-xxix; Marwick 1982 [1970]: 11ff.; Needham 1978: 25-6; Steadman 1986: 106). There is also a complex relationship between anthropological studies of "witchcraft" in non-Western societies and historians' analyses of the "witch crazes" which occurred across Europe and in the American colonies in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Historical European beliefs about "witches" are one particular form of a more widespread social phenomenon, but they have affected anthropologists' perceptions of and attitudes to "witchcraft" in other societies (Douglas 1970: xii; La Fontaine 1998: 33, 35). These ideas have also exercised a crucial influence on the way that beliefs about ritual abuse have manifested in the contemporary West.

La Fontaine argues--convincingly, I believe--that her use of such terms is justified by the comparably problematic nature of likely alternatives, and by the fact that such terms are part of the body of anthropological and historical literature about commonly occurring figures, the accusations made against them and the frenzies which their reputed activities periodically provoke (1998: 180ff.). Scholars have previously used the "witchcraft" model to examine the hysteria about the activities of communists in the United States in the 1960s and white Americans' racist conceptions of blacks--especially those from the Caribbean region (see Cardozo 1982 [1970]; Mayer 1982 [1970]: 69; Murphy 1990: 332; Steadman 1986: 119ff.). La Fontaine uses the model to compare British activists to the "witch finders" of other societies and other times, but she generally avoids using terms like "witch" and "witch finder" in the body of her text. Instead, she refers to an "anti-Satanist movement". I do not believe, however, that this term is appropriate or useful in the Australian context. Christian fundamentalists who believed themselves to be fighting Satan played only a limited role in the campaign against ritual abuse in this country, and the explicitly "Satanic" element of accusations was comparatively understated and short-lived here.[2]

The problems which scholars encounter when using terms such as "witch" and "witch hunting" are exacerbated when anthropological and historical analyses are taken up by naive or partisan participants in the debate about ritual abuse. Certain writers and
activists commonly equate the practitioners of modern "witchcraft" (or "wicca") with those accused of "witchcraft" in early modern Europe, for example, and suggest that modern "witches" secretly practise abusive rites (e.g. Boyd 1991: 121, 130; Katchen and Sakheim 1992: 26; Ryder 1992: 11, 27; see also Larner 1984: 79). Such theorists also misunderstand—or misuse—anthropological studies of "witchcraft" to argue that evil-doers in other societies actually perpetrate the same sorts of abuse as that reported by survivors of ritual abuse in the West (e.g. Noblitt and Perskin 1995).

Although La Fontaine argues that a consideration of historical and anthropological studies of "witches" and "witch finding" is vital to an understanding of ritual abuse, she is understandably wary about comparing apparently similar phenomena which occur in different societies and at different historical periods (1998: 180-1). La Fontaine is adamant that such comparisons should be disciplined by the anthropological objective of basing any general proposals about the nature of "human society" on detailed and culturally-sensitive studies of individual human societies (La Fontaine 1998: 180-1). She notes that the particular beliefs which various societies may hold about "witches" reflect very different conceptions of the nature of "evil", and that accusations occur in different social contexts and can provoke very different responses (1998: 12-3).

**Perpetrators of Ritual Abuse as "Witches"**

The particular crimes that "witches" are supposed to commit vary across cultures, but they are believed to act in ways that invert proper human behaviour. Their activities typically involve violations of important local notions concerning sex, diet and homicide. They thus profoundly violate the rules which regulate social life. Witches are also commonly believed to improperly transcend the human condition, so that their activities can constitute a manifestation of supernatural evil in the world (La Fontaine 1998: 14). It is very likely, therefore, that the members of a society will blame instances of misfortune—or more general adversity—on the presence and activities of "witches" (La Fontaine 1998: 16).

Perpetrators of ritual abuse are most definitely described in literature as "witch-like". According to those who believe that ritual abuse "really happens", perpetrators
transgress fundamental contemporary norms about sex, killing and eating. They engage in rape, child abuse and orgiastic activities, practice sexual sadism and incest, and they produce child pornography (e.g. Boyd 1991: 57, 60, 71; Gould 1992: 207; Kahaner 1988: 211, 222, 232, 234; Raschke 1994: 143, 146; Ryder 12; Tate 1991: 51-6, 300). It is also alleged that murder is common within abusive groups. Perpetrators supposedly kill rivals, sacrifice infants and fetuses that have been specially bred for the purpose and ritually murder vagrants, itinerant workers and hitchhikers (e.g. Boyd 1991: 58, 64-5; Kahaner 1988: 168, 199; Ryder 1992: 16; Tate 1991: 28-32). It is alleged that they murder—or want to murder—for former group members, the counsellors who aid such escapees and those politicians and law enforcement officials whose activities endanger the group (e.g. Boyd 1991: 67, 332; Halpern 1992; Ryder 1992: 17, 78-80, 99, 104; Young 1992: 251). Perpetrators are also supposed to engage in cannibalism and the ingestion of drugs, blood and excreta. They allegedly starve their victims or coerce them into consuming forbidden substances (Boyd 1991: 58-60, 69, 75; Hodgins 1992; Kahaner 1988: 212-4, 222; Ryder 1992: 174).

The claims made about the activities of perpetrators in these texts tend to be generalisations about ritual abuse rather than specific accusations.[3] According to their authors, published descriptions of perpetrators’ crimes are based on the accounts of survivors and their families, the first-hand knowledge of experts on the occult and the findings of specialist police investigations. Some texts are composed almost entirely of very brief first-hand accounts in which alleged perpetrators and the locations where the abuse took place are largely unidentified. This literature is predominantly American, although there are British, Australian and other versions of it. Accounts of ritual abuse given by Americans are also very commonly cited in Australian literature and at child protection seminars in Australia.

These texts may, however, also contain a particular kind of confession of ritual abuse. Some survivors claim that as they were subjected to ritual abuse—or as a result of it—they perpetrated horrific abuse on others (Boyd 1991: 79-81; Kahaner 1988: 205). This makes ritual abuse an even more troubling crime for activists. Coercing victims into abusing others is certainly a profoundly transgressive act. It also creates some ambiguity about the exact status of “perpetrators” and “survivors”. In Britain, some of
these confessions are made by people who, when joining evangelical Christian
congregations or groups campaigning against ritual abuse, claim to have left abusive
cults (La Fontaine 1998: 38-9). La Fontaine has likened these sorts of claims to both
the voluntary confessions of witchcraft which occur in other societies and other times,
and to the self-lacerating public confessions of more general sinfulness commonly
writers and activists have been much more influenced by theories about the extreme
psychological effects of ritual abuse on survivors. Some have also embraced theories
about the secret misbehaviour of US government agencies (Noblit and Perskin 1995:
167, 171n.; Pendergrast 1995: 38ff. ). These writers and activists may therefore
propose that such "survivor-perpetrators" were effectively "programmed" by abusers
expert in inducing memory-deficit and multiple personality disorders and that they may
continue to be unwillingly--or even unknowingly--taking part in ritually abusive
activities (e.g. Gould 1992: 210; Powell n.d. [c 1999]: 16, 22).[4]

The grotesque activities of supposed perpetrators are in themselves antithetical to
proper human behaviour. Their transgressive nature is, however, aggravated by the
contexts in which they allegedly occur. The literature commonly nominates "powerful
members of society" as perpetrators of ritual abuse (La Fontaine 1998: 68; Ryder
1992: 16-7, 100; Spensley 1992a). In Australia, when the professions of such
"powerful" perpetrators are specified, they most commonly include judges, lawyers,
psychiatrists and senior public servants with access to sensitive information (Report
LCSCPPE Vol.3 1998: 44ff.; Ogden 1993: 30-1; RASSA 2000 "Ritual Abuse
Cults/Organizations"). These perpetrators are thus acting in ways which violate their
professional responsibilities and ethical standards and which break their oaths of
office.

According to the literature and speakers at seminars, more humble members of society
are also involved in ritual abuse (e.g. Powell n.d. [c.1999]: 20). These perpetrators are
supposedly the parents or other relatives of victims, or those who provide their
childcare (e.g. Crewdson 1988: 138ff.). It is commonly alleged that these perpetrators
are more junior members of large abusive groups or that they belong to smaller, family-
based ones (Kahaner 1988: 217-8; Powell n.d [c.1999]: 70 ). Authors and speakers
who believe that ritual abuse "really happens" stress that these perpetrators have--
like the "witches" of early modern Europe--acted in ways that are antithetical to
parental instincts and to their social obligation to nurture and protect children (Gould
Authors and conference speakers emphasise the fact that perpetrators inculcate
children with values that are the opposite of those they should learn. Some such
writers believe that Satanists, or members of other totalising, abusive religious groups,
inevitably raise children who will become maladjusted adults. Others emphasise the
link between Christian teachings and proper social behaviour and even propose that
raising children to have non-Christian values is itself abusive (e.g. Gould 1992: 207

In this regard it is significant that women are quite often nominated as perpetrators of
is rare for women to be accused of being the sole perpetrators, some survivors and
activists place great emphasis on the activities of female perpetrators. The ASCA
seminar in 2002--where ritual abuse was specifically discussed--was, for example,
noticeably different to the numerous other of the organisation's events that I have
attended in the way that speakers and participants repeatedly condemned the
activities of female perpetrators. The ritual abuse survivor who spoke there described
one cult as being mostly composed of men, but led by a woman. It was this woman's
attitude and aggressive behaviour that seemed to have most upset the survivor.

Similarly, the Australian women shown on the training videotapes made by the
WINGS survivors' group primarily nominate women as the perpetrators of their
abuse.[5] The activities of female perpetrators of ritual abuse not only violate their
nurturing instincts but also stereotypical contemporary notions about proper female
altruism and sexual decorum.

There have been instances where Australian survivors have identified specific, high-
ranking people as the perpetrators of the most horrific of ritually abusive acts. Franca
Arena's informant "Miss A", for example, named a prominent judge as the perpetrator
who had subjected her to horrendous abuse (see Report LCSCPPE Vol. 3
(Transcripts) 1998: 44ff., 101, 130-1). These instances are, however, very rare. Accusations of ritual abuse against identified people--such as those which result in police investigations or criminal trials--are more commonly made against more ordinary people and typically relate to crimes which are serious, but of a less grotesque nature and which occur on a relatively small scale. It is often alleged, however, that those identified have unspecified connections with more powerful perpetrators, that they are peripherally involved in more seriously transgressive acts, or that they provide children for these abusive rites (e.g. Regina vs. K, NSW District Court 1994, Regina vs. J, WA Supreme Court, 1994 see Guilliat 1996). This vagueness is also typical of accusations made outside the criminal justice process, even though there is no pressure on these survivors to substantiate their claims. The survivor who addressed the 2002 ASCA seminar, for example, gave a detailed description of the horrendous abuse she suffered at the hands of Satanists and other cultists. The only person she specifically accused, however, was an eccentric--and now long-deceased--uncle. Although this man had allegedly drugged her and delivered her to the cultists, the only abuse he had himself allegedly perpetrated was some inappropriate bath-time fondling.

It is very common for authors and activists to describe the perpetrators of ritual abuse--like the "witches" in other societies and other times--as being somehow inhuman. Obviously, those who perpetrate such cruel and disgusting crimes are inhumane. In some influential texts, however, perpetrators are described as beings who have extraordinary, inhuman qualities or powers. As I have discussed, members of the abusive cult described in the seminal ritual abuse text Michelle Remembers allowed themselves to be become possessed so that evil entities could take part in their ceremonies (Smith and Pazder 1981 [1980]: 144). They could also use rituals powerful enough to ensure Satan's literal presence at their gatherings (Smith and Pazder 1981 [1980]: 226f., 242). Perpetrators of ritual abuse are thus believed to be the conduit through which supernatural evil can operate in the world.

It is more commonly asserted in these explicitly Christian, North American texts that perpetrators use their knowledge and powers to facilitate demonic possession in their victims. Survivors report having ongoing problems caused by possession, or even
that they are still troubled by the demons summoned in abusive rituals (Ryder 1992: 174-5). It is alleged in some texts that cultists carefully choose the children who will be possessed, so that perpetrators can more effectively gain access to the powers of evil supernatural beings (e.g. Ryder 1992: 15). Members of abusive groups who have undergone demonic possession—whether they have invited possession or were possessed against their will—are described as being marked by their contact with demons. Like the “witches” of early modern Europe—whose contact with evil supernatural beings was believed to have resulted in detectable deformities—the bodies of these people improperly house multiple spiritual entities (Levack 1995: 27; Summers 1969 [1926]: 70-6).[6] Those perpetrators who have supposedly caused others to be possessed by demons have—also like “witches”—committed an act which Christian activists would regard as profoundly evil and treacherous. They have spurned their rightful God and creator and have furthered the interests of an entity which is the enemy of both God and humanity. They have allowed evil entities to transform themselves and others into a travesty of a properly constituted human being. Perpetrators have also betrayed their duty to nurture and properly raise children by inducing them to lead evil lives and by exposing them to possession—a most profoundly physically and spiritually harmful experience.

Authors with a more secular, scientific view of ritual abuse claim that perpetrators induce various “multiple personality” disorders—rather than demonic possession—in their victims. This is deliberately done as part of cult programming or as an inadvertent result of their abusive activities (Boyd 1991: 98-9; Noblitt and Perskin 1995: 168; Young 1992: 253, 258). These “scientific” texts have been the more influential in Australia, even among groups which have a staunchly religious outlook. At the 1999 Conference of the evangelical Christian Festival of Light movement, for example, a variety of speakers listed the ways in which Satan was active in the modern world. The diabolical activities described, however, involved the activities of the Devil’s followers or people misled—rather than possessed—by Satan. The conference was addressed on the subject of ritual abuse by the psychiatrist and expert on the diagnosis and treatment of Multiple Personality Disorder, James Quinn (see FWN March 1999).
ASCA literature quite strongly emphasises the “spiritual” effects of the various kinds of child abuse, and prayer is an important component of all the organization’s seminars and meetings that I have attended. Yet ASCA proposes a scrupulously scientific view of the memory disorders—including “multiple personality” disorders—and of the processes by which the victims of abuse contract them.

The beliefs of the WINGS group are more ambiguous. Members of the group believe that there are abusive Satanic groups in Australia and that supernatural “powers of darkness” are active here (Powell n.d.[c.1999]: 51-2). The therapeutic activities of WINGS are very prayerful—in an explicitly though unconventionally Christian way. WINGS videos show counsellors engaging in activities which strongly resemble exorcisms, and some survivors behave as if possessed. Yet WINGS counsellors essentially attempt to “deprogram” rather than “exorcise” survivors of ritual abuse. The group’s coordinator has written that she regards “black magic” as an essentially psychological process. She believes that prayers, ritual cleansing and the invocations of angels are effective treatments for those who have been programmed by Satanic cults because perpetrators unavoidably generate “cult-loyal” alters which are imbued with a belief in and fear of God’s power (Powell n.d.[c. 1999]: 51).

These groups—and the authors of the texts that influenced them—nevertheless present perpetrators as committing very “witch-like” crimes. They have supposedly betrayed their responsibility to protect and nurture children by abusing them in the cruelest of ways, and they have forced them to become unwilling or even unknowing perpetrators of ritual abuse. To make matters worse, these experts believe, perpetrators have induced a serious mental disorder—whose chief symptom is a violation of the property unitary human personality—in their victims. Contact with evil has thus “marked” these survivors of ritual abuse.

To summarise, I agree with La Fontaine that Jenkins’ analysis of ritual abuse as a “moral panic” is useful but not totally adequate. Jenkins argues persuasively that during the 1980s, many Americans became receptive to certain ideas about the consequences of sexual permissiveness, the ubiquity of sexual assault and the activities of dangerous new religious movements. When influential books about the
abusive activities of Satanists were published--and when children in American preschools began to "disclose" that they had been subjected to this abuse--panic ensued. Sensational media stories alerted the public to the danger of ritual abuse. Supposed perpetrators were put on trial, and police and child protection activists searched for new cases. Parents frantically questioned their children about abuse that may have been perpetrated in preschools. Therapists explored the possibility that their adult patients may also have been ritually abused.

La Fontaine points out the panic about ritual abuse more closely resembles the "witch finding" activities described by anthropologists and historians than previous panics about child sexual abuse that occurred in the United States (Jenkins 1998: 15ff.; La Fontaine 1998: 12ff., 156ff.). Perpetrators of ritual abuse were--like witches--conceived as transgressing fundamental contemporary ideas about sex but also about killing and eating. Their activities were thought to indicate that society was in terrible decline. Perpetrators were also believed to engage "occult" activities that were very much like the crimes supposedly perpetrated by witches in early modern Europe. Perpetrators resembled these witches in other ways. They were commonly described as being able to transform themselves and their victims, for example, and as being "marked" in various ways by their contact with evil. Some people actually confessed to horrific--and quite improbable--crimes. As I will argue in the next chapter, the anthropological and historical literature on witchcraft also provides some useful insights into the ways in which American ideas about ritual abuse spread to--and were accepted in--other countries.
Notes

[1] Ritual Abuse Workshop, Queanbeyan District Hospital, NSW 21 Sept. 1998
(video).

[2] Anthropologist use a variety of terms to describe the actions by which people attempt to identify and deal with witches and other witch-like “hidden enemies” (Mayer 1982 [1970]: 69). La Fontaine herself writes of “witch-hunting”, “witch-finding” and “witch-cleansing”. She differentiates “witch-hunts” or “witch-cleansing”--where people engage in more “general witch-finding” activities--from the attempts that people make to find witches responsible for particular crimes (La Fontaine 1998: 15-6). More confusingly, La Fontaine describes the events in Europe in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries as both “early modern witch-hunts” and the “witch-scare”, and she writes of particular instances where such “witch-hunting” involved “witch-finders” (1998: 19, 33, 64). When she analyses the activities of British social workers, Christians and others, La Fontaine considers the possibility that they are a “modern movement of witch-finders” (1998: 156). She borrows this phrase from Richards, who used it to describe events in twentieth century Africa.

For the sake of clarity, therefore, I will be using the term “witch hunting” rather than “witch finding”, except where I am specifically citing an argument where La Fontaine has used the term. “Witch hunt” is certainly an emotive term and one which has negative connotations--especially where it is used to describe evil-doers other than “witches” (Baddeley 1999: 17; Larner 1984: 84). Many scholars have, however, been able to carefully and satisfactorily use this and similarly problematic terms (e.g. Cardozo 1982 [1970]; Mayer 1982 [1970]: 69; Steadman 1986). Alternative terms--such as “witch finding”--can also have quite negative connotations (see Summers 1969 [1926]: 102; Witchcraft 2000: 58ff.). I will also refer to “crazed” witch hunting--following Cardozo (1982 [1970]) and Trevor-Roper (1967 [1956])--to differentiate this activity from smaller-scale and endemic witch hunting.
[4] In 1994, an Australian survivor actually confessed on national television that she had killed an infant during a ritual. She stated, however, that she was attempting to end the suffering of the child, who had been flayed alive by cultists (Four Corners ABCTV 29 Aug. 1994).


[6] Ogden notes that in the 1970s, “anti-cult” activists described those who had joined new religious movements as being “marked”—much like the witches who had been in contact with Satan. They were supposedly transformed into “mindless ‘zombies’” (Ogden 1993: 11). Lotto (2001) makes a somewhat similar point about cases where young children had allegedly been ritually abused. He compares the way paediatricians examined the bodies of children with the searches for “witch marks” on women’s bodies in the early modern period. In both instances, very problematic methods were used to uncover very problematic evidence of wrongdoing.

[7] A number of WINGS videotapes depict group members’ attempts to deprogram survivors in 1994. During one session, a survivor’s alternate personalities were described—and treated—as “entities”. Another revealed that a Satanic cult had convinced her that she had “radar” instead of a human soul. The group’s chief therapist was able to convince the survivor that she did indeed have a soul (31 May 1994, 12 July 1994, 15 Aug. 1994).

The distinction between demonic possession and the various “multiple personality” disorders is a rather hazy one. Spanos among others has pointed out that scientific explanations for the seeming presence of “multiple personalities” have never completely supplanted earlier religious explanations—even among psychiatrists—and have in fact been continuously conditioned by them (1996: 183f.).
CHAPTER VII

WITCH CRAZE

There was no spontaneous worldwide “explosion” of ritual abuse allegations—despite what some writers suggest (e.g. O'Donovan 1993: 7; Preston SMH 8 Dec. 1990; Summit 1994: 11; RASSA 2000 “Belief in Its Existence”). Allegations were made in Canada in 1985—that is, the year after the arrest of the staff of the McMartin preschool—and then in Britain and Holland in 1987 and in New Zealand in 1990 (Boyd 1991: 22-3; Hill 1998). Although Australian therapists reportedly began encountering allegations of ritual abuse in the mid-1980s, the first specific, public accusation was not made here until the middle of 1988, when the staff of a childcare centre at Wahroonga on Sydney’s North Shore were named by a mother of children enrolled there (Rope, evidence to WRC 8 June 1996; Report WRC Vol. IV 1997: 673ff.). Accusations were subsequently made in Australia—as in the United States and Britain—both by parents and child protection activists to whom young children had supposedly disclosed ritual abuse and by adult survivors who claimed that they had themselves suffered such abuse in childhood.

The sorts of explanations commonly provided for the spread of ritual abuse allegations are inadequate and problematic. Writers and activists who believe that ritual abuse “really happens” generally propose that the similarities between the allegations made in different countries are signs that abusive Satanism is an organised, international
religion, or even that an international Satanic conspiracy is afoot (e.g. Tate 1991: 321; O’Donovan 1993: 12-3.; Stone and Stone 1992: 177, 183; Ryder 1992: 11ff.; see Guilliat 1996: 90). These theorists of course underestimate the capacity of therapists, counsellors and other activists to influence—and standardise—“disclosures” of ritual abuse (La Fontaine 1998: 125; Pendergrast 1995: 362ff.). They also fail to consider why—or to acknowledge that—allegations were made sequentially in different countries, and they virtually ignore some crucial differences in the way allegations emerged and evolved. Writers such as Scott (2001), on the other hand, concentrate on allegations made in one particular country. Scott is thus able to emphasise the similarities between the activities reported by ritual abuse survivors and other types of child abuse that are well-documented in Britain. She can also dismiss some sceptics as unreasonably emphasising the “Satanic” aspects of ritual abuse by ignoring the fact that they were actually responding to claims made particularly in American discourse (Scott 2001:38-9).

It is also quite rare for sceptical writers and activists to examine the way ritual abuse allegations spread from the US to other societies. Many of the most influential sceptics are Americans who are wholly concerned with such allegations in their own country. Yet those who do consider the international nature of the issue tend to propose fairly cursory explanations for what Hill (1998) might call “Satan’s migration” from the United States. Both Jenkins and La Fontaine are critical of writers who explain the spread of concern about ritual abuse—as well as the spread of claims that it was occurring—as a simple case of “American cultural hegemony” (La Fontaine 1998: 2). Many such writers do little more than Stanford, who states that “where America led [other countries] followed” (1996: 252). These writers therefore ignore the fact that, for all their similarities, there are some important differences between American society and culture and those of the predominantly English-speaking countries where allegations were made and taken seriously. The Australian journalist Richard Guilliat (1996), for example, offers little useful explanation for the fact that certain ideas proposed by conservative American Christians about the activities of the Devil and his worshippers provoked such a reaction in this religiously indifferent society. Sceptical writers also often fail to explore—or even to notice—that there were surprisingly different reactions to ritual abuse allegations in different countries.
The anthropological and historical literature on witchcraft, on the other hand, analyses the ways in which some quite similar beliefs about profoundly evil crimes and their perpetrators occur in some very dissimilar societies—and provoke similar sorts of responses. The insights offered by these studies of witch beliefs, accusations of witchcraft and witch hunts reveal the complex ways in which local culture and social tensions may interact with a more widespread sense of crisis and with compelling imported explanations for the crisis. Such studies are therefore useful in an examination of how American ideas about ritual abuse spread to—and were accepted in—other countries and how these beliefs manifested outside the US. This literature also provides clues to understanding the seemingly unlikely process by which ideas that had been vitally important in Europe and its American colonies in early modern times re-emerged and became influential in the contemporary West.

**Anthropological and Historical Theories of “Witch Craze”**

La Fontaine notes that anthropologists and historians distinguish between witch crazes—which, following Willis, she describes as “witch-cleansing”—and recurring, endemic responses to the supposed activities of witches (1998: 15-6). During endemic witch hunting, people make accusations as part of their ongoing political and social struggles, and witches are sought out and punished for particular crimes. Witch crazes, on the other hand, occur as societies attempt to address what is perceived to be a more general, deep-seated and worsening decline. The activities or presence of witches is blamed for the crisis, and they are eliminated—either by cure or execution. Crazes occur periodically in some societies, but in others they are precipitated by unique events—especially profound and troubling social change. New methods of detecting the presence of witches are typically devised, a “movement” is formed and its representatives spread both their explanation of the crisis and their method of
detecting those causing it among the population, or to new populations. Local leaders may be sympathetic to the movement, or may feel restrained from interfering with its activities (La Fontaine 1998: 15-6; Willis 1970: 131-2).

Anthropologists have identified numerous instances of “crazed” witch hunting in African societies during the colonial and post-colonial eras (see Parrinder 1963 [1958]: 170ff; Willis 1970: 129ff). Such crazes occurred in societies undergoing profound demographic, political, economic and social change but in which the resulting sense of crisis was conceived in terms of traditional notions about witchcraft (Willis 1970: 130-1).[1] Traditional ideas about the presence, activities and likely identity of “witches”--and notions about how to detect and deal with them--were blended with those influenced by Western religion, medicine and forms of administration (Parrinder 1963 [1958]: 170-2; Willis 1970: 130). As African witch hunters travelled, they tended to activate the traditional “witch-beliefs” of the particular region or the particular ethnic group they encountered. They precipitated the kinds of confessions of witchcraft traditionally made in that region--and by members of groups traditionally suspected of being witches (Willis 1970: 130).

The Witch Craze of Early Modern Europe

In western Europe, the witch craze occurred in--and immediately followed--a period of immense upheaval. The continent had been devastated by plague in the medieval period, and the resulting demographic and social changes were felt well into early modern times. The manorial and agrarian economy was being undermined by increasing urbanisation and industrial modes of production (Lamer 1984: 86; Levack 1995: 64ff.; Nelson 1975: 343ff.; Russell 1980: 112, 120). There was increasing interest in and practice of ritual magic among the educated elites, popular discontent about the corruption of Christian clergy, increasing challenges to Catholic orthodoxy, and--from the sixteenth century--the formation of “reformed” Christian churches (Cardozo 1982 [1970]: 470; Cohn 1975: 164ff; Levack 1995: 36; Steadman 1986: 107; Parrinder 1963 [1958]: 20ff.).
The Catholic Church regarded these changes and challenges as the work of the Devil and his earthly followers. Practitioners of ritual magic and religious reformers were therefore regarded as apostates and heretics, while the increasing numbers of peripatetic, unmarried women—or married women who practised forms of contraception—were perceived to be violating the most important and God-given qualities of their sex. Magicians, heretics and "unnatural" women were accused of perpetrating the worst sorts of murderous and sexual crimes (Cohn 1975: 21, 164ff; Russell 1980: 120; Lamer 1984: 86; Levack 1995: 36-7; Nelson 1975: 339, 343ff).

In response to the rise of heretical religious movements in the later medieval period, the Church had institutionalised inquisitorial tribunals, frequently conducted by members of zealous new clerical orders. Inquisitors subsequently sought out practitioners of ceremonial magic, and then—following the infamous papal bull of 1484—"witches" (Cohn 1970: 10; 1975: 23-4; Nelson 1975: 336ff; Parrinder 1963 [1958]: 20ff.). With the publication of the *Malleus Maleficarum*, inquisitors had new and standardised procedures for recognising, interrogating and punishing witches (Levack 1995: 54-5; Nelson 1975: 338; Parrinder 1963 [1958]: 25-6; Russell 1980: 79). The Inquisition initially spread the craze "through much of western Europe", although witch hunting was also taken up by secular rulers—who saw the presence of Satan's agents as a threat to their own regimes—and by zealous Protestant witch hunters (Kunze 1987: 93, 203ff.; Lamer 1984: 89-90; Levack 1995: 43, 64ff.; Nelson 1975: 340; Parrinder 1963 [1958]: 25).

At a local level, those accused of witchcraft were often practitioners of—or suspected of practising—traditional malevolent magic, or "malefice". Inquisitors regarded practitioners of malefice as agents of Satan and the clandestine perpetrators of horrendous crimes, and local populations adopted this view of these feared, distrusted or disliked figures (Cohn 1975: 239, 252; Levack 1995: 57-9; Mulhem 1994: 268). After torturous interrogation, the accused confessed to practising this kind of "witchcraft" (Parrinder 1963 [1958]: 81ff; Russell 1980: 80). Accusations were also made against economic and political rivals, midwives and other troublesome women, and, later, people who stubbornly refused to either embrace or renounce Protestantism (Cohn 1970: 246ff.; Lamer 1984: 90-1; Nelson 1975: 342-3). There were thus significant local variations in
the craze, since accusations reflected different economic and social pressures and rivalries, and different despised minorities were present. There were also local differences in the levels of intensity in the struggles between Catholicism and Protestantism and different levels of enthusiasm for witch hunting among local elites (Larner 1984: 88-90; Kunze 1987: 93ff.; Russell 1980: 83; Steadman 1986: 107).

The spreading panic about ritual abuse in the 1980s and 1990s has some important characteristics in common with the African and European witch crazes. All arose in times of dramatic change, when a sense of crisis was widespread. In each case, stories about profoundly evil groups that were secretly active among the population were spread and widely accepted. These accounts resonated with preexisting beliefs about the presence of the supernatural in daily life and also with longstanding suspicions about certain unpopular minorities. As the crazes spread to different regions of Africa and Europe, however, different minority groups were suspected of perpetrating horrendous evil, the exact nature of their supposed crimes varied, and evil-doers were pursued using different methods and with different levels of vigour. Similarly, as the panic about ritual abuse "migrated" from the US to other Western countries, the allegations varied, different sorts of people were suspected and significantly different measures were taken in response.

Ritual Abuse Concerns, Allegations and Panic Outside the US

The panic about ritual abuse had its genesis in the United States in the late 1970s and early 1980s. A sense of crisis had developed as conservative Americans contemplated the consequences of what they believed to be the "wrong turn" that their society had taken in the 1960s and early 1970s: changes in military and foreign policy, liberalisation of sexual and other mores, increasing religious experimentation and
changes to the social and economic position of women (Crawford 1994: 1354; Faludi 1991; Jenkins 1998: 121f., 146f., 164ff., 171f.; Stanley 1991; Wines 1999). American discourse was very influential both in creating a comparable sense of crisis—and in precipitating the outbreak of ritual abuse allegations—in countries outside the United States. This is most obvious in the way that the ritually abusive activities originally reported by American victims and survivors were virtually identical to those reported elsewhere. Allegations also predominantly occurred in English-speaking countries, where American ritual abuse literature, the messages of visiting American activists and even American media reports could be readily absorbed (Hill 1998; La Fontaine 1998: 12).[2]

Yet the craze took on quite different forms as ritual abuse discourse—and, consequently, allegations by victims and survivors and a more widespread panic—"migrated" from the United States to other countries. Some such differences were the result of the interval between the genesis of the craze in United States and its arrival elsewhere. Others arose because there were significant differences between the governmental, legal and law enforcement structures of the US and those of other countries. More significant, however, were the different local historical and cultural contexts in which the migrating concerns about ritual abuse became embedded.

**Interval**

The first accusations of ritual abuse were made in 1983 against the owners and staff of the McMartin preschool in Manhattan Beach, California. A precise date for the initial accusations by North American adults—other than Michelle Smith—is difficult to specify, but significant numbers “were recalling that they had been tortured in ritualized satanic orgies where adults and children had been murdered and cannibalised” in 1986 (Mulhern 1994: 278-9; see also Victor 1998; Wakefield and Underwager 1994: 67ff., 71). In Britain, the first accusations of “child” ritual abuse were made in 1987, and cases such as these had been largely displaced by adult survivor cases “by 1993” (La Fontaine 1998: 58, 175-6). In Australia, however, the first accusations by adult
survivors were made almost simultaneously with those in the child cases—although official complaints by survivors were not lodged for several years. Accusations against the supposed perpetrators of ritual abuse in Australian “child” cases continued to be made well into the 1990s, even as “adult survivor” accusations became increasingly numerous.[3]

There was thus a comparatively brief period between the proliferation of American ritual abuse literature and discourse in this country and the arrival here of counter-arguments proposed by overseas sceptics. Ralph Underwager gave expert testimony for the defence in the very first Australian ritual abuse case to come before the courts. Similarly, local sceptics quickly had access to influential scholarly studies critical of accepted means of detecting ritual abuse and obtaining disclosure, reports detailing the absence of unproblematic evidence for ritual abuse and media stories about the exoneration of those accused. In 1994, therefore, journalists were very cautious when reporting on the publication of one of the first official Australian documents about ritual abuse (e.g. Adelaide Advertiser 30 May 1994; SMH 30 May 1994). The NSW Sexual Assault Committee booklet Ritual Abuse: Information for Health and Welfare Professionals was soon after being cited in media reports critical of the the claims being made by activists and of their improper influence within state government bureaucracies (e.g. Guillatt SMH 1 Feb. 1995). In 1997 Royal Commissioner James Wood stated that the information in the booklet was “thoroughly uncritical and unscientific” (Report WRC Vol. IV 1997: 674).

**Law Enforcement, Prosecution and Judicial Structures**

The tendency for the panic about ritual abuse in Australia to be relatively short-lived—and, especially, amenable to transformation—was enhanced by the character of this country’s civic, legal and law enforcement structures. Australia—like some other countries where ritual abuse allegations have been made—has far more centrally organised regional government, police forces, courts and social services than the US. Australian police, prosecutors and judges are public servants who are appointed,
monitored and directed by state governments. The investigation and prosecution of supposed perpetrators of ritual abuse at the McMartin preschool, for example, was overseen by elected officials of Los Angeles County. The County’s District Attorney, in fact, stood for re-election—and lost—as the prosecution case was being prepared. The Municipal and Superior Court judges who heard the case were, likewise, elected officials (Crewdson 1988: 137, 143; Linder 2003; Tate 1991: 273, 285). In contrast, the prosecution of the Seabeach case—the Australian equivalent of McMartin—was prepared by public servants under the direction of the NSW Director of Public Prosecutions. The magistrate who heard the case—and essentially dismissed the charges at the committal stage—was also state-appointed. He heard the case as part of his schedule at the City Local Court. It is possible that the case only reached this stage because of policies implemented by the newly-elected NSW government, which local police believed gave them a degree of investigative autonomy. These policies also made police reluctant to increase the cost of the investigation by seeking outside help. Mona Vale police were thus unusually susceptible to influence by the assertive and well organised Seabeach parents, their supporters and panic-stricken locals (Fluit, evidence to WRC 13 Aug. 1996, 15 Aug. 1996; Ralston, evidence to WRC 13 Aug. 1996).

Prosecutions based on the “recovered memories” of ritual abuse survivors were also restricted by Australia’s more centralised prosecution system. In 1994—that is, the same year that the first Australian “adult” ritual abuse case was tried—the Queensland DPP essentially prohibited prosecutors in that state from pursuing cases based on the testimony of complainants who had recovered memories of sexual assault after hypnosis. The next year, this prohibition was extended to memories recovered by patients undergoing the controversial Eye Movement Desensitisation and Reprocessing treatment (QCMC 2003).
Patterns of Importation

"Migrating" American ritual abuse ideas and discourse obviously played a role in informing Britons and Australians about ritual abuse and making them amenable to the idea that abusive cultists were active in their respective countries. Yet local factors affected the way in which this literature and discourse was imported and distributed. In Britain, Christian fundamentalists imported and provided a ready audience for American ideas about ritual abuse. Their activism also made local foster parents, social workers and--initially, at least--the British public amenable to the idea that members of certain impoverished families were perpetrating this sort of abuse.

Christian fundamentalists in the United States, Britain and elsewhere had been expressing alarm about new--and supposedly diabolical--religious ideas and movements since the 1960s (Hume 1997: 206ff., Jenkins 1998: 172; La Fontaine 1998: 163; see also Cerullo 1973). Although fewer in number than their American counterparts, fundamentalist British Christians are vocal and well organised (Richardson 1997: 72). From the mid-1980s, they took up American ideas about the particular danger that abusive worshippers of Satan posed to children and began to distribute imported and locally-produced literature and videos about ritual abuse. At the same time, British fundamentalists formed their own child protection organizations, and the "converted Satanists" who addressed their congregations increasingly incorporated imported ideas about ritual abuse into their testaments. These converts did not, however, accuse identifiable people of being perpetrators of ritual abuse (Boyd 1991: 319ff; La Fontaine 1998: 38, 136-7, 146, 163-5; Tate 1991: 215, 320ff., 330). Such fundamentalist Christian activism complemented a more diffuse process whereby Britons were informed of the dangers of ritual abuse via the coverage of American news stories in the local media or through imported American newspapers and journals.

The bizarre statements and strange behaviour of children who had been removed from families on the notorious British "sink estates"--which came to be regarded as signs and symptoms of ritual abuse--were first discerned, recorded and reported by County-appointed foster parents, at least some of whom were fundamentalist Christians (La Fontaine 1998 77-9, 96-9, 101; Tate 1991: 19ff., 302ff., 315). Social
workers in some such cases attempted to make sense of the children’s behaviour by consulting Christian experts, “anti-cult” literature and the sorts of ritual abuse literature which fundamentalist Christians had imported and/or distributed (La Fontaine 1998: 104-6, 166; Tate 1991: 306, 310). These sorts of explanations may well have resonated with the “sleeping” Christianity of the social workers (Webster 1998).[4] Christian experts and representatives of Christian child protection organizations also advised “non-perpetrating” parents and foster parents caring for victims in a number of ritual abuse cases (Tate 1991: 202-3, 208, 214-5). The efforts by Christian organisations to warn the public about abusive Satanists played an important role in alerting the British mass media to the issue of ritual abuse—and thus spreading the panic beyond Christian and child protection circles (La Fontaine 1998: 65, 164; Tate 1991: 207, 330).

Christian “anti-Satanists” were far less important in the importation into Australia of discourse about ritual abuse. Like their British and American counterparts, conservative Australian Christians had been campaigning against what they saw as the growing power of Satan in Australian society since the early 1970s. Of particular concern to conservative Australian Christians was the influence of the American “counter-culture” in this country and the effects of reforms by Australian governments to laws regulating censorship, homosexuality and certain “victimless crimes” (Drury 2002 [1988]: 96-9; Hume 1997: 34ff.). Conservative Australian Christians tended, however, to regard Satan as inspiring contemporary evil—including interest in the occult—rather than directly encouraging it, and their campaigns focused on preventing people unwittingly coming under Satan’s power rather than challenging those involved in explicitly Satanic worship.[5]

Although ideas about “repressed memories” were circulating among networks of Christian therapists in Australia in the early 1980s, there was no comparable concern about ritual abuse. In her 1986 book, Cathy-Ann Matthews details how she underwent individual and group therapy in 1982 while training to become a Christian marriage guidance counsellor. She subsequently recovered memories of being physically and sexually abused as a child. A psychiatrist—recommended by her counsellor—helped her to identify and intensify her “pain and suffering” and to stop
"evading" it. He began the therapy by invoking the Holy Spirit (Matthews 1986: 1, 7, 12ff., 61ff.). In 1986, Matthews addressed the Sixth International Conference on Child Abuse and Neglect—held in Sydney—and provided delegates with a list of signs and symptoms indicating the presence of repressed memories of sexual abuse (Guilliatt 1996: 41ff.). Hill (1998) regards this conference as the main conduit whereby overseas beliefs about ritual abuse first "migrated" to Australia. Yet Matthews, a committed Christian whose recovered memories included being tortured and sexually assaulted by her parents, had not recalled—and did not mention—abuse with explicitly "ritual" elements.[6]

American ideas about ritual abuse were introduced into Australia in a very direct manner. The 1986 ICCAN conference was addressed by Roland Summit, Kee MacFarlane, Astrid Heger and David Finkelhor—who were among the most influential contemporary American ritual abuse theorists and activists. MacFarlane and Heger—who had played central roles in obtaining disclosures of ritual abuse from the children of the McMartin preschool just three years before—conducted additional workshops for Australian child protection workers (Guilliatt 1996: 29; Hill 1998). Within two years American ritual abuse literature was widely distributed in Australia—and in the hands of Australian parents fearful about the activities of Satanists in preschools, the paediatricians who examined children for signs of ritual abuse and the therapists who treated them (Booth and Horowitz 1992: 159-60; Report WRC Vol IV 1997: 680ff; SB 115, evidence to WRC 6 Aug. 1996). American experts on child abuse “accommodation”, recovered memories and ritual abuse visited Australia and held seminars for therapists and child protection workers over the next ten years.[7]

The Australian mass media extensively covered the Seabeach investigation and hearings and were instrumental in proposing the idea of ritual abuse to the wider public. It was not until the collapse of the case, however, that the media began to link events on the Northern Beaches with overseas reports about the organized abuse of children by Satanic cultists. In January 1990, the Derens were accused of perpetrating ritual abuse in articles published by New Idea, a weekly women’s magazine. The allegations supposedly made by the Seabeach children—including sexual abuse during Satanic rituals, animal sacrifice and being smeared with animal blood and
viscera--were reported in graphic detail. The magazine also had a summary of the allegations on its front cover, and the case was discussed in the editorial column (see Sexton 2000: 48-9). It was more common, however, for Australian journalists to more obliquely refer to Seabeach or to cite experts who had some involvement with the case when describing ritual abuse in the United States and Britain and when discussing local allegations. These early Australian media reports canvassed allegations made by children as well as by adult and adolescent survivors. Some were in large part reproductions of overseas material. The Ten Television Network's 1990 expose of ritual crime in Australia, The Devil Made Me Do It, for example, consisted in large part of the script, expert opinion and footage from a 1988 American program, Geraldo Rivera's Devil Worship: Exposing Satan's Underground (Guilliatt 1996: 91).[8] Evidently, the contents of a second 1988 Rivera program, Satanic Breeders: Babies for Sacrifice, were too incredible even for Channel Ten (Crews NYROB 17 Nov. 1994)!

History, Culture and Panic in Britain and Australia

As well as these qualifying "structural" and temporal factors, certain historical and cultural characteristics exerted a critical influence on the form that the migrating panic about ritual abuse took outside the United States. Local history and culture also made certain countries receptive to American ideas about ritual abuse. The "occult panics" which had periodically occurred in Britain and Australia prior to the 1980s were among the most important factors which precipitated panics about ritual abuse in these countries--and which shaped their particular form and development. A comparable panic about the activities of pedophiles, and some pivotal child abuse cases, were also crucial in sparking--and then shaping--the ritual abuse panic in Britain. Although concerns about pedophiles and--in the Chamberlain case--a notorious supposed
instance of child murder also occurred in Australia, these factors did not precipitate the acceptance that migrating ritual abuse discourse received in this country. They did, however, affect the form the panic took in Australia.

"Occult panics"

"Migrating" American ideas and discourse about ritual abuse reactivated some longstanding local concerns about the dangers posed by the occult and its practitioners in both Britain and Australia. In Britain, especially, the notion of ritual abuse—and the possibility that it was being perpetrated by members of new religious movements—made sense to fundamentalist Christians and, initially, to the wider public. Eastern religion and philosophy had generated considerable interest in Britain during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and there was a revival of interest in ritual magic in this period. Elements of this British "occult revival"—especially the teachings and rites of spiritualism, Theosophy and The Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn—were brought to Australia by British migrants and visiting British and American experts and attracted devotees here (Baddeley 1999: 23ff.; Drury and Tillet 1980: 14ff.; Hume 1997: 19ff; Russell 1980: 133ff.).

In the early twentieth century, British scholars, clergy, amateur investigators and enthusiasts also proposed that witch covens had managed to survive the persecutions of the early modern era and had passed on their beliefs and rituals to contemporary practitioners (Adler 1997 [1979]: 66ff.; Baddeley 1999: 41-2; Paine 1972: 160; Parrinder 1963 [1958]: 11,106; Purkiss 1996: 39ff.). These ideas were widely circulated after 1951, when—as a result of a campaign by the Spiritualist Churches—the British Witchcraft Act was repealed. The next decade saw both an increase in the number of Britons joining covens or other groups, practising ritual magic or taking an interest in "the occult" (Adler 1997 [1979]: 61; Hunt 1971 [1964]: 181; Hutton 1991: 331-2). Again, this British trend spread to Australia in the 1960s, although there was very limited interest in or attention paid to witchcraft before 1971 (Drury and Tillet 1980: 53-4; Hume 1997: 35) The increasing numbers of witches and practitioners of other
"new" religions—and the degree of tolerance they were being granted by the authorities and the public—were regularly denounced by clergy and social conservatives in Britain and Australia, and in Britain there were even calls for the reinstatement of the Witchcraft Act (Daraul 1990 [1961]: 163; Drury and Tillet 1980: 114; Russell 1980: 122).

The number of Britons and Australians engaging in occult practices—or simply interested in them—increased further during 1960s and 1970s as the "counter-culture" and certain feminist ideas were imported from the United States (Hume 1997: 30; Hutton 1991: 337ff; Tate 1991: 105ff.; Wheatley 1973 [1971]: 282, 285). The activities of witches, magicians and others were given sensationalised coverage in the mass media, while books—scholarly, popular and works of fiction—dealing with occult themes were published and films released. Media and other coverage frequently portrayed the occult as both dangerous and glamorous. Stories about the activities of witches' covens in the popular press, for example, inevitably included prurient descriptions of sex magic or images of "sky clad" participants. Although novels and films—both local and imported—dealt with the misdeeds of Satanists and black magicians, these villains were often darkly romantic characters and the perpetrators of titillating sexual crimes. Such works of fiction also presented graphic and detailed depictions of occult rituals, and portrayed Satanists as using seemingly benign new religious movements to disguise their activities or recruit victims (Baddeley 1999: 31-2, 64, 92; Drury and Tillet 1980: 101; Lewis 2001: 89-90, 240, 279-80; Stanford 1996: 263-4; Tate 1991: 329-30; Wellesley 1973: 191-202).

In the 1970s, witches, magicians and other practitioners of the occult came under attack from clergy and other morals campaigners—and, in Britain, from "anti-cult" activists (Drury and Tillet 1980: 114ff; La Fontaine 1996: 163). In Australia, however, there was a very pronounced separation between the movement opposed to the newly-arrived Eastern religions and unorthodox new Christian movements and that concerned with the "occult". The Australian anti-cult movement was dominated by members of the families of the mostly young people who had become involved with new religious movements—although they had their clerical and political allies. These activists campaigned to have specific groups prosecuted or to have legislation enacted which...
would restrict their activities. They also periodically arranged the “deprogramming” of individual ex-cultists (CJSCFADT 2000: 10.2/10/12/15/18/21/29; Richardson 1995: 199ff.). “Anti-occult” activists—who were almost exclusively evangelical Protestants—focused on the dangers supposedly posed by the general acceptance of “the occult” in contemporary Australia. They attacked practitioners of Satanism and witchcraft but did so in very general terms. They also denounced spiritualism, fortune-telling— including newspaper horoscopes—and even liberal Christianity (Drury and Tillet 1980: 114ff.).[9]

Pedophile Panics

Britons—like Americans—were more likely to accept the idea that abusive Satanic cults were active because there had been panic in the UK in the early 1980s about the activities of well organised and high-ranking pedophiles and pornographers (Jenkins 1998: 146ff., 164-5; La Fontaine 1996: 56-7; Stanley 1991: 22-3). Britons’ concerns were quite obviously influenced by the contemporaneous American panic, and some British activists were exposed to American ritual abuse discourse as they investigated pedophile and child pornography rings (e.g. Tate 1991: xi). Yet Britons had a preexisting—and longstanding—suspicion that elite members of their society were secretly involved in acts of sexual depravity and that their activities were protected by corrupt government officials. There has been periodic public outrage in Britain over the sexual misbehaviour of the country’s politicians, judges and royals—and the attempts that were made to conceal these activities—since the Profumo scandal essentially brought down the Macmillan government in the early 1960s (Grant 1993: 83-4; Shaw 1999: 263-4). Throughout the 1980s and early 1990s—as allegations of ritual abuse were being made in Britain—sexual scandals forced numerous members of morally righteous Conservative governments to resign (“Tory Scandal” Frontline 11 March 1994; “Conservative Party . . .” Wikipedia).

In Australia, there was both a a longstanding suspicion that “high-ranking” members of society were secretly engaged in immoral practices and a panic about “organised
pedophilia”. There had been periodic claims that wealthy and powerful Australians were members of witch covens and Satanic groups throughout the 1960s and 1970s (Drury and Tillet 1980: 108, 110). In the mid-1950s, in fact, Sir Eugene Goosens--the conductor of the Sydney Symphony Orchestra and director of the Conservatorium of Music--had left Australia in disgrace as a result of his relationship with Rosaleen Norton, the “Witch of Kings Cross” (Drury 2002 [1988]: 74ff.; Salter SMH 3 July 1999). Yet rumours about the Satanic or sexual misdeeds of Australian politicians, judges and businessmen were swamped--both in number and in the degree of outrage they provoked--by this country’s long and inglorious history of financial and political corruption and the involvement of the elite in organised crime (see Hickie 1985; McCoy 1980; Whitton 1989). Even the Goosens scandal involved a “foreigner” and centred on the conductor’s attempt to import pornography into Australia--rather than his involvement with witchcraft.[10]

Widespread concern about organised pedophilia--comparable to the British and American “pedophile panics” of the 1980s--did not emerge in this country until 1996, during the hearings of the Wood Royal Commission. This concern did not, therefore, condition the outbreak of ritual abuse allegations or the panic they subsequently provoked here. The Australian “pedophile panic” actually occurred at a time of increasing media and public scepticism about ritual abuse and as many local ritual abuse theorists and activists were changing the way they described--or even conceived--the claims of victims and survivors.

**Significant Cases**

There were a number of British child abuse investigations and prosecutions--prior to the outbreak of ritual abuse allegations in the UK--which played a role in precipitating and conditioning the panic there. One very influential case actually predated American allegations. In 1982, two Shropshire couples pleaded guilty to sexually abusing four children (Tate 1991: 111-3). Three of the adults had abused two of the children during what were essentially self-composed occult rituals. Police found no evidence that a
Satanist or other religious group was involved, and both of the male perpetrators had also sexually abused children without ritual (La Fontaine 1998: 87, 197n.). A number of the social workers who dealt with this case were involved in ritual abuse cases later in the decade, and activists subsequently portrayed the case in ways that made the abuse and its perpetrators more closely resemble American ritual abuse data (La Fontaine 1998: 57-8, 197n). Writing almost a decade after the events in Shropshire, Tate states that all four children had been abused during authentic magical rituals and proposes that the perpetrators were part of a larger and better organised Satanist group (1991: 111-3).

Just prior to the first allegations in Britain, the infamous Cleveland sexual abuse case caused a sensation and provoked a major conflict between British police and child protection workers and activists (Corby 1993: 35; La Fontaine 1998: 168). The number of Cleveland children referred to Social Security--and subsequently removed from their parents--increased dramatically in the first half of 1987 after two Middlesbrough physicians began to routinely use the "anal dilation" test for sexual abuse in their young patients. Police investigators were sceptical about the value of this test and the methods subsequently used to obtain disclosure, and they believed that the removal of the children was hasty and excessive (Corby 1993: 35). In the official report--published the following year--Law Lord Butler-Sloss (1988) was critical of the overzealousness of Cleveland social workers, and the courts ordered the return of most of the children.

The Cleveland case raised public awareness about the problem of child abuse in Britain, but it also made many Britons sceptical about the claims of child protection activists. As children in the first British ritual abuse cases were being removed from their homes, parents in Cleveland were assertively campaigning for the return of their children, and the press was subjecting social workers to bitter and remorseless criticism (Schultz 1989; Tate 1991: 232). Some social workers, on the other hand, became convinced that perpetrators of child abuse had supporters in powerful positions--and they were more likely to accept the possibility that British children had been ritually abused (La Fontaine 1998: 168).
The Chamberlain case was one of the most momentous—and troubling—incidents that occurred in Australia prior to 1988. Nine-week-old Azaria Chamberlain disappeared from an Ayers Rock campsite in 1980, probably taken by a dingo. After two inquests, Azaria’s parents—Seventh Day Adventist Pastor Michael Chamberlain and his wife Lindy—were committed for trial, and Lindy was found guilty of murder in 1982. Two subsequent appeals failed, but the Chamberlains were exonerated by a Federal Royal Commission in 1987 (see Bryson 1985; Bryson *SMH* 12 Aug. 2000; Pierce 1999: 172-8; Richardson 1995: 199; Wilson 1985: 4-5).

The Chamberlains were the subject of considerable popular rumour and press speculation during the investigations and trial. Lindy Chamberlain was supposed to have been deranged, or to have killed Azaria because the child was deformed or incurably ill (Bryson 1985: 122, 133). Rumours also abounded that Azaria had been murdered in some kind of unspecified pseudo-Christian ritual (Bryson 1985: 98, 122, 271-2, 439-40).

The couple were convicted—Michael for being an accessory—on the basis of very problematic evidence. Northern Territory police and the prosecution’s expert witnesses displayed both considerable determination to obtain a conviction and appalling incompetence. Police secretly taped their conversations with Lindy Chamberlain, for example, leaked details of the investigation to the press, and—possibly—tampered with physical evidence (Bryson 1985: 188, 315, 393-4). Prosecution experts famously interpreted moth holes as knife cuts, red sand stains as bloody hand prints, automotive chemicals as spray from a severed artery, and spilled milkshake as seeping blood (Bryson 1985: 386, 435-6, 452; *SMH* 12 Aug. 2000). Some of these "errors" may have been made because the experts suspected that Lindy Chamberlain had indeed committed a ritual murder. The forensic biologist who testified for the prosecution later described Lindy Chamberlain—who had "stared" at her as she gave evidence—as "you know, a witch" (Bryson 1985: 432). Prosecutors had deliberately decided not to suggest a motive for the murder—thus giving jurors the opportunity to convict on the basis of their suspicions or prejudices (Bryson 1985: 350, 474-5, 514; Wilson 1985: 4-5).
Considerations of the Chamberlain case are virtually absent from the Australian ritual abuse discourse, although some activists' insinuations about Seventh Day Adventism may be a veiled reference to the Chamberlains. After 1987, the case became a symbol of hysteria and the miscarriage of justice, and there have been subsequent instances where people who believed themselves to have been falsely accused of a crime have compared themselves with Lindy Chamberlain (Bryson SMH 12 Aug. 2000). The case has been the basis of several books, films and even an opera. Lindy Chamberlain's private life has also been the topic of intense interest to and admiration by readers of women's magazines. Overseas cases thus provided Australian theorists and activists who believe ritual abuse "really happens" with more useful and compelling examples. The failure of sceptical theorists to compare the Chamberlain case with subsequent ritual abuse cases is inexplicable.

The Chamberlain case does, however, demonstrate how ritual abuse discourse--and allegations--could successfully migrate to this country. The case indicates the capacity of Australians to believe that "outsiders" are capable of monstrous crimes. The fact that there remains a degree of public suspicion that the Chamberlains killed their daughter suggests that some Australians will not easily be dissuaded from their beliefs about evil "others". The case also shows, however, that people who strongly profess Christian beliefs and enthusiastically practise their faith may be perceived as likely perpetrators of horrors--rather than the heroic adversaries of such perpetrators.

**Effects of Past Panics and Significant Cases**

These "occult panics" and child abuse cases had two important effects on the way activists and the public in Britain and Australia responded to American ritual abuse literature and discourse. Firstly, British--but not Australian--ritual abuse activists and media linked the allegations made by victims and survivors with the activities of known occult groups. Secondly, there was always a strong possibility that the public in both Britain and Australia could be quickly alienated from the view that ritual abuse was "really happening".
British ritual abuse activists--like the promoters of local "anti-cult" discourse and imported American ideas about ritual abuse--tended to link the claims of victims and survivors with the activities of groups they identified as "Satanic". They thus nominated members of British occult groups or British branches of American movements as perpetrators of ritual abuse. Activists pointed out, for example, that members of the Temple of Set had been accused by victims in the US and subjected to police investigations in both Britain and the US (Boyd 1991: 179-81; Tate 1991: 166ff.). Members of other such groups had supposedly perpetrated other sorts of "Satanic" crime (Tate 1991: 172ff.). British activists also suggested that even though groups such as the Church of Satan repudiated the use of abusive rituals, there were probably maverick members who practised them (Boyd 1991: 117, 199).

Members of British Freemason groups and wicca covens, or individual practitioners of magic, were nominated because they were--or were believed to have been--influenced by the ideas of Aleister Crowley (Boyd 1991: 128ff.; Tate 1991: 80ff., 102). It was probably these sorts of accusations that lead to the "campaign of firebombing, graffiti and excrement by post" which resulted in the closure of a "popular Pagan book shop" in Leeds (Purkiss 1996: 50; see Tate 1991: 319-320). While some British activists also proposed that ritual abuse was perpetrated by smaller secret cults and by groups that were as yet unknown, others--such as Tate--suggested that a truly thorough and committed investigation would reveal the links between these cults and the larger, better-known "Satanic" groups (Boyd 1991: 185ff.; 350; Tate 1991: 194-5).

In Australia, there were no accusations specifically made against members of known Satanist or occult groups, nor were they mentioned in more general allegations of ritual abuse. This reflects both the negligible role played by fundamentalist Christians in introducing ritual abuse discourse into Australia and the limited capacity of this tiny group to induce panic here about the Devil and his servants. Concerns about ritual abuse here, in fact, resemble earlier "occult panics" in the way that secret, unspecified groups were accused of practising unsavoury rites, while accusers generally made little effort to coherently explain the structure or motivation of abusive groups.
The unfocused nature of allegations in Australia is also a product of this country's small population, colonial heritage—and "cultural cringe".[11] Australian occult groups--including Satanist groups--are little-known and are invariably small local versions of British and American movements (Drury and Tillet 1980: 75ff., 105, 107-8). In Britain, on the other hand, there have been several notorious local "Satanist" groups--most notably the Order of the Nine Angels, the Process Church of the Final Judgment, and even the performance art group Thee Temple ov Psychic Youth [sic] (Baddeley 1999: 60ff.; 154ff.; Boyd 1991: 198-9; Lewis 2001: 196-7, 215-6; Tate 1991:123ff 170ff). There is also a strongly British component to many of the religious ideas and movements which aroused such interest in the West from the 1960s--and which were subsequently linked with Satanism and ritual abuse by British and American theorists (e.g. Kahaner 1988: 47ff.; Katchen 1992: 17-8; Ryder 1992: 14ff.). The Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, Crowleyite "magick" and modern witchcraft, for example, were all invented or inspired by Britons. They were imported into the United States--and Australia--at various times in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (see Adler 1997 [1979]: 41ff.; Barrett 1996: 171ff., 210ff.; Hume 1997: 17ff.; Hutton 1991: 331ff.; Russell 1980: 133ff.). These beliefs and movements had never ceased to exist in Britain and were familiar to many Britons--even if only in a vulgarised form--before the concerns about them were re-imported in the form of American "anti-cult" and ritual abuse discourse (Boyd 1991: 128; Katchen 1992: 12 Tate 1991: 131-2, 329-30).

Similarly, allegations of ritual abuse contain numerous British folk beliefs about the existence and activities of various evil entities and practitioners of malevolent magic (La Fontaine 1998: 18-19,158). In Britain, these ideas were linked to existing occult movements--explicitly or in a readily recognised form--in British and American novels and films, as well as in the ritual abuse discourse promoted or influenced by British fundamentalists.[12] Although Hollywood--and American popular culture more generally--has obviously influenced contemporary Britons' ideas about the occult, there have also been some very influential British books and journals about the occult, British novels with occult themes and British horror films (Baddeley 1999: 83; La Fontaine 1998: 158; Wellesley 1973: 193). Even occult "heavy metal" music was a British invention (Baddeley 1999: 114). British "occult folklore" was brought to Australia by British migrants, and imported books and films with occult subjects and
themes have been popular here. Their influence in Australia has been weakened, however, by being disconnected from their historical and geographical roots.

British activists' accusations against members of known groups had the effect of retarding a more general panic about ritual abuse in that country. Members of new religious movements—who considered that they were being surreptitiously accused of abusing children—or Britons who were interested in the occult were among the most vocal critics of ritual abuse activists (Tate 1991: 319-20). They were able to generate an unlikely public sympathy for their protests because—as Tate bitterly acknowledges—claims by Christian campaigners were often extreme and overstated and because much of the campaign agenda was unlikely to gain popular support. Many Britons either engaged in some of the activities denounced by fundamentalist Christians, or regarded the activities of serious occultists as generally harmless (Tate 1991: 320ff). In the early 1990s, furthermore, there was a generation of Britons who had been constantly titillated by depictions of the occult in popular culture and who would inevitably notice similarities between the campaign against ritual abuse, previous campaigns against "Satanism", and past moral activism by Christians (see Thomson 1991).

Fundamentalist British Christians, social workers and other activists also came to grief when they clashed with police over the conduct of investigations and trials. Tensions arose in some cases when police refused to charge the defendants with offences relating to their ritual abuse—rather than the neglect, and/or sexual and physical abuse—of children, and to vigorously pursue other, higher-ranking supposed perpetrators (Boyd 1991: 245; Tate 1991: 309ff.). Police believed charges of ritual abuse could not be successfully pursued in the courts and regarded the "evidence" which social workers believed justified wider investigations as wholly unreliable (see Tate 1991: 198ff.). They found their misgivings to be well-founded on the rare occasions—the 1989 case in Sussex, for example—when charges relating to ritual abuse were tested in court (see Tate 1991: 216ff.). Police involved in these cases resented having to reassess initial investigations because of ongoing "disclosures" by the children and were outraged when social workers and their supporters began unofficially gathering evidence against other supposed perpetrators (Boyd 1991: 11; La Fontaine 1998:
Social workers and other activists brought their concerns about the failure of police to properly pursue perpetrators to the press, and the police responded in kind (Boyd 1991: 11). The British media thus learned in very quick succession that government social workers had discovered instances of ritual abuse and that police were failing to properly pursue perpetrators. Their reports to the public at first generally accepted that such abuse was occurring in Britain and were sympathetic to the social workers (La Fontaine 1998: 164). Almost immediately, however, they were also reporting the assertive statements made by police, and press coverage came to support either the social workers or the police (La Fontaine 1998: 65). Media coverage of the issue became increasingly hostile as relevant government departments conducted internal inquiries into failed cases, and later, as official reports by La Fontaine and Clyde—who investigated allegations of ritual abuse on the Orkney Islands—were published.

These media reports inevitably focused on the removal of children from their parents, allegations that very large numbers of children had been abused in the most bizarre ways, zealous child protection activism, the use of controversial methods of obtaining “disclosure” and clashes between police and social workers. They referred to—or precipitated memories of—the Cleveland case (see Boyd 1991: xi, 7, 16-7). Also reminiscent of Cleveland was the activism of the parents who had been accused of ritually abusing their children. In Britain—unlike the US or Australia—it was parents who were alleged to have ritually abused young children (La Fontaine 1998: 68-9). Parents’ complaints about absurd allegations and overzealous social workers and activists have the potential to generate more public sympathy than comparable complaints made by some of those accused in the US and Australia: providers of child care, the wives of sex offenders or—in the Aquino case—high-ranking members of the Temple of Set!

Parental activism was particularly significant in cases—such as in the Orkney Islands—where those accused were not denizens of “sink estates”. The removal of nine “ritually abused” children from their homes on the Orkneys, for example, had generated considerable hostility both within and without this tightly-knit community. When the
case against the children’s parents was abruptly thrown out of court they "stormed" the local Social Security office, demanding the immediate return of their children (Fager 1991).

From around 1993, therefore, the campaign against ritual abuse in Britain was increasingly dominated by mental health professionals or other, less qualified “experts” in the treatment of the effects of ritual abuse which manifested in adulthood (La Fontaine 1998: 174, 176). These activists placed less emphasis on corroborating survivors’ claims or precipitating prosecutions against those accused. In fact, although survivors generally accused their parents of being perpetrators, they were much less specific about their other tormenters or the beliefs that motivated them (La Fontaine 1998: 177-8). Later, Scott (2001) proposed that the “ritual abuse” reported by the survivors was perpetrated by idiosyncratic occultists, “dabblers”, and perpetrators who—for a variety of reasons—cynically added some form of ritual to their sexually-motivated abuse of children. Concern about ritual abuse in Britain thus continued, though “in reduced and less well publicised form[s]” (La Fontaine 1998: 179).

Christian activists continued to believe that children were being abused by the Devil’s agents in Britain, but their capacity to influence child protection policy was now severely limited, and they were unlikely to receive media attention that was in any way sympathetic. Some of the social workers and child protection activists who had dominated the campaign to pursue perpetrators of ritual abuse came to accept the criticisms raised by the various inquiries and in the press. They also revised their views about the expertise and motivations of Christian activists and the value of their alliance with them (La Fontaine 1998: 171-2; Tate 1991: 324-5).

Those social workers and other activists who continued to believe that ritual abuse was being perpetrated in Britain were officially silenced as a result of departmental inquiries and, later, as the reforms suggested in external inquiries were enacted. They were also effectively prevented from attempting to uncover further instances where children had been ritually abused (Tate 1991: 313ff.). It is probable that many of them decided of their own accord to maintain lower public profiles for fear of losing their positions or chances of promotion and to avoid press ridicule. Some may also have
been intimidated by the assertive actions of people who saw themselves as the victims of child protection fanatics.

In Australia, the panic about ritual abuse underwent a somewhat different transformation. There was a flurry of official, expert and media discourse in the early 1990s concerning the likelihood that children had been abused at the Seabeach preschool and that the perpetrators had escaped justice. In response, members of the NSW Parliament attempted to pursue an "appeal" of the magistrate's decision, initiated an internal police inquiry and reformed the Evidence Act to facilitate the testimony of young children (Favretti, evidence to WRC 14 Aug. 1996; *Hansard* (NSW LA) 5 Sept. 1990: 6704ff.; Ralston, evidence to WRC 13 Aug. 1996; Scott, evidence to WRC 6 Aug. 1996). Very soon afterwards, comparable discourse arose concerning ritual abuse reported by Australian adults.

The panic about ritual abuse was, however, quickly curbed as--beginning in the early 1990s--sceptical overseas discourse was circulated here, the results of court cases and official inquiries became known, local investigations failed and cases against Australians accused of ritual abuse by adult survivors collapsed or prosecutions failed. Finally, the report of the much-anticipated Wood Royal Commission subjected ritual abuse activists--especially those in the mental health professions--to some acerbic criticism (*Report WRC* Vol. IV 1997: 673-4).

In response, Australian activists began to modify their statements--particularly their public statements--about ritual abuse. Very few were now prepared to publicly discuss the abuse of children by Satanists. Some activists emphasised the similarities between survivors' allegations of ritual abuse and reports of abuse by other perpetrators. Some stressed that theorists had always listed Christian clergy, members of new religious movements, the deranged or the devotees of arcane sexual practices as perpetrators of ritual abuse. Others ceased speaking about ritual abuse altogether and habitually referred to the perpetrators accused by survivors--even when the survivors themselves had described being ritually abused by members of Satanic cults--as "pedophiles".[13]
From the mid-1990s, the Australian mass media—including those newspapers and programs which only a few years before had promoted the idea that ritual abuse "really happens"—brushed over the issue, ignored it completely or even ridiculed the notion. The media did, however, continue to demonise certain individuals and groups over the issue. The popular media reported the trials of those accused by adult survivors—and cases which did not get to court—using language and themes which were very similar to those they had used to castigate alleged perpetrators in the early 1990s. Now, however, journalists reversed the thematic roles they assigned to the involved parties. Elderly parents accused of abuse were portrayed as pathetic victims rather than suspects, while the evil "others" who persecuted the innocent and harmed families were ignorant, overzealous or even malicious therapists. The media also began to emphasise the role of "radical feminists" and "Christian fundamentalists" in precipitating accusations of abuse (e.g. A Current Affair TCN9 29 Nov. 1995, 14 Aug. 1996; Today Tonight ATN7 9 Dec. 1996). And in 1996, journalists covering the Wood Royal Commission began to subject Australian proponents of the idea that ritual abuse "really happens" to quite extraordinary levels of censure and ridicule (e.g. Brown SMH 31 Oct. 1996; McClymont SMH 31 Oct. 1996).

To summarise, there are some important similarities between the witch crazes that occurred in Africa and early modern Europe and the panic about ritual abuse in the contemporary West. As a result of dramatic change and and a sense of crisis in Africa and early modern Europe, stories spread about the horrendous evil perpetrated by "witches". New ideas about these evil-doers resonated with preexisting beliefs about the presence of the supernatural in everyday life and about the activities of certain minorities. As different regions of Africa and Europe were caught up in the crazes, however, quite different ideas emerged locally about the identity of perpetrators and the exact nature of their crimes. The ways in which witches were pursued—and the enthusiasm with which they were pursued—also varied from region to region.

Ideas about ritual abuse—and allegations that this appalling activity was occurring—were similarly affected by a variety of factors as they "migrated" from the United States to other countries. It took some time, for example, for these ideas to become established outside the United States. Countries such as Britain and Australia did not
have the kinds of governmental, legal and law enforcement structures that had been so conducive to the proliferation of the panic in the US. Ideas about ritual abuse were also affected by particular national historical and cultural characteristics. As a result, the panic about ritual abuse varied markedly in different countries.

In Australia, the process by which allegations by adult survivors displaced “disclosures” of ritual abuse by young children occurred quickly but incompletely. Sceptics mobilised promptly and effectively. Only one case of ritual abuse was ever successfully prosecuted here, and very few subsequent cases even came to court. American ideas about the ubiquity and malevolence of Satanic cults were not generally taken up in this country, and Australian activists did not—indeed, could not—readily blame known “Satanic” groups as the perpetrators of ritual abuse. The Australian media was also somewhat reluctant to unambiguously describe cases of ritual abuse as the work of Satanists. Eventually, even most ritual abuse activists came to describe—and perhaps even to perceive—the allegations made by survivors as referring to abuse perpetrated by organised pedophiles.

Notes

[1] Willis suggests that the African witch crazes that occurred in pre-colonial times may also have been responses to profound change. The more recent crazes may thus be the continuation of a tradition rather than a phenomenon entirely provoked by colonialism (Willis 1970: 131-2).

[2] Victor notes the very different receptions “migrating” American discourse about ritual abuse received in Britain and France. Language differences limited the kinds of personal and professional contacts which were essential for a successful “migration” between the US and France. French intellectuals and journalists, furthermore, commonly disdain American culture and are wary about its spread.
Feminism in France—unlike much influential Anglophone feminism, which has increasingly focused on "systematic sexualized [male] violence"—has maintained a strongly socio-economic focus. The influence of evangelical Protestantism is negligible there (Purkiss 1996: 15; Victor 1998).

[3] Identifying early "allegations of ritual abuse by adult survivors" in Britain and Australia is a surprisingly complex task. There were Britons who claimed to have "survived" past involvement with Satanism before 1987, and who were often subsequently considered "survivors of ritual abuse". They were converts to evangelical Christianity who were repudiating the service that they had rendered to the Devil in the past. It is difficult to ascertain precisely when they began to report being subjected to—or witnessing—activities later characterised as "ritual abuse". These converts had not "recovered" memories of these events, nor did they accuse identifiable people of being involved in Satanism (La Fontaine 1998: 38, 40, 136-7, 146, 163-5; Tate 1991: 215, 320ff., 330).

According to information provided to the Wood Royal Commission, adult survivors in Australia first claimed to have been ritually abused in the mid-1980s—prior to both the first Australian "child" allegations and first allegations by American adults. It is, however, common for adults undergoing therapy first to recover memories of sexual abuse, or to report sexual abuse that they had always known about. Memories of more bizarre sexual abuse or of ritual abuse tend to be gradually uncovered as therapy progresses (see Matthews 1986: 12ff.; Guilliatt 1996: 60ff.; Elson 1998: 3.2.8, 4.1.3). It is therefore probable that in the mid-1980s Australians—who subsequently claimed to have survived ritual abuse—first alleged that they had been sexually abused or made reports which therapists later considered nascent allegations of ritual abuse.

One of the women who recovered memories of ritual abuse by male relatives in the "Bunbury" case in Western Australia made what was essentially the first "adult" accusation in 1989. The first Australian "child" allegation had been made only the previous year. In 1988, the Bunbury survivor told her therapist about being sexually abused by a stranger, and later that year she began to recover memories
of being sexually abused by her father. In 1989, however, she told her husband and some close friends of more bizarre and seemingly ritualised abuse perpetrated by her father. The woman’s siblings speculated that there was a Satanic aspect to this abuse—and that their father had possibly taken part in diabolical rituals in his youth (Guilliatt 1996: 60ff., 68-9). She made her complaint to police in 1993 (Guiliatt 1996: 5).

A number of adult survivors—who mostly accused their parents or grandparents of perpetrating ritual abuse—contacted the criminologist Edward Ogden in 1990 (1993: 29ff.). That same year, survivors participated in the television program The Devil Made Me Do It (Deirdre Grusovin 11 Feb. 2002).

[4] Only some British social workers regarded the children’s statements and behaviour as indicating ritual abuse (La Fontaine 1998: 62-3). In many instances, social workers promoted other explanations for this behaviour and assertively resisted parents and others who insisted that children had been ritually abused (see Tate 1991: 196ff.).

Christian explanations of ritual abuse were consistent with other ideas influential among British social workers. Cultural Feminism proposed that evil—in the form of sexual violence—was pervasive in the contemporary West and that victims’ disclosures of it should be accepted (Corby 1993: 35; La Fontaine 1998: 170). The conspiracy theories proposed in much Christian literature resonated with social workers’ own distrust of the traditional—and more sceptical—attitudes and methods of police and the judiciary in ritual abuse cases (Corby 1993: 35; La Fontaine 1998: 103, 168; Tate 1991: 304).

[5] The evangelical Australian Festival of Light/Call to Australia movement has, since its formation in 1974, campaigned against both child abuse and the influence of “satanism and the occult”. One of the movement’s founders, Lance Shilton, had in fact chaired the Anglican Church’s 1974 Commission of Inquiry into the occult (Drury and Tillet 1980: 116). Yet as late as 1990 the FOL was not explicitly linking the two issues (see “Come Crown Jesus . . .” 1990).
In the later 1990s, however, the movement's leaders were among the most outspoken supporters of the idea that ritual abuse "really happens". In 1998, when scepticism about ritual abuse was widespread, Rev. Fred Nile was exclaiming that "there's no doubt that there's evidence of paedophile activity involving Satanic cults . . ." (The Religion Report ABC2RN 22 July 1998). The theme of the movement's 1999 annual conference was that "Satan Is Alive and Well but Hellishly Dangerous". A "panel of informed speakers"--mostly evangelical clergy--informed conference delegates about "various satanic activities" such as the "rebellious, blasphemous 'Homosexual and Lesbian Mardi Gras Parade'", tours by diabolical rock musicians, abortion and "obscene textbooks, plays and witchcraft" in schools. It was at this conference that James Quinn spoke about "satanic attacks on children". Another non-clerical speaker at the conference was Franca Arena, whose subject was "exposing pedophilia and its consequences" (see FWN March 1999).

[6] Matthews relates that she had originally recalled having a "normal" and "happy" childhood. During therapy—which included the use of suggestive guided imagery sessions—she recovered memories of her father beating her. She subsequently recalled that her father had drawn targets on her body and thrown sharpened pens at her, then that he sexually assaulted her (with her mother's connivance). Matthews then recalled that he set her on fire, then that he put pins under her fingernails and then that he raped her (Matthews 1986: 7, 12-14, 32, 46-7, 58).

[7] Colin Ross has visited Australia and conducted workshops here on a number of occasions, while Bessel van der Kolk was the keynote speaker at the 1996 conference of the Australian Association of Trauma and Dissociation. Roland Summit conducted a seminar on ritual abuse for the NSW Child Protection Council in 1994, a report of which was subsequently published and widely distributed (Summit 1994). According to Richard Guilliat, Summit's address lasted six hours (Guilliat SMH 1 Feb. 1995).

[8] By having the NSW parliamentarian and child protection campaigner Deidre Grusovin appear on The Devil Made Me Do It, the program's producers were able to
link the most bizarre overseas ritual abuse allegations with the Seabeach case. The Seabeach parents had sought Grusovin's help before the case had come to trial, and after its collapse she had used Parliament to accuse members of the NSW police--including an officer involved in the Seabeach investigation--of corruptly protecting pedophiles from arrest and/or successful prosecution (Deirdre Grusovin 11 Feb. 2002; Hansard (NSW LA) 5 Sept. 1990: 6702ff.; 6 Sept. 1990: 6751-7).

Grusovin was in large part responsible for an internal police review of the investigation and later for the pedophile reference of the Wood Royal Commission (evidence of Scott, WRC 6 Aug. 1996; see Hansard (NSW LA) 1 Dec. 1994: 6612ff.).

[9] I do not mean to suggest that outside Australia there was some sort of unified "anti-cult" movement. Introvigne (1997) points out that there were always differences--and tensions--between various types of "anti-cult activists". He differentiates between members of "anti-cult" and "counter-cult" movements. Anti-cultists objected to the behaviour of certain new religious movements, while counter-cultists objected to their beliefs. Introvigne also argues that there were important differences within these movements. Some anti-cultists perceived new religious leaders as charlatans, while others focused on the effect that cult membership had on devotees. Counter-cultists perceived new religious movements as either heretical or diabolical. Lewis makes a comparable distinction between the "secular" and "Evangelical" anti-cult movement, although he notes that "Evangelical" anti-cult activists frequently emphasised the criminal or exploitative activities of new religious movements as a way of attacking their creeds and rituals (2001: 7-8).

My point is that in Australia, "anti-cult" discourse was dominated by what Introvigne would identify as the branch of the movement that focused on the effects of cult membership on devotees. Activists concerned about "the occult" here were a smaller and less influential group than in Britain and much more sharply differentiated from the anti-cult movement.

[10] The activities of the "Witch of Kings Cross" in the 1950s predated both the publication of British literature about modern Garderian witchcraft and the arrival in
Australia of many British migrants interested in witchcraft. Rosaleen Norton’s
witchcraft was an eclectic and idiosyncratic blend of Greek mythology, British
occultism, Jungian psychology and surrealism (Drury 2002 [1988]: 26-7, 33-5,
100ff., 116ff., 119). She had very limited influence on subsequent practitioners of
witchcraft in Australia (Hume 1997: 34).

Goosens was an Englishman “of Belgian extraction”. Police had come into
possession of some sexually-explicit letters he had written to Norton, and a roll of
undeveloped film. Goosens was subsequently arrested while attempting to smuggle
pornography and certain ritual items into the country and prosecuted for offences
under the notoriously strict Federal Customs Act. He was never charged with
“scandalous conduct” under NSW law, and his involvement with Norton—and his
connection with her contemporaneous prosecution for obscenity and the
performance of an “unnatural sexual act”—remained a rumour (Blanks SMH 22 May
1993; Salter SMH 3 July 1999; see also Blackshield 1970; Dutton 1970; Encel
1970: 77-9).

[11] A.A. Phillips first used the term “cultural cringe” to describe Australians’
notorious inferiority complex over locally-produced art (see Serle 1973: 135). The
term was subsequently used to describe the uncritical receptiveness of
Australians to imported art and popular culture, their “almost desperate desire for
approval” by overseas commentators and their contempt for those commentators
who actually praised Australia (see Dunstan 1992 [1972]: 2-3). I have used the
term in a somewhat facetious manner to draw attention to the fact that Australians’
involvement with or interest in the occult has almost invariably involved imported
movements, ideas or aspects of popular culture.

[12] A common theme of the popular British Hammer horror films—especially the
various vampire films and film versions of Wheatley novels produced in the 1960s
and 1970s—was the resurrection of dangerous supernatural forces or entities by
modern Satanists, occult groups or “dabblers”.

[13] See Chapter III.
As La Fontaine points out, anthropological and historical studies show that accusations of witchcraft—whether they are made during endemic witch hunts or witch crazes—are commonly made against those members of a society who are considered "outsiders". They may be resident foreigners, the economically marginal or people who are perceived to violate social norms in some way (La Fontaine 1998: 74). Of course, the exact identity of "outsiders" in a given society, the norms they violate, their other peculiarities, and the ways in which such people are associated with the inherently alien figure of the witch vary considerably (Douglas 1970: xxv-xxvii; La Fontaine 1998: 14, 74).

The Britons initially accused of perpetrating abusive, witch-like crimes in the 1980s were an obvious and unambiguous "outsider" group. The alleged perpetrators of ritual abuse were "from the lower end of the social spectrum", and "the early cases involved people whose material circumstances were of the very lowest" (La Fontaine 1998: 70). They were members of families who were habitually unemployed, frequently had criminal records and were generally in constant contact with Social Services and other state agencies. They inhabited notoriously poor, dilapidated and violent housing estates. Their family structures were unorthodox--siblings very commonly had different fathers, for example--and parental provision for and supervision of children was very lax (La Fontaine 1998: 70-2).
The status of these particular people as "outsiders" was, if anything, more pronounced in Britain during the 1980s. The Conservative government had strongly repudiated both liberal explanations for poverty and social delinquency and past attempts to address these problems through socialist programs. The sorts of families that were first accused of perpetrating ritual abuse thus embodied values antithetical to those stressed by Thatcher: order, effort, self-reliance and "traditional" moral values.

Those typically accused in American "child" cases--and in British and American "adult survivor" cases--were, however, affluent and of high social status. Nevertheless, I will argue that these supposed perpetrators too resemble the kinds of "outsiders" commonly accused of practising witchcraft.

In her summary of a range of anthropological and historical studies, Douglas notes that witches are conceived as residing--or existing--some distance from the group they are believed to harm, or as "internal enemies". These "internal" witches--against whom accusations are made--may be resident "outsiders": foreigners, social deviants or people who have some socially anomalous position or status. They may, however, be members of a group within the community which competes with the accuser's own. Some "internal enemies" are conceived as outsiders secretly residing within the community and surreptitiously attacking its members (Douglas 1970: xxvi-ii). The fact that these people are "outsiders" may not therefore be obvious until suspicions arise about the presence of witches--or even before an actual accusation against them is made. Affluent and socially prestigious people accused of perpetrating ritual abuse are similarly regarded by their accusers--and by those who accept the accusations--as secret "internal enemies".
Persecuting Outsiders, Creating Outsiders

Douglas proposes a broad and rather cautious functionalist explanation for the common suspicion that strangers, deviants and rivals may be witches. She points out that concerns about the activities of witches--and actual accusations of witchcraft--typically occur as people variously attempt to fortify or modify social relations within their community (1970: xxvi-ii). In a later examination of witch beliefs among the Hewa people of Papua New Guinea, Steadman more precisely--but with considerably less caution--examines how accusations of witchcraft fulfill such functions. Steadman suggests that "outsiders" are commonly accused of witchcraft because such people may be persecuted with virtual impunity (1986: 115-7, 119-20).

Steadman compares witch hunting by the Hewa to the witch craze in early modern Europe and Massachusetts and to the "red scare" in the United States in the decades following World War II. He notes that those who made accusations of witchcraft and sought to punish witches were attempting to intimidate "people who threaten them and their social relations"(1986: 115). In each ethnographic example, witch hunters persecuted either their rivals, deviants or those in a socially anomalous situation, as a way of demonstrating the strength, unity and resolve of the witch hunters' own group. What Steadman regards as more significant, however, is that those accused were also "innocent, [relatively] unthreatening individuals". They especially lacked the kinds of personal power and the social network necessary to resist or to precipitate retribution on witch hunters (Steadman 1986: 115, 119, 120).

There are numerous anthropological and historical studies which show that accusations of witchcraft are made as part of wider political contests, and that innocent and helpless people are very often persecuted as witches. Steadman's suggestion that there is a causal link between the vulnerability of "outsiders" and the frequency with which they are persecuted as witches is, however, problematic.
It is, of course, not difficult to find studies where powerful and well connected people are accused of witchcraft. In cases such as these, being accused of witchcraft actually made people more vulnerable to persecution.[1]

Throughout his discussion—especially his consideration of witch hunting among the Hewa and in Europe during the early modern period—Steadman implies that witch hunters identify vulnerable members of their communities, cynically persecute them for political ends and then justify their actions with accusations of witchcraft.[2] Here he fails to fully explore the implications of his own observation that, among the Hewa, a person is ultimately selected for persecution because he or she is considered witch-like, or because rumours about them are already in circulation (1986: 110-1, 116). Steadman also fails to consider the role of witch beliefs in the cosmology—or, in the case of the United States during the McCarthy era, the political ideology—of the societies in which accusations are made. For the members of these societies, “politics”, “economics” and “the supernatural” are conceptually inseparable. Thus, “vulnerable women” are indeed frequently identified as witches. This is not simply because they are easily persecuted, but—as feminist anthropologists and historians have pointed out—because women are commonly regarded as inherently base, malicious and subject to horrific cravings. Inhuman entities can more easily convince women to engage in destructive activities, and women are more likely to invoke them. Such entities are even believed to more readily take on a female guise. Women are, in effect, “outsiders” within these—that is, within their own—communities (see Goody 1970: 236ff.; Macfarlane 1970: 92; Lerner 1984: 85; Nelson 1975).

Crawford (1994) provides some more useful insights into the targeting of “outsiders” by witch hunters—although his own work explores contemporary Americans’ attitudes to “outsiders” of a quite different sort. He argues that “at both the individual and social levels, there are strong motivations” for the inferior position and status of certain groups to be periodically reinforced and for such groups to be held responsible for crises and ongoing social tensions (Crawford 1994: 1348, 1358). Crawford himself examines the ways in which Americans—horrified by the emergence of HIV-AIDS and fearful of a wider AIDS epidemic—focused their
animosity and revulsion on groups conceived as immoral, irresponsible and unworthy (1994: 1348).

Crawford points out that crises and ongoing social tensions threaten the position of social elites, but also disturb those who conceptually align themselves with elites or in other ways regard themselves as synonymous with the society. Different groups within a society therefore strive--through hegemonic negotiation--to conceive these crises and tensions in ways that do not radically alter the social order. They engage in a process whereby the idea that certain groups--which are already despised or distrusted--are responsible for new or endemic social problems are proposed and accepted (Crawford 1994: 1358; see also Lawrence 1982: 39, 49; Williams 1977: 110-2).[3] Thus homosexuals, users of illicit drugs and "Africans" were identified as responsible for HIV-AIDS and as the agents of its possible spread (Crawford 1994: 1355, 1357, 1361). The process whereby members of certain groups are identified as witches involves comparable explanations for, and means of dealing with, potentially disruptive change or misfortune. "Vulnerable women" were thus blamed for the illness and other misfortune in Salem, "people that had always [been] feared" being held responsible for the malaise in South-Eastern Africa in the 1930s, and people from "the very lowest" social stratum were identified as the perpetrators of gross mistreatment of British children (La Fontaine 1998: 70; Lewis 2001: 236-7; Parrinder 1963 [1958]: 99ff., 171; Steadman 1986: 119).

Crawford's considerations also shed light on instances where those accused of perpetrating profound evil are not members of vulnerable and stigmatised groups. He argues that people who have a degree of power and status dread the thought that they may be--or may come to be regarded as--"other". Individuals are motivated to ensure that the group to which they belong is not regarded as responsible for social problems--but also that they themselves remain designated as members of such an "innocent" group. When discussing contemporary conceptions of the HIV-AIDS crisis, Crawford notes that middle-class Americans equate "health" with a variety of positive moral values, and regard being healthy as a sign that they validly belong to their class. This provides strong motivation for members of this group to pursue "healthy" practices (Crawford 1994: 1347, 1348,
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1353). Yet many “respectable” Americans are attracted to, or even engage in, the sorts of behaviours that are regarded as characteristic of “unhealthy” outsider groups—and which could well result in infection with a blood-borne virus. Crawford argues that by focusing on an “external [unhealthy] other”, individuals can largely avoid confronting the conflict between their identity and their behaviour (Crawford 1994: 1355). They are also able to regard members of their own class who become infected with HIV-AIDS or certain other illnesses as having the moral values of “outsiders”, or of inappropriately associating with members of “unhealthy” groups (Crawford 1994: 1347, 1356).

A similar process of identifying witches—and the perpetrators of ritual abuse—occurs in other societies and is similarly motivated by the fear “that the ‘other’ may be . . . me!” (Crawford 1994: 1357). The literature shows that witches are identified by what are often quite ubiquitous characteristics. People may be suspected of witchcraft—or an accusation of witchcraft against them can seem reasonable—because of some aspect of their appearance, because they are women or elderly, because they are jealous or resentful, or because they own certain objects and keep certain animals. Being named by a suspect under rigorous interrogation can also lead to an individual being identified as a witch—as can expressing scepticism about witchcraft or criticising witch hunters (Macfarlane 1970: 92; Nelson 1975; Paine 1972: 177-8; Parrinder 1963 [1958]: 141, 143, 171-2; Thomas 1970: 62)! When witch hunting is taking place, individuals associate the signs of witchcraft with the characteristics of “outsider” groups. Yet members of more powerful and prestigious groups may also be suspected—and accused—because they exhibit such signs.[4] There is then strong motivation for members of the suspected or accused witches’ own group to dissociate themselves from these people and to regard them as secret “internal enemies”. Quite banal characteristics were similarly regarded as indications that seemingly exemplary individuals were, in fact, perpetrators of ritual abuse—and that the obligations due to such people could properly be withdrawn.
Accusations of Ritual Abuse in American and British “Child” Cases

The people first accused of perpetrating the “witch-like” activity of ritual child abuse in the United States were those providing childcare for other peoples’ children. In these early cases, it was the children’s parents who either made the allegation of ritual abuse or facilitated the accusation being made by child protection activists. Those accused were generally not economically deprived. In some significant cases, however, they were considerably less affluent than the accusing parents—or the parents who sponsored their actual accusers (see Scheer and Cone (US) Elle Nov. 1993; Tate 1991: 271). In the early 1980s, however, issues such as the involvement of women in the paid work force and the provision of outside childcare were crucial in the campaign by influential American conservatives to reverse the “wrong turns” taken in the 1960s and 1970s (see Faludi 1991: 62ff.). Providers of non-parental childcare—even economically comfortable ones—were thus “outsiders” in the sense of being involved in an activity that was effectively being portrayed as morally objectionable and inherently damaging to children.

The various childcare workers who were accused of perpetrating ritual abuse in the US were very often “outsiders” in other, additional ways. Activists have noted that it is extremely unusual for young men to work in preschools. They have used this fact to question the motives of Ray Buckey, the principal suspect in the McMartin case—although Buckey’s mother, sister and grandmother, as well as three female preschool teachers were also charged. Some McMartin parents reportedly found the sight of a male playing with and intimately relating to young children to be disturbing. The fact that this young man read Playboy magazines and was interested in health and physical fitness was also depicted in a sinister light (e.g. Crewdson 1988: 133; Tate 1991: 272; see also Lewis 2001: 171). The male childcare workers accused in other cases were foreigners, were married to very young women or suffered from disorders which made their appearance and modes of speech unusual (see Kahaner 1988: 112; Pendergrast 1995: 366n., 367-8). The couple primarily suspected of ritually abusing the children who attended the child care centre at the
Presidio army base did not actually provide care for these children. Michael Aquino, was a reservist army officer who periodically attended the base. He was also the founder of The Temple of Set, a Satanist "church" (Summit 1994: 16-7). According to some accounts, his wife's name--"Lilith"--means "child stalker" (see Tate 1991: 159-60).

"Outsiders" of a very different kind were initially accused of ritual abuse in Britain. In 1987, Social Service workers in several British counties--and the foster parents connected to these departments--sensed that some of the impoverished children in their care had been subjected to more than neglect, physical mistreatment and sexual abuse (La Fontaine 1998: 64). Even British writers who are convinced that these children were ritually abused acknowledge that social workers and foster parents interpreted some rather ambiguous comments by the children--as well as remarks which young children might typically make--as signs that adult members of their impoverished families were both perpetrators of ritual abuse and providers of children for other more powerful and well-connected Satanists (e.g. Boyd 1991: 10,15- 6, 19; Tate 1991: 302ff; see also La Fontaine 1998: 77-9.). The children's extended families and networks of acquaintances were perceived as constituting abusive cults (La Fontaine 1998: 65-6).

The fact that these families were "outside", in the sense of being at the very bottom of, British society was central to their being accused of witch-like crimes. The social workers dealing with families from the so-called "sink estates" had to continually cope with violent, sullen and dirty clients. They and the foster parents had also to deal with children who had most certainly been neglected and possibly subjected to physical and sexual abuse. These children behaved and spoke in ways that were unfamiliar and disturbing to even experienced social workers and foster parents (La Fontaine 1998: 7, 72-3, 96ff.). Ritual abuse texts and discourse provided social workers with explanations for the children's strangeness, and the oddness of their families made these explanations plausible (La Fontaine 1998: 94ff.). These texts also informed social workers and foster parents about the very real dangers involved in intervening in ritual abuse cases. Social workers could thus disregard any thought that the stress they felt when dealing with these families was a
professional failing or personal fault on their part (La Fontaine 1998: 99ff.). Britons working with the victims of ritual abuse--like their American and Australian counterparts--could instead conceive of themselves as heroically thwarting powerful and murderous Satanic cults.[5]

In identifying the "sociological patterns" of these early British cases, La Fontaine points out that, like "witches" in other societies and at other times, the alleged perpetrators of ritual abuse could be denied the social obligations due to them (1998: 74, 188; see also Douglas 1970: xxv; Macfarlane 1970: 92ff.; Thomas 1970: 67-8). She notes that, in these early British cases, "defining people who are failures as parents as satanists is a step which legitimises the withdrawal . . . of professional compassion" (La Fontaine 1998: 74). After accusing such people of ritual abuse, social workers could concentrate almost solely on addressing the problems of the children. The almost insurmountable task of aiding adult members of these families could be abandoned. I would add that social workers and foster parents could also feel justified in using questionable techniques to obtain further "disclosures".

There is another, more subtle aspect of this withdrawal of "professional" and other obligations from Britons accused of ritual abuse. While the very first British cases involved social workers and foster parents seeking explanations for the "bizarre" behaviour of children from these families, subsequent accusations occurred as social workers and others became increasingly convinced that perpetrators of profound evil were present and active. These accusations were also made against impoverished British families whose daily lives were immersed in "evil"--criminality, violence, delinquency and sexual promiscuity. These were people who, to use Crawford's words, were "already stigmatised" and "who suffer most . . . from the pathologies of social organization". Accusations thus allowed the "preservation of existing social relations . . . [and of certain] individuals' privileged place within those relations" (Crawford 1994: 1358). Social workers dissociated themselves from people who were "imagined as embodying all the properties falling outside" contemporary hegemonic values, and engaged in activities--child-saving, pursuing perpetrators and educating the community about ritual abuse--which could be seen
as epitomising these values (Crawford 1994: 1348).

Similarly, it was members of other groups supposedly immersed in evil--devotees of unorthodox new religions, people with unusual sexual proclivities and decadent members of Britain’s elite--who were suspected of being the senior members of Satanic cults. Activists felt justified in making outrageous and unsubstantiated claims about such people and engaging in improper activities to expose them (see Baddeley 1999: 154ff.; Boyd 1991: 198-9; Lewis 2001: 215-6; Tate 1991: 310-2, 323-5). Accusations against--or allegations about--such people, also allowed activists to advance their political agenda in areas such as child protection and sexual assault (La Fontaine 1998: 74, 167-8). Activists--whose occupations, gender, feminism, sexuality and religious beliefs could make their own status somewhat tenuous--attempted to create “an external other”. Their own “experienced discomfort of internal conflict [was] temporarily resolved by devaluing, denying, and repressing the proscribed or conflicted aspects of the self and by recreating an imagined and seemingly safer unity through externalisation” (Crawford 1994: 1355).

“Adult Survivor” Cases in the United States and Britain

From the late 1980s, American discourse about ritual abuse was increasingly dominated by cases involving “adult survivors” rather than “child victims”. A number of influential research projects into the supposed effects of childhood sexual abuse on memory were published at this time, along with some more accessible interpretations of this research (Ofshe and Watters 1994: 305ff.; Pendergrast 1995: 95ff.; Ross 1989: 94ff.; Wakefield and Underwager 1994: 67ff). The Courage to Heal, in particular, was so popular that second and third editions of the book were published in the US, as well as a condensed version, books for survivors’ families
and supporters, and a children's book (Pendergrast 1995: 42n., 43n.). Its authors famously proposed that if readers believed that they had suffered abuse in childhood—even if they could not remember it—then they most probably had (Pendergrast 1995: 42). Jenkins argues that the earlier panic about ritual abuse in preschools influenced American therapists and their patients, as well as the consumers of self-help books such as The Courage To Heal. They identified abuse such as that supposedly suffered by the preschoolers as the repressed trauma responsible for a multitude of problems (Jenkins 1998: 173-4).

At this very time, however, the proposition that ritual abuse was being perpetrated in American preschools was becoming difficult to sustain. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, medical, psychological and other studies were published which seriously undermined the various theories about the nature and extent of ritual abuse in preschools and the methods which had been commonly used to diagnose sexual abuse in very young children (e.g. Ceci and Bruck 1993; Cohn 1991; Gardner 1992; McCann et al. 1989; 1990; Muram 1989; see Atabaki and Paradise 1999). Their results were promptly incorporated into sceptical discourse about ritual abuse (e.g. Lyon 1998: 303-4n.; Pendergrast 1995: 362ff.; Victor 1998; Wakefield and Underwager 1994: 16ff.).

Critical studies of preschool ritual abuse—including a number sponsored by American government agencies—were also published at this time, and numerous attempts to prosecute alleged perpetrators either failed or were overturned by appellant courts (see de Rougemont MJ Jan-Feb. 1993; Clearing House on Child Abuse and Neglect Information, Fall 1994; Lanning 1992; SDGJ Report, 1992). Some of these cases became infamous for their injustice, or resulted in police and child protection workers being subjected to considerable ridicule. Kelly Michaels, for example, had been convicted on 115 counts of child sexual abuse solely on the incredible claims of the preschoolers she taught. She had served four years of a forty-seven year sentence when her appeal was successful in 1993. She immediately initiated legal proceedings against her accusers, prosecutors, and the county and state that had convicted and imprisoned her (Costin et al. 1998: 14; Neimark 1996: 80). Dale Akiki was exonerated that same year, having been held on
remand for more than two years. Akiki and his defence counsel promptly began extensive media appearances (Pendergrast 1995: 362ff.)

Allegations of ritual abuse in Britain changed in ways that were comparable to those in America and for very similar reasons. In Britain, however, allegations were subjected to crucial critical examination by police investigators, rather than lawyers. Police and social workers had effectively cooperated to prosecute abusive and neglectful adults on the "sink estates". Social workers and child protection activists were, however, dismayed by the very strict, evidence-based criteria used by police to assess allegations of child sexual assault, by their refusal to charge defendants with offences relating to their ritual abuse of children and by their failure to vigorously pursue other, higher-ranking perpetrators (Boyd 1991: 8, 11, 245; La Fontaine 1998: 64-5; Tate 1991: 309ff.). Social workers were more accustomed to presenting evidence of child sexual abuse to courts with lesser standards of proof, and their professional responsibility was primarily to ensure the more general welfare of complainants and children at risk (Boyd 1991: 11; Scott 2001: 15). British police--members of a predominantly male institution--were also unconvinced, if not unaware--of the Cultural Feminist ideas about the inherent truthfulness of disclosures of sexual assault which had been so influential among social workers (La Fontaine 1998: 170; Scott 2001: 36).

As criminal cases collapsed and police and social workers clashed--often in public--over the conduct of ritual abuse investigations, the relevant government departments initiated inquiries of their own. A Joint [Police and Social Services] Enquiry Team thus reexamined the investigation of ritual abuse on the Broxtowe estate in Nottinghamshire, and Lord Clyde was commissioned to investigate the removal of children in the Orkneys whom social workers believed had been ritually abused (Fager 199; Tate 1991: 313ff.). La Fontaine's inquiry was commissioned after the collapse of a case in Rochdale near Manchester (Boyd 1991: 20).

As allegations were increasingly made by adult survivors in both Britain and the United States, different sorts of "outsiders" began to be accused of ritual abuse, and they were denied very different sorts of social obligations. Those accused by
adult survivors are rather more difficult to identify than those in the child cases, since they are a more diffuse group and because the allegations against them were less frequently put before the courts. Accusations were made by adult survivors in the United States against people who did not have current or recent access to young children, while British survivors accused people—generally their own parents—who had never come to the attention of Social Services. In the United States, relatively few cases based on accusations made by adult survivors were tried in the criminal courts, and the cases which came to the civil courts tended to examine the sexual—rather than the ritual—component of survivors' complaints (Pendergrast 1995: 278-9, 279n.). In Britain, no such cases have come to court, and there has been no legal or official medical recognition of the memory deficit disorders which supposedly plague adult “survivors” of ritual abuse (La Fontaine 1998: 177-9). Adult survivors more commonly seek retribution on their supposed abusers by confronting them, cutting off contact with them or informing others of the alleged abuse.

There is, however, some survey and anecdotal information which identifies the types of people accused by adult survivors of perpetrating ritual abuse. In 1992, the False Memory Syndrome Foundation in the United States surveyed those among its members and others who considered themselves to have been falsely accused of child abuse—including ritual abuse—by adult “survivors”. Two years later, the Foundation conducted a survey of “retractors”—people who had claimed to have suffered ritual or other severe abuse, but subsequently withdrew the allegation (see Nelson and Simpson 1994). Studies have also been conducted into the psychological theories held by therapists specialising in the area, their ideologies and personal beliefs (see Wakefield and Underwager 1994: 152ff.). A number of writers have collected the personal accounts of adult survivors, those accused of ritual abuse, therapists and retractors. Survivors' accounts, in particular, have been collected both by writers who believe that ritual abuse has been perpetrated and by those who are sceptical of survivors’ claims. This anecdotal information is remarkably consistent with the survey data, although—not surprisingly—writers interpret the data very differently.
According to the survey and anecdotal data, those accused of ritual abuse by adult survivors are not outsiders in the sense of being impoverished or having unsuitable access to children. Most accusations in the United States are made against affluent men, chiefly the fathers of well-educated and successful female "survivors" (Mangen 1992; Nelson and Simpson 1994; Pendergrast 1995: 238ff., 277; Ryder 1992: 187; Wakefield and Underwager 1994: 79, 304-5). According to the FMSF survey, furthermore, three quarters of the accused were active members of Christian churches (Wakefield and Underwager 1994: 79). Accusers often report that their relationships with their fathers were--or had been--somewhat difficult, but that they discovered that they had been subjected to serious abuse through therapy (Nelson and Simpson 1994; Pendergrast 1995: 316ff; Ryder 1992: ii; Wakefield and Underwager 1994: 80; see Boyd 1991: 319ff.). Accusers had typically entered therapy for such reasons as depression, marital or childrearing problems, eating disorders and work-related stress (Pendergrast 1995: ; Ryder 1992: ii; Wakefield and Underwager 1994: 107, 121, 148). Those accused very commonly reported that they were surprised by the allegations (Wakefield and Underwager 1994: 80).

There are comparable--though a little less--British data about ritual abuse reported by adult survivors. The results of the studies conducted by Gudjonsson (1997; see also Eacott 1998; Loftus 1997b) and Scott (2001) suggest that there are similarities between adult survivors in Britain and America, and that they name similar sorts of people as perpetrators of ritual abuse. Gudjonsson surveyed members of the British False Memory Society. Between 8% and 26% of his respondents had been accused of perpetrating "Satanic ritual abuse" (Loftus 1997b). Scott's informants were self-identified survivors of "ritual abuse". Her sample is small, and she does not claim that it is statistically valid. She did, however, distribute questionnaires and recruit her informants through "UK organizations providing support/counselling to adult survivors of sexual abuse" (2001: 195). Scott is also herself an activist, and she seems content that her sample is generally representative.

The British studies suggest that survivors of ritual abuse in that country are mostly female, and aged between 30 and 50 years of age (Gudjonsson 1997: 112; Scott 2001: 196). Like the American survivors, they "recovered" memories of abuse after
undergoing therapy. Approximately 90% of Gudjonsson’s respondents make this claim about their accusers (Eacott 1998: 305; Gudjonsson 1997: 111; Loftus 1997b). Although Scott states that “only four of . . . [her twelve] interviewees could readily be described as having ‘recovered memories’”, her methods of contacting respondents and the fact that all interviewees reported that they had suffered some degree of memory dysfunction concerning the abuse, its nature and extent, suggests that their memories of ritual abuse were also “recovered” during therapy (Scott 1998: 5.3; see also Scott 2001: 195, 197).

The studies suggest that British survivors—and those that they accuse—are overwhelmingly middle class and, predominantly, upper middle class. More than half of Gudjonsson’s respondents were members of the top two “social classes” of the UK Standard Occupational Classification (1997: 112). Most of Scott’s informants—who were representative of the “diversity” of her total sample—were from “decidedly wealthy” or “professional middle class” backgrounds (Scott 2001: 198).

Both American and British data indicate that therapists played a very important role in precipitating accusers’ memories of abuse—although the various writers disagree about whether therapists facilitated the recovery of repressed memories or generated false memories. According to their critics, therapists believe child abuse to be endemic and the undiagnosed cause of numerous physiological, psychological and behavioural problems. They therefore concentrate on having their patients and clients “recover” the memories of abuse, often to the exclusion of all other diagnoses and treatments (Nelson and Simpson 1994; Pendergrast 1995: 198, 316, 320, 348, 356; Wakefield and Underwager 1994: 103, 106, 113, 149, 153, 156-8, 210ff.).

Therapists treating adult survivors in the United States include psychiatrists, psychologists and social workers (Pendergrast 1995: 206, 214, 349; Wakefield and Underwager 1994: 80). There are also numerous counsellors and practitioners of various kinds of therapies, many of whom have had little professional training and do not belong to officially recognised professional bodies or associations (Wakefield and Underwager 1994: 152). Taken as a whole, these therapists are predominantly female, and they tend to specialise in the “memory-recovery” field (Pendergrast
There is also evidence suggestive that women--in Britain as well as the US--who recover memories of abuse quite commonly become therapists, and that therapists commonly come to recover their own memories of abuse (La Fontaine 1998: 174; Pendegrast 1995: 199-200, 200n.). Many therapists working in the field--including accredited professionals--have been strongly influenced by feminist theories about the coercive and socialising role of male sexual violence and about women's tendency to accept and internalise oppressive ideas and practices (Wakefield and Underwager 1994: 156, 210). Also influential among therapists are theories--such as those of Bradshaw--about the extremely high rates of "family dysfunction" in contemporary society (Pendergrast 1995: 205ff., 241, 331n.; Wakefield and Underwager 1994: 30). Many therapists working in the field are devout Christians--some of whom are specifically "Christian Counsellors"--with particular views both about the presence of Satan and his agents in modern society and about what constitutes sexual propriety (Pendergrast 1995: 203, 211, 238, 325; Spanos 1996: 270-1). According to their critics, many therapists do not take sufficient steps to prevent their own personal beliefs, needs or problems from influencing their diagnoses and the course of treatment they stipulate (Pendergrast 1995: 316, 356; Wakefield and Underwager 1994: 156ff.).

The parents--and especially the fathers--accused by adult survivors of ritual abuse are thus "outsiders" to the adult survivors, their therapists and, to a lesser extent, to relatively young middle class women more generally. A few survivors report that they had recalled instances of sexual abuse prior to recovering memories of being abused in more grotesque ways (Pendergrast 1995: 253, 265, 347). More commonly, however, survivors report that they had resented or even clashed with their "abusers" in various ways before commencing therapy. They may also have suffered problems--depression, obesity and eating disorders, for example--which could in retrospect be blamed on parental, especially paternal, abuse (Pendergrast 1995: 241, 243, 244, 262, 266, 325, 347).

The fathers of some survivors were--or the survivors believed them to be--alcoholics, disabled or suffering from physiological or mental illnesses (Pendergrast 1995: 336, 341, 347, 353; Wakefield and Underwager 1994: 113). Survivors'
educational opportunities had thus been limited, they had been socially ostracised or had been obliged to take on inappropriate familial responsibilities (Pendergrast 1995: 227n., 331, 354). Other survivors had felt stifled in oppressive households. They had been subjected to corporal punishment, their educational and career choices had been rejected or ridiculed, and they felt that their body image and sense of personal worth had been derided (Pendergrast 1995: 331, 341). There were also survivors who felt neglected by ambitious, hardworking fathers or who believed that a sibling or acquaintance had been favoured at their expense (Pendergrast 1995: 248, 266, 319-20, 325, 331).

These conflicts and resentments were often exacerbated by changing social mores. Successful, liberal women resented the fact that their more conservative fathers had used corporal punishment on them, for example, or had attempted to prevent them pursuing non-traditional educational and career choices (Pendergrast 1995: 259, 262). On the other hand, some women who reached adulthood or who were reassessing their lives in the more conservative 1980s were repulsed by their parents' past drinking habits, sexual mores or child-rearing practices (Pendergrast 1995: 246).

Adult survivors do not, therefore regard the conflicts which they had with their supposed abusers as inevitable or the result of “personality clashes”, or that their fathers--primarily--had common personal faults or failings. Their childhood experiences--real and perceived--are reconfigured by means of contemporary feminist, “family dysfunction”, religious and political theories. Survivors, their therapists and supporters perceive these men as “other”: a relatively discrete and transgressive group, or the exemplars of serious societal problems. They are the patriarchal oppressors of women and girls and among the the chief beneficiaries of this oppression. They are the heads of dysfunctional households. They are the practitioners of discredited child-rearing strategies and other inappropriate social behaviours. They are also members of a generation whose innovations were for conservatives a serious deviation from proper social, political and sexual practices, and for Christians the vehicle by which Satan pursued his earthly ambitions.
There are a number of ways in which the people accused by adult survivors were denied the obligations due to them. Adult survivors, quite obviously, felt more than justified in denying their "abusive" parents any filial obligations. The data--both survey and anecdotal--in fact, show that survivors commonly cut off personal contact with their supposed abusers, take legal action against them and are cruelly imaginative in their treatment of them (Loftus and Ketcham 1996 [1994]: 171ff., Pendergrast 278-9, 290-1). The nature of the accusations also meant that the authors of works about such abuse, as well as practising psychiatrists, psychologists and other professionals could ignore important ethical responsibilities. Where child abuse was supposedly involved--and ritual abuse is the most abhorrent form of child abuse--therapists felt justified in taking serious action against supposed perpetrators or in encouraging their patients to do so on the basis of the most problematic and unproven of beliefs. Therapists have encouraged their patients to accept that their "symptoms" indicate that they have suffered abuse, and so have encouraged patients to make accusations--often publicly--against their parents and others, to isolate themselves from their families, to make complaints to police and to initiate legal action (Lanning 1992: 110, 128; Pendergrast 1995: 58-60, 68, 328, 331ff., 339, 341ff., 503, 354; Wakefield and Underwager 1994: 121). Likewise, therapists appearing in court as expert witnesses have made very questionable claims about the validity of certain research and its implications (Wakefield and Underwager 1994: 252-3; see Barret vs. Hydburg Sup. Court, Buncombe Co, N. Carolina 1995 99CVS793; Noblitt and Perskin 1995: 150; testimony of van der Kolk, Dale vs. RC Diocese of Burlington et al. 26/7 Sept. 1997).

Therapists have used their legal status to arrange for their patients to be isolated from their families while undergoing treatment, or they have manipulated patients into initiating such isolation (Pendergrast 1995: 296). They have attempted to informally exact monetary retribution on parents by soliciting their patients' fees from them (Pendergrast 1995: 277, 293). Moreover, there are cases where therapists have seemingly attempted to usurp parents' place in their patients' lives by initiating inappropriately close, pseudo-parental relationships with patients (Pendergrast 1995: 292ff., 320, 324, 329; Wakefield and Underwager 1994: 114).
It is also possible that the way that those accused by adult survivors—as well as those supposedly accused by very young children—were treated by American legal and law-enforcement agencies constituted a denial of social obligations. Child abuse is considered a most horrific crime, and in the last twenty years people accused of it by adult survivors have gradually had their legal rights and protections—such as the statute of limitations—whittled away. Penalties for such offences have at the same time been dramatically increased (Lyon 1998: 453; Wakefield and Underwager 1994: 15, 26). In one US state, laws were amended to allow judges to more severely punish crimes committed during Satanic rituals (Lanning 1992: 139).

Like therapists, some legal and law enforcement officers believe that the nature of the crimes supposedly committed by those accused by adult survivors entities them to waive customary ethical and even legal responsibilities. Some police complained to the author and activist Kahaner—who believes that ritual abuse is being perpetrated—about the propensity of certain officers to pursue supposed Satanists solely because they are Satanists (Kahaner 1988: 114). Police have in some cases prepared prosecution briefs in which accusers’ more problematic claims have been omitted (Crews NYROB 17 Nov. 1994). The American Bar Association has, in fact, expressed its concerns about prosecutors in child abuse cases neglecting their legal responsibilities in their attempt to gain convictions, and there have been documented cases where prosecutors have engaged in seriously unethical or even illegal behaviour (Cockburn and Silverstein 1996: 284ff.; Wakefield and Underwager 1994: 16, 36).[6]

In summary, anthropological and historical studies show that accusations of witchcraft are very often made against the members of “already stigmatised” groups. As La Fontaine shows, allegations of ritual abuse in Britain were also made against people whose poverty effectively placed them “outside” British society. Those accused of ritual abuse by adult survivors are clearly not members of stigmatised groups. Yet they too can be seen as “outsiders”. Like the denizens of British “sink estates”—and, indeed, those Americans providing child care during the 1980s and 1990s—they are people whom their accusers, their therapists and other activists perceived to be immersed in evil. They were considered capable of ritual
abuse because they were—supposedly—violent, sexually deviant, oppressive, misogynistic and lacking in self-control. Accusations of ritual abuse—like accusations of witchcraft in Papua New Guinea, Africa and early modern Europe—also performed certain social functions. Like accused witches, supposed perpetrators of ritual abuse could be denied the social support usually due to them. Accusations of ritual abuse—and the persecution that followed—obviously achieved certain political, professional and even psychological ends. Accusers, their therapists and supporters could denounce contemporary misogyny and sexual oppression, and take action against the perpetrators of particularly heinous wrongs. Survivors could also dissociate themselves from their parents, and join their therapists and other activists in repudiating their values.

Notes

[1] In his study of the notorious Pappenheimer witch trial in Bavaria in the late sixteenth century, Kunze notes that accusations against a family of impoverished, itinerant workers resulted in a speedy trial, condemnation and cruel execution. When more affluent and well-connected Bavarians were similarly accused, influential members of their families or social networks were able to convince the authorities that the accusations were false (Kunze 1987).

Nelson notes that, a few decades later, a considerable number of wealthy men were executed as witches in Bavaria and nearby regions. As a result of the Thirty Years’ War, local rulers were unable to raise adequate funds by the usual methods. The trial and execution of wealthy “witches” thus “constituted a convenient and lucrative source of income” (Nelson 1975: 342).
[2] According to Steadman, Hewa witch hunters selected a victim from among the rival “roofing and flooring group” that they wished to intimidate. This person was chosen because he or she was physically non-threatening and “politically insignificant”. An accusation of witchcraft was made because the impossibility of proving such a charge discouraged wavering about the propriety of killing the chosen victim. Killing a “witch” (as opposed to a non-witch) also allowed the possibility of future cooperation with the rival group to be maintained (Steadman 1986: 115-6). Steadman argues that the Catholic witch hunters of early modern European similarly persecuted “innocent individuals” as a way of “intimidat[ing] those who posed the real threat, those likely to support religious revolutionaries”, while the Massachusetts Puritans executed “vulnerable women” as a tactic in the “political and religious competition within Salem Village” (Steadman 1986: 117, 119).

[3] Crawford grounds his deliberations in Foucault’s theories about the formative role of “configurations of power” in social order (1994: 1358). His observations about contemporary conceptions of HIV-AIDS—and their implications for witchcraft and ritual abuse—are, however, entirely consistent with Gramsci’s theory of “hegemony”. Scheper-Hughes considers Gramsci to have “anticipated Foucault in his understanding of the diffuse power circuits in modern states and of the role of ‘expert’ forms of power/knowledge in sustaining the common sense order of things” (1992: 230).

Hegemony, in Gramsci’s sense, is a process whereby conceptions of reality are constructed. Social groups make self-enhancing propositions and counter-propositions to each other about “the meaning of things”. The hegemony that emerges must, therefore, accommodate some of the alternate conceptions of non-elite groups. Within hegemony, furthermore, both elites and non-elite groups have differing—potentially oppositional—conceptualisations. Hegemony is continually being “renewed, recreated, defended . . . modified . . . resisted, limited, altered [and] challenged” (Williams 1977: 112). An accommodation between the propositions precipitates a renewed or recreated hegemony, while a propositional incapacity precipitates an “alternative hegemony” (Lawrence 1982:
Thus, potentially disruptive ideas—that child sexual abuse was widespread and perpetrated by seemingly respectable people, for example, or that the political, economic and social order in Britain was profoundly flawed—were effectively quashed. Britons could concentrate instead on the horrific forms of child abuse supposedly perpetrated by the “undeserving poor”.

[4] Russell provides a compelling example of this process in his examination of the interrogation, trial and execution of the judge Dietrich Flade in Trier in 1589. A series of plagues and other disasters convinced local elites and the peasantry that witches were active. Flade was accused by a number of suspects undergoing interrogation. When subjected to torture, he admitted attending sabbats, causing plagues and other horrors. Flade had originally aroused suspicion because of his circumspection and scrupulous application of the law during witch trials (Russell 1980: 83-4).

[5] The idea that advocates for victims of ritual abuse are stalked or in other ways intimidated by members of Satanic cults appears quite regularly in the literature (e.g. Ryder 1992 99ff.). According to the Stipulation and Consent Order issued by the Minnesota Board of Psychology, psychologist and author Renee Fredrickson had constantly complained to police about being stalked by cultists, having her mail opened and finding markings made by them. She also interpreted numerous natural events as evidence of such stalking (7 May 1999). In Australia, the paediatrician John Spensley warned the participants of a 1992 conference on “Satanic Ritual Abuse” that cultists have “huge sums of money at their disposal . . . [and] are in a position to exert considerable power”. They “work in secrecy . . . They infiltrate,” he said (Spensley 1992a). Psychiatrist Anne Schlebaum addressed the same conference on the dangers faced by therapists treating survivors of ritual abuse (see AAMPAD Conference Notes, Melbourne, Sept. 1992). A “youth worker” who spoke to journalist Yvonne Preston in 1990 described being pelted with condoms, having her power cut off and seeing a man wearing “a black pointed hood” in her backyard. She thought she was “going mad” (Preston SMH 8 Dec. 1990).
[6] It is sometimes difficult to differentiate the unjust treatment meted out to those accused of child abuse from that more generally endured by suspects in American police investigations and by defendants in criminal trials. Left-liberal and civil libertarian critics of American legal and law-enforcement systems argue that unethical and illegal behaviour by police and prosecutors, problematic rules for the admission of evidence by courts and illogical sentencing schemes are, in fact, endemic. Lyon (1998), for example, shows that the fact that the defendants in the Wenatchee case in Washington state were accused of child abuse exacerbated problems arising from the localised administration of courts and police forces, the fact that judges and senior police are elected via expensive and non-compulsory ballots, the mercenary nature of the legal profession, and the miserly provision of funds for public defenders. Similarly, Cockburn and Silverstein (1996) describe the unjust treatment by federal officers and agencies of those accused of child abuse as typical of more widely-occurring injustice and official misbehaviour.

Discussing the incident in Waco, Texas, in which questionable claims of child abuse motivated—or were used to justify—the use of “tanks and CS chemicals” to break the siege of the compound of a radical Christian sect, Cockburn and Silverstein argue that the “catastrophe embodied almost everything wrong with federal law enforcement and justice... out-of-control agencies, grotesque use of unnecessary force, denial of due process and elementary liberties, followed by cover-up and self-exculpation by relevant officials” (1996: 285, 287 my emphasis).

Interestingly, the ritual abuse therapists and activists Noblitt and Perskin suggest that the Waco sect may have been Satanic. They draw attention to the unusual scar on the chest of the sect’s founder and leader David Koresh and suggest that this scar—and Koresh’s doctrinal and sexual teachings—may have been the result of his “earlier involvement in a demonic cult” (Noblitt and Perskin 1995:165-6). Noblitt was in fact “interviewed by several radio stations during the crisis [at Waco]... because of [his] previous work with... cult survivors” (Noblitt and Perskin 1995:165). Like the inquisitors of the medieval and early
modern eras, Noblitt and Perskin perceive the world as infested with groups that are inspired by, and secretly serve, the Devil. They propose—and are in the position to promote—ideas which reverberate with the religious orthodoxy of witch hunting times.