



A Field Study Update on Organizational Satanism and Setianism in the United States

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Abstract

Background With recent attention to the organizational dynamics of contemporary Satanism, updated information on Satanic and Setian organizations is imperative for the field.

Purpose The purpose of this research note is to update the literature surrounding Satanism and Setianism with new organizational and administrative information, which will help scholars studying these groups in developing new theoretical frameworks and interpretations.

Methods A snowball sample interview, participant observation, and ethnographic study was conducted. In person field work was done primarily in Austin, TX, and New York, NY, where occult bookstores, wicca stores, online group pages/forums, Satanic gatherings, and goth clothing shops were frequented for a portrayal of “lived Satanism.”

Results Findings elaborate on the authority structures of five Satanic and Setian organizations, and a long considered defunct Satanic group called the Church of Satanic Brotherhood is uncovered. Participants also elaborate on the previous schisms within the Satanic niche.

Conclusions and Implications Field note recommendations are given to future researchers working in Satanic studies. The organizational findings inform future research and theoretical innovations, including religious organization ecology (ROE) theory.

Keywords Satanic Temple · Church of Satan · Temple of Set · Church of Satanic Brotherhood · Organizational · Field Study

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Introduction

The Church of Satan and its schismatic organizations have recently been shown to conform to religious economies and organizational ecology expectation of schism (Foertsch 2022). Following these discoveries, social scientists of religion now must integrate this non-deistic, often atheistic belief system into their theoretical frameworks. This note could be seen as the starting place to do so. Original field study follows to assist researchers in this task.

This note begins by introducing the relevant literature for Satanic studies and field methodology in high tension religious movements, as well as religious economies and organizational ecology theory. After a brief discussion of methods, the paper will then focus on new organizational findings from qualitative interviews, participant observation, and ethnography. These results summarize original discoveries within the field of Satanism studies, to give more organizational and administrative context to the theoretical discussions surrounding Satanism.

Satanism

On April 30th, 1966, the Church of Satan was founded by Anton LaVey. The church initially was flexible in its interpretation of Satan derived from Anton LaVey's *Satanic Bible* (1969), but later settled on "rationalistic Satanism." This interpreted Satan as a humanistic or cathartic symbol rather than a divine being. Other related organizations, such as the Temple of Set, maintained their view of Satan as an actual deity. Most Satanic groups view Satan as a symbol of human liberation from dogmatic conformity.

While the Church of Satan is seen as the seminal example of organizational Satanism, there are many other groups that also compete within the Satanic niche (Foertsch 2022). While there is little cohesiveness within the movement, it is often held in high tension with the external environment (Petersen 2016). Organizationally, Satanic groups can range from strong centralization with high boundaries, secrecy, and membership costs (such as frequent ritual attendance) to complete decentralization. The only unifying factor in this niche is the focus on Satan as a symbol, although (often sacralized or deified) radical individualism and societal liberation are often recurring themes.

The Church of Satan spurred many schismatic groups such as Temple of Set (forming Setianism) and the Church of Satanic Brotherhood (see Petersen 2009; Foertsch 2022). The impact of the Satanic niche and its ideas in the public sphere makes Satanism/Setianism a fascinating case study for sociologists of religion (an example being the Satanic Temple and its movement—see Laycock 2020). Recent studies suggest that there exists a Satanic niche in the American religious market that functions in ways predicted by religious economies and organizational ecology theory (Foertsch 2022).

There are a range of secondary and primary sources available to study Satanism as a religious niche. Good secondary sources for understanding the history of the Satanic niche are found in Introvigne's *Satanism: A Social History* (2016), Laycock's (2020)

Speak of the Devil, van Lwijk's *Children of Lucifer* (2016), Dyrendal et al.'s (2015) *The Invention of Satanism* and Lewis' (2001) *Who Serves Satan?* As for crucial primary sources, many come from LaVey himself, which could be found online. Details about Church of Satan schisms are also told in Flowers' *Lords of the Left-Hand Path: Forbidden Practices and Spiritual Heresies* (1997), *Satan Wants You: The Cult of Devil Worship in America* by Lyons (1988), Aquino's *The Church of Satan* (2002), as well as Blanche Barton's (1990, 2014, 2021) accounts of LaVey. These sources along with original research are essential for understanding the Satanic niche.

Methodologically, in an article titled "Doing Field Studies of Religious Movements: An Agenda," Pitchford et al. (2001) summarized the difficulties and necessities in this new age of field study on religious movements in high tension with the environment. I consider this article to be a guiding principle in this research design, and as such, several of their elements are directly addressed in the findings in order to advance the field of Satanism and Setianism studies. These elements are primarily but not limited to (1) "Organizational history and context," particularly identity, descent, timeline, demography, and (especially) locations and ecologies (Pitchford et al. 2001: 380-3) (2) "Mobilization," specifically defection (Pitchford et al. 2001: 384-5) (3) "Organization," focusing on doctrine, cost, and commitment (Pitchford et al. 2001: 385-6) (4) "Governance," with a key eye to leadership and authoritative power (Pitchford et al. 2001: 388-9), and finally (5) "Outcomes," or success and failure—largely elucidated through discussion of schism (Pitchford et al. 2001: 390).

Religious Organization Ecology in Emergent Religious Groups

The theoretical foundation of organizations in the American sociology of religion usually focuses on American Christian Protestant denominations through the framework of religious economies theory. Religious economies theory highlights the importance of the religious market in organizational growth, and the rational choice of each individual when deliberating over religious belief systems and organizations to fulfill their spiritual demands. It attempts to account for all levels of analysis—from macro to micro—to explain why certain religious organizations do better on the market than others. Finke and Stark (2001, 2005) introduce the idea of a "religious demands standardized curve." This theory posits that there is a constant amount of demand for religious goods, and that various religious organizations fulfill these demands in different ways. Included in the religious economies perspective are concepts of "church/sect/cult," "tension," and "strictness." Each of these concepts helps explain why schism, growth, and decline happen in religious organizations.

For example, religious denominations undergo schism when moving from a "sect" phase into an institutionalized "church" phase, although this framework is not without its problems. High tension groups within this mechanism are often described using the derogatory term "cult," which is routinely applied to the Satanic case. Bromley and Melton (2012) update this theoretical imposition with a keen eye to "emergent religious groups," which operate external to accepted tradition and function as outsiders. Emergent religious groups can be considered as "outsider" largely due to their high costs and high distinctiveness, and are different than alternative (ex.

LDS), sectarian (ex. Cavalry Chapel), or dominant (ex. Methodist) groups. Thus, emergent religious groups (or ERGs) are used here as a helpful theoretic enhancement of religious economies theory.

Organizational ecology, a theoretic paradigm that applies biological ecology to social organizations (Hannan and Freeman 1977), is a helpful tool for understanding the role of institutional innovation in religious congregations. This theory posits that voluntary organizations compete on the market for a finite set of resources, such as membership, money, property, etc. Different niches are carved out to lower competition, and an organization attempts to maximize its ability to monopolize resources within its environmental niche through fitness. Thus, organizational forms, leadership, and bureaucratic structure are used to maximize niche fitness and monopolize resources, making these elements imperative to study.

For example, an organizational innovation of strictness and environmental tension begets growth. Strictness determines resource costs associated with membership in the religious denomination. Higher tension grants benefits such as commitment and distinctiveness, which outweigh costs and stimulate membership growth. Similarly, the choice to professionalize (the move to an institutional church) lowers strictness, costs, and distinctiveness, and leads to stagnating growth or loss (Iannaccone 1988, 1992).

Organizations can attempt to specialize or generalize within their niche. Depending on the resources the generalist organization gives to members, this might lead to schism due to a lack of distinctiveness and may increase “free-riding” (Iannaccone 1992). Free riding is when members of an organization fail to contribute equitably to communal resources and take more than they contribute. In the case of religious organizations, this is typically seen in larger churches with lower tension in society, where members do not pay for religious goods with their resources (time, money, etc.) because there is no stigma attached to membership. This would be considered niche stretching, where a generalist organization loses membership when competing with specialist suppliers that can better fit the needs of an individual believer in the religious market.

Goffman (1963) shows stigma as a branding that society applies onto a deviating individual. In the case of religious organizations, stigma is not always as harmful as Goffman may have initially assumed. In countless examples, stigmatized religious organizations grow faster than those who have no stigma within broader society. The higher the costs associated with membership; the more resources members will often be willing to contribute to the success of the organization, which enhances the organization’s fitness (or ability to attract future membership). Bourdieu (1986) discusses the importance of symbolic capital on how one is treated within intersubjective interaction. Religious beliefs are a major form of social and cultural capital, and purposely taking on stigmatic or mainstream religious beliefs would directly impact how individuals are perceived and treated. We see this case often with members of the Church of Satan (CoS hereon), who claim exclusivity while facing problems in the workplace because of the predominant Christian society.

Ultimately, one could make the argument that religious economies theory has issues when discussing meso-level or institutional functions, especially in the case of high-tension emergent groups that function as niche specialists. This epistemologi-

cal hole in rational choice religious markets theory could be fruitfully filled through the usefulness of organizational ecology, which was previously incorporated into the Satanist framework through niche (Foertsch 2022), or even within the findings of new institutionalism. While others have argued that this synthesis does not need a terminological shift (Scheitle 2007, Stark and Finke 2000), normative claims of an economic market could also reproduce hegemonic capitalist narrative and legitimacy (Gramsci 1999). Both models discuss the role of the individual actor within organizational fitness/isomorphism. Therefore, this theoretic synthesis is abbreviated to *religious organization ecology theory* to account for these insights—or ROE for short.

Propositions

As such, the core research propositions that drove my data collection and analysis were:

1. Satanism and Setianism in the United States correspond to theoretical expectations of religious organizational shape and schism (ROE theory).
2. In line with Pitchford et al.'s recommendations (2001), a current representation of Satanic and Setian administrative and authority structures is pressing for the field of Satanism/Setianism studies to continue theoretical development.

Methods

A snowball sample interview study was conducted, beginning with specifically targeted key players in the field of Satanism and Setianism. See the appendix for the list of twenty-three questions used. Participant observation and ethnography was added during the interview phase, to get a more holistic view of the state of enacted Satanism today: occult bookstores, wicca stores, online group pages/forums, Satanic gatherings, and goth clothing shops were frequented in order to ascertain the validity of opinions pulled from the first two methods and glean how this has impacted “lived Satanism,” so to speak (often represented locally through the newer Satanic Temple). In person field work was done primarily in Austin, TX, and New York, NY, where the Temple of Set and the Church of Satan have large membership/influence, respectively.

I began with social media participant observation and ethnography in January of 2021, which is still ongoing. This involved analysis of content shared over emailing lists, Facebook, Twitter, forums, and blogs. The interview study was started in May of 2021. At the end of the snowball sample thirteen participants were interviewed, either formally or informally, through a variety of mediums. These unstructured and semi-structured interviews were done either in person or over videoconferencing service (zoom). Due to this small sample size saturation was not reached and supplemental in-person participant observation and ethnography was added in June of 2021 and lasted until September of 2021. This involved several weekends a month over four months in Austin, TX, and a full week in New York, NY. I visited occult bookstores, wicca/white magic shops, Satanic gatherings, and goth clothing shops in

each respective location. Participant observation was used primarily in places where there was a large enough public to mask researcher identity. Ethnography was used in contexts where there were few outsiders, necessitating deanonymization and a formal indication of researcher status. Historical content analysis, primarily written accounts found in monographs from people associated with the Satanic niche, was also employed to verify some findings.

Table 1 shows the relative success/outcome of contacting each Satanic/Setian organization and its high-ranking members, which are notoriously difficult to reach.

Results

Satanic Organizations and Authority

Regardless of the difficulties collecting data, findings from the historical content, interview, participant observation, and ethnographic methods are discussed in the following section in more depth; the majority of them are simply reports of administrative structure within the ROE theoretical framework. This section's purpose is to ensure that the most up to date knowledge on Satanic organization is available to researchers in Satanic studies— which lends itself to further study or theorizing.

The Church of Satan (CoS):

The Church of Satan responded to only one inquiry after administrative email follow ups— and their response was “We have no interest in participating.” This being the case, updates with the CoS had to be found online and through other avenues. One particularly interesting primary account that has just come out is Blanche Barton's *We Are Satanists* (2021); although slightly biased, it provides excellent source material for researchers studying the CoS post-Setian schism. Blanche Barton, who is currently the “Magister Templi Rex” of the CoS (the leader of the Council of Nine), agreed to interview and has given several interesting quotes on our topic here, which will be included below.

Barton refuses the label LaVeyan Satanism for a variety of reasons, largely pointing to the authority of LaVey in defining Satanism as an organized belief system. She speaks frankly about why it is difficult for members of the Church of Satan to speak to academics, who seek to put the CoS movement on equal ground analytically with other groups.

To be fair, academics no doubt see us as biased and unduly restrictive when we repeatedly insist that there are no ‘varieties’ of Satanism. As the organization designated to carry the philosophy of Satanism forward, through emerging societal changes and challenges, we must protect LaVey’s ideas, as one would protect a product brand. This isn’t inconsequential territorial wrangling. We aren’t defending our street corner from competing tent-show evangelists, afraid they’ll bite into our financial interests. We have no church buildings or paid clergy to bankroll. But we do have a solemn responsibility to ensure Satanism

Table 1 Outcome of Contact with Satanic and Setian Organizations (2020–2022)

Organization	Administrative Contact	Known Leaders Contact
The Church of Satan (CoS)	The CoS administration immediately declined to participate after 1 follow up email. Found at: https://www.churchofsatan.com/contact-us#feedback	Blanche Barton, Magistra Templi Rex, responded to basic questions without full interview after 2 months of follow up.
The Church of Satanic Brotherhood (CSB)	The Church of Satanic Brotherhood has no apparent administrative email. A general Facebook page has some basic information. Found at: https://www.facebook.com/groups/319432915908940/	John DeHaven, leader of the CSB, was contacted directly. This put the PI into contact with the apparent second in command who was successfully interviewed.
The Temple of Set (ToS)	The ToS responded well initially in order to recruit the PI as a member. After the PI made it clear that this was unlikely, communication was ended. Found at: https://xeper.info/pub/pub_gil.html	Multiple high-ranking leaders of the ToS were contacted, the only one that was helpful was a former High Priest, who avoided interview but did answer metaphysical belief questions. Others did not return emails even after multiple follow ups.
The Satanic Temple (TST)	A regional administrative contact was used (which will remain anonymous). A thorough vetting process ensued (5 rounds), which allowed access to newsletters for in-person gatherings.	High ranking members of local branches were met and informally interviewed during ethnography. Malcom Jarry, cofounder, answered questions about membership numbers.
The First Satanic Church (FSC)	The only contact listed was an address. The PI sent a letter and two follow ups to this address but has yet to hear back. Found at: https://www.satanicchurch.com/	The letters have yet to elicit a response.

maintains its integrity. Satanism is easily (often purposely) misconstrued by those who would misuse it or condemn it. It offers unprecedented freedoms that must be clearly balanced with other elements within the philosophy to be properly applied. If the leadership of the Church of Satan acknowledged these many derivative groups who have been started by grumbling ex-members, or by outsiders hoping to make a buck or get attention by calling their club some new, improved version of Satanism, we would be compromising Anton LaVey's vision. He fought against any dilution or rewriting of his philosophy during his lifetime and we continue that fight. In accepting every minor, short-lived group that calls itself Satanic as actually practicing Satanism, academics lend credence to ideas that do not adhere to the founder's concepts, thereby weakening a worthwhile religion. (Barton 2021: 340)

This ideological perspective is an indication of a reversal from church to sect, or even emergent (Bromley and Melton 2012). It is indeed the case that LaVey has defined a religious movement, and there is no denying that for those in academic positions—simply look at the importance of *The Satanic Bible* in groups that refuse LaVey's literal authority. This return to orthodoxy seems to be defining the recent CoS.

On the topic of Aquino and LaVey's split, Barton had an interesting take on the matter, which is self-explanatory: "My thoughts on Michael Aquino are that he was sexually and emotionally obsessed with Anton LaVey, and when LaVey spurned him, Aquino manufactured excuses for departure ('selling degrees' and 'betraying the Prince of Darkness') and left in a huff." (Blanche Barton, Personal Communications, 2021).

Additionally, several minor updates can be reported on the organization of the CoS. After the death of LaVey, there was a power struggle between Blanche Barton and LaVey's daughters Karla and Zeena (supported by Diane Hegarty, LaVey's second lover who helped found the CoS). This is in line with findings on the consequences of the death of a charismatic leader in religious organizations (Sutton and Chaves 2004). Barton became the de facto High Priestess of the CoS and stepped down from that role (Barton 2021). Barton mentions several reasons for her want to step down as High Priestess: (1) To protect the CoS from future lawsuits from Karla LaVey, Zeena LaVey, and Diane Hegarty, (2) To shelter her son by LaVey, Satan Xerxes, from the public light (3) Her belief that the CoS leadership should be shared by a couple, and (4) To dispel notions that the CoS is simply a personality cult unable to welcome new leadership. After this, Peter Gilmore became High Priest, and soon Peggy Nadramia, his wife, became High Priestess. For a more in depth look at the CoS from the 1980-2010 s, see Foertsch (2022).

Under Gilmore the CoS has become very adversarial towards all other Satanic groups, with the occasional odd exception (one being the Temple of the Vampire). They claim most other Satanic groups as imposters and false claimants to LaVey's authority. The Satanic Temple has not escaped this stance, claiming that they are "fake Satanists" who only use the name of Satan to further their political agendas—which they denounce within a social Darwinist lens (the Satanic Temple has more of pluralistic humanist attitude). It appears that this is an attempt to reverse the process of sect to church, towards "Satanic fundamentalism." A considerable attempt has

been made to create market exclusivity within the Satanic niche for the CoS through this organizational innovation.

This position seems to be working in the CoS' favor in terms of membership, but this is anecdotal. Most of the CoS membership also appears to be aging, which could suggest availability of niche resources. Without younger members being attracted to the organization to fill in leadership positions, this could become a potential problem down the road.

Barton has an interesting take directly on the Satanic Temple, as well as issues of authority and doctrine, which represents one of the central hypotheses posited by previous research (Foertsch 2022; Starke and Dyck 1996):

...examining Satanic organizations and those who have broken away from Dr. LaVey's original ideology in order to start their own groups. If you are examining ideas of authority structure versus doctrinal differences, it should be noted many of the groups I mentioned above, as well as many of the contemporary Satanic poseur groups were never actually part of the Church of Satan to begin with. So then, given the choices presented, I suppose the weight would be more on the doctrinal side than the authoritarian side, since the guys that started the groups weren't rebelling against any direct organizational authority. To be insultingly reductionist, I compare most of the groups trying to use Satanic imagery to gain clicks and press attention these days as not that different from the rock groups in the 1970s and 1980s who were using the trappings and iconography of bad-boy Satanists but who didn't have the first clue about what Satanism truly advocates. Take the current flavor of the decade—the Satanic Temple. They are a political performance group, street players who have taken on the trappings of Satanism to make certain points about religious hypocrisy that have become hard-wired into the power structure of certain regions in the United States. Whatever value there is in their presented principles—and the heritage and gravitas they might claim—came right from Anton LaVey. However, LaVey's posture, and the posture his organization has maintained long past his death, is that religion has no place in the public square. We are strong believers of the separation of Church and State because we know how dangerous any entanglement might become. The Church of Satan is politically uninvolved, as an entity. Our members are free, even encouraged, to become politically involved regarding issues they feel strongly about. But the entity of the Church of Satan has no political affiliations. The Satanic Temple has gained a lot of ink simply because they work overtime pissing people off waving the banner of Satanism, and we (the actual Church of Satan) are burdened with explaining ad nauseum that they are in no way affiliated with us and do not represent Satanism- (Blanche Barton, Personal Communications, 2021)

Of course, much of the CoS administration functions much like it did under LaVey–Gilmore has unilateral power as High Priest, and the Council of Nine serves as merely an advisory body. Priesthoods continue to be appointment based and not centered on a denominational form of professional training, further illustrating sect/emergent categorization. Barton (2021) speaks proudly of this tradition, which is in

her opinion not mired by democratic delay, even though online operations place the Facebook page at 15,400 members, Twitter at 328,100 followers¹. A good quote on the matter from Barton's interview: "...our structure hasn't changed much from when Anton LaVey was alive. We still emphasize that what authority you have within the organization is reflective of what you have achieved, and continue to achieve, in the outside world. We don't have tedious rank tests to pass. Our challenges are decisive and unannounced, rather like life itself" (Blanche Barton, Personal Communications, 2021).

The Church of Satanic Brotherhood (CSB):

There is much to be reported here. Long thought to be fifty years defunct by academics, I managed to contact and confirm the continued existence of the first schismatic group off the Church of Satan in 1972-3. This involved social media participant observation and ethnography, as well as contact (an occasional interview) with several high-ranking members of the organization.

Gathered information suggests that after the schism with the CoS, the Church of Satanic Brotherhood managed to survive and even thrive in the Midwestern United States. This evidently included weathering the storm that was their leader John DeHaven's public conversion to Christianity in 1974, who appears to have returned shortly after to leadership in the CSB. Members claim that the organization had roughly 500 members at its height and dwindled to around 10 during the 1980s Satanic Panic, suggesting the importance of environmental conditions on niche resources. High tension during the Panic led to an essentially defunct organizational outcome. They mention the importance of the internet in revitalizing the organization post-1990 and claim a robust membership today, likely due to lower tension and an easier ability to reach potential membership resources.

Presently, the Church of Satanic Brotherhood is headed by John DeHaven, who acts as the High Priest. High ranking officials have claimed that there are two operating domestic grottos— one in Detroit and one in Dayton Ohio, both locations of the early schism with the CoS (West and the Babylon Grotto of Detroit, DeHaven and the Stygian Grotto in Dayton). Tension with the external environment seems to be high, but little could be found in local media to corroborate. Furthermore, the CSB asserts that there is an international membership, located in one grotto in Bavaria, Germany. The Facebook page has roughly 7400 followers, 76 members, and the number of estimated active grotto members is 130 (by the author).

Organizationally, it appears as though the High Priest John DeHaven has complete fiat power and can make unilateral decisions or excommunicate at will, with a Council of Nine functioning only as an advisory committee. There is a monthly newsletter for membership, and there is a five-degree system, like the CoS. In paradoxically direct contradiction to this, however, it appears as though local grottos are given free rein to do as they please without central involvement, likely to encourage member-

¹ Notably more than the growing Satanic Temple, which has 85,500 followers on Twitter. The Satanic Temple Facebook page, on the other hand, has 198,500 followers— which perhaps shows the difference in appealed demographics.

ship growth. Leadership claims that this is how true Satanism should be done—without oversight or limitations on drug use, social conformity, or belief. They juxtapose this to the modern CoS, which has recently claimed to be the “orthodox” version of Satanism. Strictness is low but tension is presumably high, suggesting that environmental conditions are likely the reason why CSB continues on to this day.

I will leave this section with several quotes from an interview with the “Magister Sacorum” of the CSB (essentially the second in command), Flavius Apollonius.

- *Yeah, yeah, we’re making a lot of noise for dead people. Yeah, yeah. [laughter]*
- *One of Aquino’s people who accused me and the Church of Satanic Brotherhood, by extension of being Satanists of the Year Five [a reference to the schism, which occurred roughly five years after LaVey founded the CoS in 1966]. He meant that derogatorily. And because he had felt like the Temple of Set had evolved from that. But all course, from my opinion, was they had devolved from that, and I cheerfully accepted that title and, and that’s kind of the way we organize.*
- *So any rate that we’re not trying to conquer the world and so therefore we don’t need to keep our troops under tight discipline.*
- *I said I thought at the beginning what I had hoped the Church of Satan would be was a big tent. For everybody... We’re the Tower of Babel, but I hope at some time we’ll learn each other’s language. (Flavius Apollonius)*

These quotes, along with the full interview transcript titled “Flavius Apollonius, Magister Sacorum of the Church of Satanic Brotherhood” and supporting internal documents are held in the Special Research Collections Department of the University of California Santa Barbara Library. The transcript provides a wealth of knowledge to researchers interested in both the CSB and early organizational Satanism, as the subject was also involved with Michael Aquino and the Temple of Set. Unfortunately for space reasons the full ramifications of this interview cannot be developed, but it is recommended that those parties interested request access from the UCSB Library or from the author.

The Temple of Set (ToS):

The Temple of Set was an incredibly difficult organization to do any sort of research on beyond what was given online. This demonstrates the remarkable negotiation of environmental tension the ToS employs through secrecy. Contact was attempted at multiple points: individual and organizational social media, email, and attempted fieldwork in Austin, TX, where the ToS has a strong membership. The most helpful during this process was a former High Priest, who answered several metaphysical questions but avoided interview or discussion of organizational forms. An administrator of the ToS email (who requested not to be named or quoted) gave organizational information, but only when under the impression that the author would join the membership (and after two vetting processes regarding knowledge of foundational texts and nature of study). Once this question of membership was clarified in the negative, this person became terse in follow ups.

Even so, some information could be gleaned from what little interactions were maintained with the subjects. The Temple of Set rejects Satanic influence and highlights the incomprehensibility of its doctrine without rigorous study, which situates the ToS in high tension and commitment within the Satanic and occultic niche. It claims a more democratic form of council, which has the final say over the High Priest. Problems seem to be communicated to the full priesthood, which then does as it feels best. The ToS also claims to allow people to believe as they will, but when this was mentioned to leaders of other groups such as the CSB, this idea was ridiculed and Aquino's overriding authority was cited. It is unlikely that a traditional deist, for example, would be let into the ToS.

Overall, multiple emails were left unanswered. The email administrator claimed a call for interviews was sent out, but no subjects followed up with the author. The conclusion must be that our findings based off the reported information is found wanting. A major takeaway for those studying the ToS is to remember that they are *no longer a Satanic organization*, although evolved from such, and it would be a *very unwise practice* to continue labeling them as such.

The Satanic Temple (TST):

The following consists of several notes and thoughts from participant observation, ethnography, and informal interview with leaders within the Satanic Temple, which was not originally a focus of this study but was included by the author to get a more “on the ground” view of contemporary organizational Satanism.

Recently, schisms have hit the Satanic Temple (see Laycock 2020 for an excellent in-depth analysis of this). The leadership has been accused internally of being not being forward enough— and being too traditionally empowered (the leadership almost entirely white, for example— see Sprankle et al. 2021; Danielson 2022; Lewis 2001). These claims only reflect the difficulty in creating a contemporary mass political movement within the American Left— individual plurality and identity becomes a driving force of organizational change and schism. Being a left-leaning politicized form of Satanism only expedites this process, as Satanists have never been ones for cohesiveness or dogmatic conformity to central authority.

This is not to say that TST will always be plagued by these problems—there is still a usefulness in the collective gnosis/unconscious that this particular movement has managed to tap into to counter the recent rise in political conservative extremism. It likely means that collective identity and belief will have to be shaped in a more deliberate way internally, which one could argue is happening right now. These problems certainly do not seem to be impacting membership numbers, which have been reported at 500,416 “registered” members² (Malcom Jarry, Personal Communications, 2021) by the cofounder. It is no doubt that this rising number is due to its public tension with assertive evangelical Christianity. This tension recently culminated in

² Jarry refers to registered members as “...a member who has gone to our website, read our tenets, entered their name and email address, and clicked a box averring that they believe in our tenets. We have many members who are not officially registered presumably because they do not want to be on a list, even one that is private.” (Jarry, Personal Communications, 2021).

TST's headquarters in Salem Massachusetts being set aflame by a Christian arsonist on June 10th, 2022 (Becker et al. 2022). Continuing legal battles over abortion rights in conservative areas, especially after the Supreme Court decision to roll back *Roe v. Wade* protections, has continued to support membership growth—highlighting the importance of environmental tension in generating membership resources and commitment in emergent groups.

As of this day, it seems as though TST is restructuring its organizational structure to include more checks and balances on the local congregations while also giving more representation in “Central.” For the US case, for example, local congregations (almost one in each state) have been organized into six regional authorities composed of each chapter head (often two for each one). This regional step serves as a check to complete self-autonomy and supports Central in governing the actions of TST members. Central also has introduced councils consisting of heads of local congregations, as well as the “congress,” in which each congregation has equal (one) vote. This assists regional representation and centralization of the movement—both likely sought by leaders after the numerous schisms that have plagued the Temple in the latter half of the 2010s. Additionally, TST introduced an ordination program in 2021 for Satanic ministers. Perhaps these innovations will lead TST to a greater sense of shared identity and an increased salience as a politicized mass pluralist Satanic movement. From this information it is unmistakable that the Satanic Temple is making its way down the demand curve from sect to church to solidify its base, but membership commitment, tension, and conversion remain high. Whether this leads to more schisms or not remains to be seen.

The First Satanic Church

At the time of this writing, solicitations for further information from the First Satanic Church by mail have gone unanswered by Karla LaVey. Findings from other sources have claimed (perhaps with bias) that the First Satanic Church is essentially defunct, or mail-only. Others deride it as no better than a social club, with no real belief system, hinting at extremely low tension. Ultimately, the research cannot confirm or deny these reports conclusively using the materials given (essentially only a website with a mailing address).

Limitations

As mentioned in the [results](#) section, there were a variety of reasons as to why participants might not have gone on record formally with an interview. The reason why I encountered so much difficulty when investigating could likely be attributed to several factors. (1) Interview subjects mentioned that academics have misrepresented them in the past. (2) Interview subjects worried about anonymity—Evangelical Christians are known to threaten them with death. (3) The nature of the institution the PI is working out of. (4) It could be possible that these individuals wish to keep barriers with the outside world high, to maintain higher commitment and an air of mystery (this especially seems to be the case with the ToS).

This limits the verifiability of especially anonymous accounts. As such, snowball sampling only yielded a small number of interviews, hindering their generalizability. These accounts were corroborated with ethnography and participant observation.

Additionally, in-person participant observation and ethnography have flaws with generalizability—Satanic groups could differ in organizational and administrative form by region. These groups are notoriously difficult to sample quantitatively, however, so qualitative methods are often the best tool social scientists have when endeavoring to understand organizational forms of emergent groups (Bromley and Melton 2012) such as Satanism and Setianism.

Conclusions and Implications

To revisit the findings on Satanic and Setian organizations above, I offer several things that could help inform future field studies focusing on organizational Satanism and Setianism.

1. It is unwise to call the Temple of Set Satanic. Instead, refer to it as Setian and gaining access to participants will become easier.
2. The Church of Satan rejects the label of “LaVeyan” due to beliefs that LaVey had ultimate authority. It is unwise to refer to it as such when interviewing participants.
3. The Church of Satanic Brotherhood does indeed exist, and its continued existence should be studied.
4. The Satanic Temple has been undergoing major administrative changes, which should be followed up by scholars of organizational religion. Furthermore, the schisms within the Satanic Temple reported on by Laycock (2020) merit a research project focused specifically on the motivations and theoretical explanations for the schisms, as found in Foertsch (2022).
5. The First Satanic Church may be defunct. Subsequent research should attempt to confirm this finding.
6. Religious organization ecology (ROE) theory could be a helpful paradigm for discussing organizational characteristics found in emergent religious groups and more, while excising problematic normative terminological usages.

Overall, these findings are proposed to the scholarship surrounding organizational Satanism and the sociology of religion to improve upon the literature at hand. It will make it intimately easier to contact and engage with participants and will also allow for new case studies to emerge within the field that have hitherto been underreported or ignored.

The ultimate purpose of this study was to update literature surrounding organizational Satanism/Setianism. From this study, my hope is that the field of Satanism studies will use the proposed organizational findings and theory to move forward and strengthen their respective and interwoven tools of analysis.

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