



Sacred Bodies: Gendered Experiences within the QAnon Mythology

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ABSTRACT

The QAnon conspiracy theory has been flagged as a threat to national security and to social cohesiveness in the United States and abroad. While many researchers have addressed separately the religious dimensions of the conspiracy and the differences in how men and women interact with the conspiracy, research that considers how both aspects feed into each other has been absent. This paper seeks to fill that research gap through a thematic content analysis of the gendered theologies that QAnon draws on and creates. Through examination of the 'canon' of Q drops from 2017-2022 under a lens of feminist political theology, this paper explores thematic overlaps with evangelical and New Age religious movements and examines how constructions of gender within each are reflected or transformed within the conspiracy.

DEDICATION

For you, Mama.

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INTRODUCTION

Watching interviews with federal law enforcement in the aftermath of the January 6, 2021, Capitol insurrection, I found myself increasingly frustrated. Just a month before, in December, I had submitted my senior research capstone discussing the convergence of various far-right militaristic sects in online QAnon spaces. QAnon, a conspiracy theory that alleges widespread paedophilia and corruption in the U.S. government and promises a coming rapturous reshuffling of the status quo, had caught my interest as an extension of a longstanding curiosity about conspiracy theories and cults. In the conclusion of that capstone paper, I had highlighted that discontent with the election results was breeding discussion of the need for imminent action. Posts hinting at some sort of event at the Capitol on January 6 had been swirling in those forums since November. I had seen them myself. And yet, in the week following the insurrection, numerous officials said that the event had been somehow unforeseen. Several people lay dead for the oversight.

QAnon rocketed into mainstream awareness with the arrest of several high-profile adherents in relation to the insurrection. With it, the niche area of emerging scholarship on the phenomenon was thrust into the limelight as people struggled to understand what motivated a sea of everyday people to storm the seat of the United States government.

In researching for my capstone, I had been struck by the way that some of the language and themes of the conspiracy had sounded familiar to what I heard ringing from the pulpits of the Baptist churches I grew up in. And as I watched and listened to the coverage of January 6, the interviews with members of the crowd and, I began to realise that far, far more people had found something familiar in the mythology that QAnon espoused. My capstone had focused on largely-male militant groups beginning to converge, but as time went on, I became more interested in the number of women I saw at the rallies and spreading QAnon's gospel on social media sites. As a yoga practitioner, I noticed the yoga and wellness space being increasingly filled with Q-adjacent conspiracism. This blend of personal experience prompted a desire to explore just how intertwined the New Age circles I now frequented, the evangelical circles I had grown up in, and the QAnon conspiracy theorists I researched came together.

This study seeks to braid those threads together and uncover in what ways the theological symbolism and intertextuality of QAnon shapes the gendered experiences amongst adherents. I chose to explore this question under the lens of feminist political theology, a theoretical framework which studies the social-order effects when secular political and religious realms are transposed. This particular theoretical framework, which draws on elements of political theory, religious studies, and gender studies, provides a fertile ground for analysis. This fills a current research gap through overlaying both religious and gender lenses which have largely been treated separately within existing studies of the QAnon phenomenon. It also allows for a deeper exploration of the underlying dynamics, motivations, and implications of the mythos shaped by Q.

This study will first identify five core politico-spiritual themes within the QAnon conspiracy/mythos. I will then analyse how these themes draw on existing forms of religion and spirituality, particularly American evangelicalism and New Age spirituality. Finally, I will explore the way that these connections reproduce and reshape conceptualizations of gender and sex within the QAnon conspiracy and impact adherent experiences.

The literature review will first provide a more in-depth overview of political theology, the QAnon conspiracy, its documented intersections with the religious frameworks being analysed, and the gendered aspects of each. Following the literature review, the methodological structure of the analysis will be explained. I will discuss the process of early coding and categorization and the selection of the final five themes of the QAnon mythology I chose to organise my analysis. These themes are justice and retribution, corruption and purification, good and evil, heroism and responsibility, and knowledge and belief. In the analysis section, each theme will be analysed separately, with its version in QAnon dissected and related to the other theological teachings it draws from. Where relevant, I incorporate the ways that this borrowing replicates or transforms gender ideals from the original religious teaching to its form in QAnon. After the analysis, the discussion section will provide a less granular overview of the findings and ground them in an

overarching assessment of meaning. The conclusion will summarise my findings, discuss the limitations of this paper, and offer suggestions for future researchers.

POSITIONALITY STATEMENT

In the spirit of reflexivity and transparency, I acknowledge the impact my own experiences and identities have on how I interact with the topics of this paper. As a white, queer, female ex-evangelical my interest in the subject of this research is undeniably personal. I was raised in the Southern Baptist tradition and held a position as a youth leader within the church before my departure, so I am very familiar with the teachings and structures within that discipline. Even after leaving the faith, I went on to attend a Methodist university for my bachelor's degree. Accordingly, this research does not seek to indict or pass judgement on the religious traditions it discusses, but instead to contextualise how certain strains of thought within them may provide openings for radicalization. I understand that as a white, educated American, I possess a privileged position in terms of resource access and endeavour to keep that in mind throughout my work. I acknowledge that the evangelical tradition, New Age spiritualism, and the QAnon communities are all dominated largely by white individuals and that the conclusions drawn from this overview of the topic may potentially be less applicable to racial minority groups within these categories.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The below review of literature will begin with an outline of the discipline of political theology which is the touchstone of this paper, followed by a summary of the QAnon conspiracy on which this paper centres. Next, a bird's-eye view of the literature on religion and conspiracism will be offered as a grounding point. Following this, the overlap between QAnon and evangelical theology will be outlined, including a separate section dedicated to the gendered impacts of this theology. The relationship between New Age spiritualism and QAnon will follow, with separate sections within each dedicated to their gender perspective which informs this analysis.

I. Political Theology

The lens of political theology may provide a useful method for analysing the complex relationships between the political and the religious in the modern era. Definitions of the concept vary, largely because it stands astride the delineation between two fields that largely prefer to stay separate: theology and politics, the former dealing mostly with God and the sacred and the latter focused on the ideal, rational construction of secular life. Political theologians with a point of departure in religious studies ground the concept as it relates to their faith: “political theology designates the field, the milieu, the environment, and the medium in which Christian theology should be articulated today,” (Moltmann, 1971: 8). It is not this conception of political theology that is of interest in this paper – at least, not entirely. Certainly, the social environment will be discussed, but of more importance than simply contextualising Christian theologizing is the alternative and increasingly common branch of political theology, as originating from political theorists rather than theologians. Perhaps the most cogent definition of this branch of study is “the secularization of monotheistic religious concepts for political theory and practice,” (Arato, 2013: 143). In this understanding, political theology consists of the sacralization of political concepts that are not inherently theological, assigning divine significance to elements of social or political life. Sometimes this may happen organically, to varying extents; often it is engineered through individual or institutional propaganda meant to appeal to the emotions and spirituality of its audience.

While Arato’s definition specifically identifies monotheism, the concept of ‘political theology’ actually has its earliest origins in polytheistic ancient times. Greek Stoic philosopher Panaetius offered a tripartite categorization of divine entities: *physikon* (natural forces), *politiken* (state religion), and *mythiken* (mythological creatures), a typology that was sublimated into Roman philosophy soon after (Moltmann, 1971). Marcus Varro, a Roman philosopher, mirrored this tripartite imagination in his *Divine Antiquities*, highlighting the ways in which *politiken* entities were used in the construction and maintenance of Roman national identity (Newman, 2018). For Varro, political religion represented a midpoint between the non-prescriptivism of mythic theology and the over-

prescriptivism of philosophy; it is able to motivate unified action without being overwhelming or convoluted (Fiorenza, 2012).

During the Enlightenment, a similar notion of political religion reappeared as ‘civil religion’ in Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s *The Social Contract*. Rousseau identifies several main pillars of effective civil religion: the existence of god and of an afterlife, rewards for good works and punishment for vice, and tolerance of diverse religious beliefs within the state (Fiorenza, 2012). However, Rousseau’s attempts to identify a specific religious base on which states ought to be built that evades either theocracy or moral bankruptcy is unsuccessful, leaving his work on civil religion to be prescriptivist but not in fact actionable. (Beiner, 1993).

Political theology had its modern renaissance in the work of German political theorist Carl Schmitt, who wrote that ‘all significant concepts of the modern theory of the state are secularized theological concepts,’ (Critchley, 2012). Schmitt argued that the rise of secularism and departure from traditionalism and religion in society at large prompted a pseudo-religious search for meaning through politics (Critchley, 2012). Scholars of political theology highlight the resurgence of religious themes and symbols in today’s modern, ostensibly ‘secular’ world. Saul Newman writes in his introduction to political theology:

Can we really say that we live in a secular world when terrorist attacks, inspired by fundamentalist interpretations of religion, occur with ever greater frequency....? To what extent can we say we have successfully and irreversibly separated church and state when, for instance, evangelical Christianity and other religiously conservative movements have such inordinate influence on electoral politics and government policy in the United States and other parts of the world? (2018: 9)

This echoes Marx’s sentiments about the transcendent nature of the state over civil society (Newman, 2018). Newman follows this line of thought in proposing that “religion, in its *absent presence* in modern societies, creates a space of transcendence in which new forms of power emerge and proliferate” by incorporating new narratives into the transcendent space (2018: 19). Feminist political theologians go a step further in critically analysing how

systems of oppression, including androcentrism and heteronormativity, are reproduced in the political arena through this transference (Pui-lan, 2013; Graham, 2013).

QAnon is particularly well-suited to study through the lens of political theology. It takes a fundamentally political and secular struggle over control of the machine of electoral politics and bureaucracy and transforms it into a battle of cosmic scale and immense moral importance. Simon Critchley writes,

Somehow we seem to have passed from a secular age, which we were ceaselessly told was post-metaphysical, to a new situation in which political action seems to flow directly from metaphysical conflict. This situation can be triangulated around the often-fatal entanglement of politics and religion, where the third vertex of the triangle is violence. Politics, religion, and violence appear to define the present through which we are all too precipitously moving, in which religiously justified violence is the means to a political end. (2012, pp. 8)

Current studies of QAnon tend to fall along distinctive fault lines, focusing on either the social media infrastructure that facilitates its spread, the religious symbology it exploits, or the ways that women's interactions with the conspiracy have differed from men's. Feminist political theology offers a perspective through which to unite these last two studies, providing a more holistic understanding of the gendered theologies that undergird the conspiracy and shape adherents' actions – and the threats they pose.

II. The QAnon Conspiracy

Describing the QAnon conspiracy is a task easier said than performed; it is what is known as a 'big tent' conspiracy theory, meaning that it welcomes a variety of smaller conspiratorial subsets beneath its overarching premise. It has variably been described as an alternate reality game (Davies, 2022), a conspiracy theory, a cult (Cohen, 2022), and a new religious movement (Argentino, 2020). Neo-Nazis and mommy bloggers, sovereign citizens and wellness influencers – all may find a home under the QAnon banner if presented with the right entry point. For the purposes of this paper, QAnon will be considered as a conspiracy theory that *draws on* religious impulses. The definition used for

this purpose combines several common traits of conspiracies: they claim that an elite group seeks to secretly influence society in ways that reflect their interests, and that these well-hidden plots can be uncovered through interpretation of 'evidence' that generally includes targeted suspicion of certain groups found unsavoury by believers (Piraino et. al, 2023).

The central, overarching premise of the QAnon conspiracy is a simple one: that there exists within existing hierarchies of power a shadowy, Satanic cabal of people who abuse children and orchestrate world events in order to protect themselves and serve their wicked interests. The proposed membership of the alleged cabal is flexible, of course, to suit the needs of evolving political and cultural situations, but figures who have been accused since the beginning include Hillary and Bill Clinton, Nancy Pelosi, George Soros, and the Rothschilds. Others allegedly involved include countless Democratic Party elected officials, left-leaning actors such as Tom Hanks, most of the national media, and most Republicans who are not supportive of Donald Trump, who plays a messianic role in this conspiracy. He is believed to be the person leading the fight against the cabal, which will ultimately culminate in 'The Storm' in which the wicked are publicly tried and executed (Carlson, 2021).

QAnon is named after its 'prophet' figure in Q, an anonymous Reddit user who claims to be a U.S. government official with 'Q' clearance working closely with then-President Trump. From their first post in October 2017 until now, Q has posted about 5,000 'drops,' cryptic posts of varying lengths that purportedly reveal the machinations of the cabal and those fighting it. Believers are encouraged to 'do [their] own research' to decipher these posts. After President Trump lost re-election, the posts from Q stopped for 18 months before resuming in June 2022 after the Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade*.

It is in part the simplicity of QAnon that makes it so contagious; conspiracy theories almost by default oblige one to accept the existence of shadowy concentrations of power pulling the strings from behind the scenes. The additional layer of Satanism and child abuse that QAnon adds comes on the heels of allegations of numerous incidents of sexual assault by beloved media figures over the preceding years, including Harvey Weinstein in 2017, Kevin Spacey in 2017, and Bill Cosby in 2014. Furthermore, depending on the circumstances of

exposure to the conspiracy, one may not realise that this premise is a fundamental aspect of it until they are already more heavily engaged in the community. The paedophilia angle of the conspiracy comes directly from its most proximate predecessor, the Pizzagate conspiracy, which went viral online in 2016 and accused Hillary Clinton campaign chair John Podesta of running a child trafficking ring out of the (non-existent) basement of a DC-area restaurant called Comet Ping-Pong (Jensen & Kane, 2021). The Pizzagate conspiracy thrust itself onto law enforcement radar after 28-year-old Edgar Welch entered the restaurant in December 2016 with an AR-style rifle and demanded the employees free the children he believed to be in the basement (Jensen & Kane, 2021). While shots were fired, the incident resulted in no injuries and Welch was taken into custody by law enforcement (Jensen & Kane, 2021).

In 2019, the Federal Bureau of Investigation declared QAnon, Pizzagate, and other “fringe political” conspiracies to be a threat to United States national security, claiming that these conspiracies legitimise violent political action. In the time since, numerous incidents of violent action by QAnon believers have taken place, ranging from domestic violence and kidnapping incidents to attempts to destabilise the national government. A 2021 study analysing 100 incidents of criminal action by QAnon believers found that the majority were interpersonal acts of violence within the family unit (Jensen & Kane, 2021). The authors highlighted that traditional counterterrorism measures are meant to address issues of national security rather than more familial issues, and advised a public-health-based approach to dealing with QAnon radicalization (Jensen & Kane, 2021). But plots of national security significance have also occurred, including plots to blow up essential infrastructure and kidnap or kill political leaders. Most infamous is the January 6 Capitol riot, in which many of those arrested and charged were believers in the conspiracy or even contributed to its spread (Jensen & Kane, 2021). Today, several members of Congress believe in QAnon, and an increasing number are running for local, state, and national offices. Within communities, QAnon believers have tried to disrupt and take over school boards and public services. There is also a coordinated effort to increase their participation in the electoral process as ballot counters or election monitors, providing an opportunity to intimidate voters or skew vote counts in their favour.

QAnon serves as a convergence point for previously disparate groups, enabling them to gain numbers and cross-pollinate with other belief systems. This follows a larger phenomenon of convergence in the American right overall, pulling more and more people further to the extremes of American conservatism. That being said, QAnon is not limited to recruiting people with conservative viewpoints; indeed, it has appealed to people across the political spectrum who are sceptical of existing institutions and power structures. Observers have noted that QAnon draws on religious languages and tropes (discussed at length below) as well as embracing a variety of other political orientations and conspiracy theories under its umbrella, rendering it both incredibly flexible and very contagious.

III. Religion and conspiracism

The role of religiosity in susceptibility to conspiracist beliefs can be difficult to identify. Non-religious individuals can and often do believe in one or more conspiracy theories, while religious individuals may not believe in any. A 2019 study in Australia found that mere identification with a religion was not a predictive factor for belief in conspiracy theories; instead, the *degree* of religiosity had a positive correlation with conspiratorial thinking, with trust in public institutions being a mitigating factor (Jasinskaja-Lahti & Jetten, 2019). While conspiracy theories and religion are not the same, there can be considerable overlap in their general belief structure, including belief in struggles between vast benevolent or malevolent forces, ideas of purification and salvation, and the existence of 'higher knowledge,' (Robertson, 2017).

Priniski et al. (2021) describe the good versus evil dichotomy that conspiracies are built around and argue that "in the context of belief formation, new beliefs also tend to generalize from or cohere with, features of prior beliefs," (1). This does not mean that religion is a prerequisite to conspiracy belief, as those 'prior beliefs' may be political, philosophical, or practical. However, it *does* mean that for a conspiracy theory to spread so virally as QAnon has, it must cohere with a wide swath of extant worldviews, and may indeed weaponize the language of various popular worldviews in order to secure more believers. The exploitation of evangelical symbology provides a familiar structure to those

raised in and around those faith communities, while the use of New Age spiritualist themes promotes a sense of independent revelation and control.

IV. QAnon and evangelicalism

Evangelicalism as a label is employed somewhat generously by the media and is often used where it is convenient rather than where it is *clear*. Different sects of evangelicalism, such as Southern Baptists, Pentecostals, and Methodists, have additional and highly distinctive beliefs from each other. And while evangelicalism is highly associated with the American right wing and is overwhelmingly conservative, there do exist some more liberal strains of evangelicalism, though they are few and far between. Defining evangelicalism from an outside perspective can be difficult, so the basic defining beliefs will be drawn here directly from the National Association of Evangelicals. They highlight 4 central beliefs of evangelical theology: the Bible as the ultimate authority, the ‘born again’ experience of believers, the conversion of others (evangelising), and the essential sacrifice of Jesus Christ’s death on the cross to make human salvation possible (“What is an evangelical?” 2023). Beyond these basic tenets, the beliefs of evangelicals can vary widely. There is no central authority within evangelicalism for standardising scriptural interpretation and adherent beliefs, and even organised subsets of the faith such as the Southern Baptist Convention, the largest denomination, tend to provide considerable leeway for individual congregations to shape their own understandings of doctrine.

Evangelical Christianity has been chosen as the first religious category for this study because white evangelicals make up the largest religious category of QAnon believers at 20% (Public Religion Research Institute, 2022). About a quarter of Americans overall identify as evangelical, making it the largest religious group in the United States (Pew Research Center 2015). Furthermore, 43% of QAnon believers are Republican (Public Religion Research Institute, 2022), and the so-called ‘Christian Right,’ composed mostly of evangelical Protestants, plays an outsized role in the platform and politics of the Republican Party (Conger 2010). Surveys suggest that white evangelical Republicans are *much* more likely to believe in conspiracy theories than the rest of their Republican peers; for example, 74% of white evangelicals are likely to believe the conspiracy that widespread

voter fraud kept Trump out of the White House in 2020, while only 54% of other Republicans profess the same (Cox, 2021). The percentage who believe in the sex trafficking theory of QAnon is 31% of white evangelicals and 25% of other Republicans (Cox, 2021). Accordingly, analysing the specific appeal that QAnon has for evangelicals is of interest in understanding how the conspiracy draws on, replicates, and influences existing belief structures.

The evangelical emphasis on the Bible is an outgrowth of a broader belief that an individual's relationship and understanding of God should not be derived wholly from the teachings of a priest or pastor. Instead, individual reading, interpretation, and even memorization of the Bible are encouraged within evangelical sects. Sunday services within evangelical churches often consist of readings of various verses or stories followed by group interpretation and discussion. This process of first individual and then group reading and interpretation practice is mirrored in how the meaning of Q drops is constructed and interpreted within QAnon's online communities (Mendoza III, 2021).

Eschatological beliefs of American evangelicals tend to follow a generally literalist interpretation of the Bible. Considerable focus is dedicated to the reading and interpretation of the Book of Revelations, which describes the end times including warning signs, key figures, battles, and the ultimate coming of the Kingdom of Heaven. It is not uncommon within evangelical churches, particularly those of more charismatic or fundamentalist leanings, to hear pastors and church leaders try to fit current events into the framework of the end times predictions. This tradition, too, carries over to the beliefs of QAnon conspiracists. Mendoza III (2021) ties the QAnon conspiracy to the end-times beliefs of American evangelicals. He writes, "...the battle over politics is then reframed into a battle of morals, parallel to a common Evangelical understanding of the rapture, which includes the battle over all existence found within the Book of Revelations, or sometimes as an echo to the flood story found in the Book of Genesis; that is, an ultimatum between absolute Good and absolute Evil," (Mendoza III, 2021: 7). Some of the popular conspiratorial threads that have been sublimated beneath the QAnon umbrella explicitly involve translating current events to Revelations prophecies. Both the rollout of 5G

technology and the COVID-19 vaccine have been accused by conspiracists of spreading ‘the Mark of the Beast’ described in Revelation 13 (Inwood & Zappavigna, 2022). The Mark symbolises allegiance to the Beast from the Sea described in Revelations; this beast is more colloquially referred to as The Antichrist. Accusations of new technologies being the Mark have been a regular fixture on the fundamentalist right for decades; similar panics have been sparked by bar codes, RFID chips, and cryptocurrency (Merlan, 2019).

Carlson (2021) provides an in-depth analysis of Q drops and identifies sublimations of evangelical theology in the QAnon worldview, terming its perversion as ‘Parasitic Christianity.’ He specifically identifies four areas in which Christian figures are replaced by conspiratorial figures and events: the Saviour, the Adversary, the Saints, and the Rapture (Carlson, 2021). Carlson describes how the process of coming to believe in QAnon (being ‘red-pilled’) mirrors the process of conversion within the evangelical faith, in which one renounces their old worldview and is called on to proselytise to others. Within the context of the QAnon conspiracy, Donald Trump and Q become akin to the Messiah and the Holy Spirit, respectively; one a saviour, one stirring believers to action (Carlson, 2021). The Adversary, of course, is represented in every alleged member of the evil cabal, whose abuse of children is explicitly stated to be Satanic in nature (Carlson, 2021). Even the long-term predictions of QAnon, the Great Awakening, and the Storm, mirror the final events of Revelations where the world will first be prepared and sanctified after suffering, and evil will be obliterated to create paradise on Earth and glory for believers (Carlson, 2021).

V. Evangelicalism and gender

Due to its style of Biblical interpretation, evangelicalism tends to reproduce traditionalist-style conceptions of family, marriage, gender roles, and sexuality. It is important to emphasise as mentioned elsewhere above that the beliefs described below do not and cannot describe those of *all* individual believers and congregations, but instead provide a broad overview of the dominant strains of thought.

Looking first at the largest group of evangelicals, the Baptists, an assessment of church teachings on family and gender is made fairly simple. The current edition of the ‘Baptist

Faith and Message,' which serves as the overarching doctrinal guidance for all Baptist congregations, has a specific section dedicated to beliefs surrounding the family. It explicitly defines marriage as between one man and one woman, precluding homosexuality or polygamous relationships from acceptance by the church ("Baptist Faith and Message," 2000). Homosexuality is described as "sexual immorality" alongside adultery and pornography ("Baptist Faith and Message," 2000). In terms of gender roles within a married couple, the Baptist Faith and Message obliges the husband to "provide for, to protect, and to lead his family," (2000). This places the male partner in a position of power and authority over his wife and children. Meanwhile, the wife is expected to "submit herself graciously.... To respect her husband and to serve as his helper in managing the household and nurturing the next generation," ("Baptist Faith and Message," 2000). A woman's purview is explicitly limited to the household itself, and women within the Baptist faith are ideally meant to serve as homemakers and stay-at-home mothers. In the commentary attached to this section, it is claimed that this position does not suggest inferiority; instead, the husband and wife represent different aspects of God, which are complementary (Jordan et. al, 2000). Elsewhere in the document, life is defined as beginning from the moment of conception, making abortion unacceptable within the Baptist faith ("Baptist Faith and Message," 2000). The document also says that God created humans male and female; transgender or nonbinary individuals are not considered as being part of God's design for humanity ("Baptist Faith and Message," 2000). Within the Church structure, only men are permitted to serve as pastors ("Baptist Faith and Message," 2000).

Pentecostals, another large share of the evangelical denomination, have separate and rather more diffuse leadership than Baptists. The largest association of Pentecostals in the United States, the Assemblies of God, counts over 12,000 congregations amongst its membership, together accounting for over 3 million believers ("The Assemblies of God," 2023). The General Presbytery of the Assemblies of God writes position papers to clarify various doctrinal issues, and it is from those documents that the following information is drawn. In its 2014 position paper on "Homosexuality, Marriage, and Sexual Identity," the Council affirms that marriage is between one man and one woman, that homosexuality is a sin, and that identifying as transgender or nonbinary contradicts God's image for mankind

(The General Presbytery, 2014). However, the Council also argues that homosexual and transgender people should be treated with grace and hospitality rather than scorn by believers and explicitly argues for compassion and kindness to those communities rather than alienation and criticism (The General Presbytery, 2017). Contrary to Baptist doctrine, Pentecostals embrace women in spiritual leadership roles within the Church (General Presbytery, 2010). Pentecostalism encourages modesty and high levels of self-control and servitude among believers of all genders (Martin, 2008). Believers are forbidden from drinking, smoking, gambling, and sexual promiscuity (Martin, 2008). However, the literalist interpretation of Scripture inherent to evangelicalism continues to encourage the submission of women to their husbands (Martin, 2008).

The Methodist denomination is the most progressive of the three when it comes to matters of gender and family. The United Methodist Church [UMC], which is the largest Methodist association in the United States, concurs with Baptists and Pentecostals that homosexuality is counter to God's plan and that marriage is only between one man and one woman (*The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church*, 2016). However, it diverges in stating that the role of husband and wife should not be as servants and leaders but as partners (*The Book of Discipline*, 2016, pp. 111). The Church writes that [emphasis added],

We reject social norms that assume different standards for women than for men in marriage.... [and] especially reject the idea that God made individuals as incomplete fragments, made whole only in union with another. **We call upon women and men alike to share power and control**, to learn to give freely and to receive freely, to be complete and to respect the wholeness of others. (*The Book of Discipline*, 2016, pp. 111)

The UMC allows and encourages women to participate in church leadership, and does not bar women from holding any roles in the clergy (*The Book of Discipline*, 2016, pp. 23). The Church agrees with other evangelicals that life begins at conception and discourages abortion in most cases (*The Book of Discipline*, 2016, pp. 114). However, it is sympathetic to the diverse array of circumstances that may make abortion the best choice for an individual woman (*The Book of Discipline*, 2016, pp. 115). UMC encourages women who are

considering abortion to pray heavily and consult with their pastoral leadership and encourages empathy and understanding to those who have had an abortion, even offering counselling services to those who need them following an abortion (*The Book of Discipline*, 2016 pp. 115-6). Furthermore, while Methodists do promote sex only within marriage, they acknowledge that it frequently occurs outside of committed partnerships and promote access to and use of contraception (*The Book of Discipline*, 2016, pp. 115).

Sociologist Sally Gallagher argues that the discourses and *symbolism* of female submission are a “distinguishing mark of evangelical identity” even in churches that allow more equal roles in practice (Maddox, 2013). In a 2013 study of the Hillsong church, a large evangelical congregation in Australia that paints itself as empowering to women, the author concludes that “the pressure to be—and, even more, to look—perfect, while living out complex interplays of submission, autonomy, and authority, gives a theological gloss to many women’s everyday experience,” (Maddox, 2013). This mirrors the findings of existing literature on the ways in which conservatism in general appeals to women. Existing research suggests that the right attracts female followers through an embrace of supposedly-empowering maternity and a sublimation of their rage at existing structures of sexual violence (Bracewell, 2021). Bracewell posits that QAnon is particularly appealing to women because its basis is in fear of sexual exploitation. She builds on Dworkin (1983), who argued in *Right Wing Women* that engagement with the patriarchal structures of the right serves as an almost protective mechanism for women, providing some measure of stability and security in their place in society while offering opportunities to direct their rage at oppression toward whatever enemy the right is currently focused on. ‘Every accommodation that women make to [male] domination, however apparently stupid, self-serving, or dangerous, is rooted in the urgent need to survive somehow on male terms,’ (Dworkin, 1983: 34).

The phenomenon of ‘Pastel QAnon,’ as coined by Marc-Andre Argentino (2021), describes the way in which QAnon boomed on social media circles during the early stages of the pandemic thanks in large part to pastel-coloured, social-media-optimised posts within mother-support circles expressing concern about child trafficking. QAnon’s central premise

preys on a vulnerability that is close to the heart of women, especially those who are told that their primary role is to rear and protect their children. At the same time, QAnon appeals to men, argues sociologist Cliff Leek, through appealing to “the mythopoetic aspect of the men’s movement [which] is very much rooted in patriarchal notions of chivalry and men as protectors and warriors. Evangelical masculinity is basically identical,” (Meltzer, 2021).

VI. QAnon and New Age Spirituality

New Age spiritualism can be described as “a blend of cross-cultural spiritualism and a new awareness of Eastern philosophy and ascetic practices that sought to provide a mantle that emphasized progressive change and the possibility of deep personal transformation,” (Peters, 2022, pp. 1). The movement can be traced back to roots in esoteric early Christianity, but in centuries since has come to be perceived as a framework of understanding the universe that can be overlaid atop any religious beliefs—or lack thereof (Peters, 2022). A PEW study in 2017 found that over a quarter of Americans identify themselves as ‘spiritual but not religious,’ (Lipka & Gecewicz, 2017). While New Age spiritualism started out as a distinctly progressive movement when it became popular in the 1960s and 70s, it has since revealed itself to be far more malleable to varying political stances. Peters writes, “In the years following especially those of the Trump administration much of the progressive elements of New Age had been stripped on its [sic] critical components to expose a malleable and vulnerable core of beliefs that could be recruited for any cause and even forms of violence,” (Peters, 2022, pp. 1). Academics and members of the New Age community have flagged with concern an ideological drift toward the far-right and conspiracism, particularly in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. But the community’s vulnerability to conspiracism was highlighted in an academic paper well before the pandemic in 2011, when a pair of researchers coined the term ‘conspirituality,’ defined as a ‘politico-spiritual philosophy’ centred around the idea that a shadowy group is pulling the strings of the world order and that the human race is in an awakening process that will overthrow these malicious groups (Ward and Voas, 2011).

New Age spiritualism is a highly individualistic philosophy. New Agers believe that personal experience can trigger revelatory knowledge about the self and about the universe and that this knowledge can bring about a sort of individual spiritual ascendancy and even godliness (Peters, 2022). “Intuition is the hinge-point of New Age epistemology; it’s the ‘do your own research’ mode,” (Remski, 2023). For believers, intuition and experience become more valuable than propositional, ‘scientific’ forms of knowledge and learning. In QAnon, ‘knowledge’ is shaped by independent research and intuitions regarding what sources can be trusted and not trusted. Independence is lauded, and the phrase ‘do your own research’ is used frequently in posts by proselytising believers. Each individual can come to their own set of beliefs beneath the QAnon umbrella based on what coheres with their own worldviews at the time without being fundamentally in conflict with their peers and without alienation from the communities in which they organise.

Modern iterations of New Age spiritualism spread by gurus and social media influencers alike posit that not only can one understand the reality of the world through internal examination, but that *internal thoughts* can actually *shape the external world*. In 2006, this notion was put forward in Rhonda Byrnes’ best-selling book *The Secret*, as the ‘law of attraction.’ Today, it has taken on a new name on social media: ‘manifestation.’ The manifestation tag on TikTok currently has over 35 billion views, with videos ranging from how to ‘manifest’ school success to getting the partner of your dreams and becoming wealthy—all through the power of repeating certain thoughts and goals like a mantra (Pitcher, 2022) . This reflects the hyper-self-responsibility, ‘bootstrap’ mentality commonly seen on the right to blame individuals for all manner of social, physical, and mental ills. According to manifestation, you alone are responsible for your current circumstances: you simply don’t want to change them enough.

New Age spiritualism also encourages and lauds various somatic activities as ways of encouraging holistic wellness (Peters, 2022). This popularly includes such practices as yoga (often in colonised forms), massage therapy and chiropractors, acupuncture, and a wide swath of dietary adjustments and supplementation (Peters, 2022). However, many of these practices bear conservative and even fascist undertones that may not be apparent to

practitioners. Much of the modern yoga movement, for example, is grounded in the Hindutva fascist movement amongst Hindu Indians (Udupa & Naik, 2023). Many yoga studios abroad that promote ‘authentic’ yoga practice are in fact tied to the Hindutva movement and attempts by nationalists to rewrite the history of yogic practice to eliminate the diverse influences of other South Asian religious groups and philosophies (Udupa & Naik, 2023). Many of the forms of holistic treatment marketed today by New Agers and naturopaths involve reductive and misleading accounts of the source of those practices—if not outright lies—in order to appeal to a mostly-white consumer base. Furthermore, the emphasis on somatic practice in wellness communities and the desire to promote bodily purity mirrors fascist movements across history which tie state health to individual health and the individual body to morality. In a movement that promotes thought as world-changing, illness is not merely a physical failure but a spiritual one.

Peters (2022) discusses how far-right groups have long used mystic symbols, like those from Norse paganism, within their corpus of symbols, and highlights the overlap between New Agers and anti-vax and anti-state movements globally based on notions of radical individualism. Numerous journalists and scholars have flagged QAnon and adjacent beliefs within the wellness and spiritualist circles, particularly on Instagram (Aubrey, 2020; Guerin, 2021; Crockford, 2022; Heřmanová, 2022). These beliefs weave in and out of the more traditionally Christian-oriented fabric of QAnon—rather than Trump as a Messianic figure fighting a Satanic cabal, for example, spiritualists might frame him as a ‘light worker’ fighting off more nebulous forces of darkness. The symbology remains similar, no matter the theological orientation one enters from.

VII. New Age Spirituality and gender

Gender is not simply a lens of evaluating the New Age movement; it is in fact a “constitutive [dimension]” of it and integral to the construction of its cosmology (Maluf, 2015). At the same time as it was taking off in the 1960s and 1970s, feminism was also reshaping society, and feminist critiques found their way quite organically into New Age beliefs (Maluf, 2015).

The countercultural and feminist ideal in the New Age movements is present in various ways, even contradictory ones: the criticism of Western rationalism and the valorization of emotion and intuition; the ritualization of daily life; the valorization of individual choices; the centrality of corporal experience; the valorization of life in community, in detriment to the nuclear family; as well as others. (Maluf, 2015, pp. 2)

The New Age movement embraces emotion over logic and promotes the seeking of harmony with others and within one's domestic environment, elevating the traditionally feminine above the 'masculine' logic and independence (Maluf, 2015). Women consistently represent the majority of New Agers in the United States, which scholars believe is in part because the feminine-coded belief structures of the New Age movement would oblige men to give up many behaviours that cohere with hegemonic masculinity, likely costing them social capital with other men (Trzebiatowska & Bruce, 2013). But while there may be a more structural basis for the dominance of masculinity in organised religion such as evangelicalism, there *is* a strain of gender essentialism within the New Age movement, even despite its feminist roots, that encourages the continued gender stereotyping that feminists themselves raged against. Instead of dismissing feminine interests, it seeks to uplift them – but rarely denies that they *are* fundamentally feminine rather than merely human. Nowhere is this essentialism starker than in current narratives about 'the divine feminine' and 'the divine masculine' popular in modern New Age communities and booming on social media.

The 'divine feminine' is described with various traits, including yielding control, nurturing, passiveness, receptivity, intuitiveness, and emotionality (Pitcher, 2022). The 'divine masculine' is seen as assertive, dominant, giving, self-confident, and disciplined (Pitcher, 2022). If it seems like this is merely a repackaging of traditional gender roles, it is: while New Agers will argue that each person has the divine masculine and the divine feminine within themselves, nearly all advice is geared toward embracing the aspect that aligns with one's physical sex (Pitcher, 2022). In many circles where this phraseology is being utilised, one can find it used interchangeably with terminology common in far-right communities, describing individuals as 'wounded' or as high or low value depending on how closely they

adhere to the role assigned by their biology (Pitcher, 2022). Mythopoetic men's groups that seek to help men reclaim their access to their divine masculinity present an image of masculinity that is distinctly familiar and distinctly separate from women (Meltzer, 2021). This concept, rather than encouraging individuals to embrace duality, instead encourages an acceptance of the roles society already imposes but on the premise of some sort of sacralised self-communion and fulfilment. Despite New Age ideology being rooted in feminist thought at its inception, it is easily corrupted to mirror the very traditionalist gender ideology that it sought to escape and which has been observed already in evangelical movements.

METHODOLOGY

This research will apply qualitative methods of research to the so-called 'canon' of Q drops, which consists of roughly 5,000 posts beginning in October 2017. Posts after December 2022 will not be included to allow for a cut-off of data collection for the purposes of this thesis. The analysis will be limited to the posts attributed to Q and will not include the extensive discourse to be found in the comments below them and in other communities online. While those discourses are valuable mines for research, delving into them would be beyond the scope allowed by this paper and would be more suitable for doctoral research. And while other influencers began to take on more significance during Q's long hiatus from the end of 2020 to June 2022, it is Q's posts and ideas that continue to undergird much of the political conspiracy landscape and spin-off groups that have cropped up in that time period. As the touchstone of much of the conspiratorial discourse, dissection of Q's posts can provide valuable insights across subjects that analysis of other figures within the conspiracy could not.

Additionally, the ethics of this sort of research dictates some degree of protection for the authors of the content being studied; at this time, Q is still anonymous after considerable investigation by numerous individuals and agencies, but influencers and commenters on his posts may be more easily traced. Being that Q's identity is still unknown, or indeed if Q is even a singular person or collective of people who share the online mantle, I have chosen to use 'they/them' in order to refer to Q where necessary.

As this research required manual coding and analysis, I was unable to analyse all 5,000 posts within the Q-Anon canon. I did have all of them available through the archive utilised, **dchan.qorigins.com** which was created by researchers and contains all Q-drops and the commentary around them scraped from Reddit, 4chan, and 8chan. While quantitative analysis requires researchers to ensure their samples are ‘statistically significant,’ qualitative analysis has different goals and therefore does not oblige a specific number or percentage of samples. Instead, qualitative research and thematic analysis need enough data to identify recurrent symbols and themes and situate them in context, an amount which can vary depending on the text being used.

I read and analysed the first 200 Q-drops which formed the initial basis of the conspiracy in order to establish my initial ‘codes,’ labelling specific symbols and themes which were reiterated numerous times across the posts. The following list of codes was compiled:

- Prosecution
- Justice
- Unrest
- Power
- Control
- Scandal
- Corruption
- Money
- Truth
- Influence
- Family/Kids
- Narrative
- Purification
- Patriotism
- Evil/Dirtiness
- Heroism

Separately, during this period, I also noted key quotes that established the early structure of the conspiracy and highlighted when Bible verses or other religious references were made explicitly in these early posts for later reference. I also noted the first incident in which Q referred to themselves and their purported clearance in drop 48, and highlighted those posts that made mention of various political figures by name or code word.

Once preliminary codes were established, I skipped through about every 50 posts, skimming for long-form drops (many are merely a line or two) with enough text to analyse. With my knowledge of the American political context, I paid particular attention to posts

issued close to the tail end of the 2020 Presidential campaigns and that election, after which Q took his hiatus. I also paid particular attention to the posts immediately after his re-emergence in June 2022. Throughout these readings, I tallied the frequency of previously identified codes and added new ones as they became relevant. Once the readings were complete, I grouped the codes and distilled them into broad themes for analysis, resulting in the following categories:

1. Justice and Retribution
2. Corruption and Purification
3. Good and Evil
4. Heroism and Responsibility
5. Knowledge and Belief

In the political theological spirit of blending analysis of the secular and the religious, this paper will deploy a hermeneutical approach. Hermeneutics, first employed in the discipline of religious studies to analyse texts like the Bible and the Torah, “attempt[s] to explain social and political life in terms of the language and complex meaning of that political action for social and political actors,” (Gibbons, 2006). Accordingly, this analysis considers the language of the Q-drop texts within the broader context of American political and religious life to situate its meaning(s) to both the author and readers.

ANALYSIS

I. JUSTICE AND RETRIBUTION

Justice, in both the structural legal and cosmic senses, is a frequent touchstone of the QAnon conspiracy. The earliest set of posts from Q in 2017 centre on the alleged (and untrue) detainment of Hillary Clinton pending federal charges. Matters of legal justice and criticisms of figures within the justice system occur frequently and are explored first below, including an analysis of the criticisms Q levies against Ruth Bader Ginsburg in particular for her gender-related court rulings. Following this will be explored the perhaps more interesting ideas of cosmic justice portrayed in the QAnon mythology. Q draws on

scripture, on evangelical teachings about the wrath of god, and on spiritualist ideas about karma to craft their vision of the Storm.

Throughout the years, the several investigations of Donald Trump are portrayed as a corruption of the justice system while at the same time, Q touts other cases in progress or alleges that enemies of the state are facing impending prosecution. The conspiracy does not seem to struggle with the tension between, on the one hand, a corrupt justice system when it targets some, and on the other hand, a perfectly functional system directed at the so-called 'deep state' actors. Rather than undermine the theory, this tension is actually essential; the primary struggle Q outlines is between two separate factions of the government, one composed of Satan-worshippers and their enablers and the other led by Donald Trump to triumph over them. This struggle provides cover for why certain investigations can be called corrupt while others can be noble patriots doing their duty. At several points over the years, including drops 4, 6, and 1837, Q has alleged that they themselves or Donald Trump are under cyberattack by 'three-letter agencies' who, one must imagine, have little better to do with their time.

In drop 1928, Q outlines the first film of a metaphorical trilogy about the process of exposing and prosecuting their enemies:

MOVIE 1 [Full]: The 'START'

PLOT: How the intelligence apparatus, State Dept, and Dept of "JUSTICE" of the United States, in joint effort w/ our (x) primary foreign allies + other covert assets, as directed by HUSSEIN [WH] in coordination w/ HRC, colluded and conspired to RIG THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION OF 2016 in an effort to install HRC, frame POTUS (PROJECTION!), create emergency contingencies re: installation of SAFEGUARDS and FIREWALLS to PREVENT EXPOSURE OR CONTINUATION OF PRESIDENCY SHOULD COUNTER FAIL TO ENSURE OPERATORS, ACTORS, AGENTS OF POWER, PAST & PRESENT, REMAIN IN CONTROL, AND USE SOURCES/COVERT ASSETS OF THE FAKE NEWS MEDIA TO CARRY OUT X-FRAME BARRAGE OF STRATEGIC COORDINATED [GUIDED] ATTACKS DESIGNED TO DIVIDE, COVER/SHELTER, JUSTIFY IMPEACHMENT/REMOVAL IN EFFORT TO REGAIN CONTROL AND PREVENT PUBLIC AWARENESS OF ILLEGAL, CRIMINAL, TREASONOUS ACTS [MOVIES 1-3 FULL LIST].

While the post is poorly structured, we can parse the meaning section by section. Q alleges first that the United States' intelligence services, Department of State, and Department of Justice have been silently working behind the scenes with foreign allies and spies. This, itself, is feasible. But Q goes on to say that this was directed by a coordination between Hillary Clinton (HRC) and 'HUSSEIN,' which Q frequently uses to refer to President Barack Obama, presumably because using his middle name plays on existing hatred for ex-Iraqi politician Saddam Hussein. The 'POTUS' referred to in the above post is, of course, Donald Trump. The goal of this coordinated effort, according to Q, is to frame Trump to gain support for his removal from office, and to maintain their influence in the government and news media so they can continue to cover up their activities. The activities in question, while not specifically outlined in this drop, are of course the child sexual abuse claims and treasonous coordination with foreign governments.

These efforts extend even to those who are intended to be the legal arbiters of justice in the United States, if Q is to be believed. Amongst the attacks levelled against various judges and lawyers, a lengthy post dedicated in its entirety to Ruth Bader Ginsburg is worth examination. In drop 2653, Q posits that she was appointed for nefarious reasons and then goes on to run through a laundry list of opinions Justice Ginsburg gave over the years that are apparently evidence. All of these opinions are related to gender relations. Q flags her advocacy for gender-integrated prisons, Scouts organisations, and fraternities/sororities; her questioning of whether Father's and Mother's Day should be separate holidays; her suggestion that anti-polygamy and anti-prostitution laws may be unconstitutional; her belief that women should not be singularly exempt from the draft; and suggestions that laws should be written with gender inclusive language rather than in the default masculine.

The focus on the gender-oriented topics Ginsburg spoke about hints at the fundamental gender essentialism that rarely peeks through in Q's writings. If these are the matters Q specifically highlights to take issue with, then one can presume that Q believes in 'traditional' marriage and chaste women, that women and men's organisations should be kept separate, that men are somehow more ethical to conscript to war, and that language that centres men as the default is of no issue. While the post is meant to reveal something

hidden about Ginsburg – through references to a book *she herself* wrote – Q in fact tips their own hand as to their beliefs about the nature of men’s and women’s’ roles in society, one that is reflected in the gender essentialism and role assignments of the theologies they draw on. To Q, Ginsburg’s support for the transgression not only of gender boundaries is a reflection of greater transgressions of justice itself she must have been willing to participate in during her time on the Supreme Court.

The concept of justice, however, is not limited merely to *legal* justice. The traditional anthropomorphized figure of Justice portrays a woman with scales in one hand and a sword in the other. One side of the scale weighs the action, obliging Justice to mete out consequences of appropriate weight in turn to maintain cosmic order. The concept of justice does not, then, require merely the *exposure* of wrongdoing, but some sort of active consequence for it. Ideas of what this includes may be characterised as falling generally along two lines of thought: that of retributive justice and that of restorative justice. Retributive justice is focused on the infliction of punishment upon the perpetrator; restorative justice seeks to make whole the victim insofar as possible. It is entirely the former that interests Q and their followers. The victims of abuse alleged by the conspiracy are mere props; little focus is given to the mass medical and psychiatric treatment that would be required if the premises of the conspiracy were true or to reparations for the aggrieved. Such banal matters lack the motivating zeal that comes with punishing wrongdoers.

Instead, Q promises apocalyptic, fire-and-brimstone retribution against their enemies. Early in the conspiracy, drops 34 and 35 from November 2017 warn readers that over the coming days, the United States is going to descend into chaos as arrests are made, the Emergency Broadcast System begins broadcasting 24/7, and riots in the streets are met with domestic military deployment. “Organizations and/or people that wish to do us harm during this time will be met with swift fury – certain laws have been pre-lifted to provide our great military the necessary authority to handle and conduct these operations (at home and abroad),” it finishes, with the implication that the military will have leave to mete out extrajudicial punishment and executions. Q assures readers that those who do not fight will

be safe, and finishes the posts with a quote from John 3:16. In drop 43, Q emphasises that “resistance will be dealt with swiftly.... Any military seen is for your protection as well as to demonstrate our resolve.” While of course none of this did, in fact, happen in November 2017 or any time since then, this early post forms the early basis for how Anons conceive of the coming ‘Storm’ in which the cabal will be eradicated. The protection of patriots, broadcasting of the emergency signals, and domestic activation of the military in some ways mirrors elements of the Book of Revelations, which has long been of particular interest to evangelical sects in the United States. It calls to mind the sparing of believers from the end-time plagues and disasters, the trumpeting that is said to accompany them, and the release of the Horsemen and the Angels of Euphrates. This is supplemented by a post just a short while later, when drop 42 alludes to the coming “JUDGEMENT DAY.”

Drop 1434 claims that the “Flood is coming,” an apparent allusion to the Biblical flood that wiped out nearly all of humanity for their sins. “THERE IS NO ESCAPE. THERE ARE NO DEALS,” writes Q in drop 520, “..THE HUNT CONTINUES. PRISON. DEATH.” This is a succinct summary of the end goal; hunting down every enemy and trapping them pending righteous execution. In drop 2344, Q asks the Anons, “Are you ready to see arrests? Are you ready to see PAIN? Are you ready to be part of history?” Not only is death in the cards, then, but torture and suffering to balance the scales of the suffering Q claims that his enemies have imposed on countless children and fellow ‘patriots.’ “No escape. No deals,” also shows up in several later drops (786, 2568), a rallying mantra to assure believers that punishment *is* coming, if only they are patient. Drop 790 claims that “THE DAY OF RECKONING IS UPON US,” in February 2018 – Anons are, of course, still waiting.

Alongside frequent allusions to the Bible, a corrupted version of the concept of karma shows up often amongst Anons. Karma has, through the rise of New Age spiritualism and various Eastern practices being repackaged for Western audiences, become a colloquial term far removed from its origins. The traditional Buddhist and Hindu conception of karma refers to the way in which your actions in one life dictate the circumstances of your reincarnation into your next life; or if you are lucky, your escape from the cycle of reincarnation forever (Jackson, 2022). Someone who lives a highly ethical life will likely be

incarnated as wealthy, healthy, and powerful in their next, while someone who lives an unethical life will be reincarnated into poverty, infirmity, and low social status (Jackson, 2022). This understanding of karma in some ways defends the oppressive caste structure of India at the time, positing that those in charge had earned their status *pre-birth* through their good works.

The New Age version of karma is not wholly dissimilar, but rather than karma consisting of an accumulation of one's actions over a lifetime and paying off in the next, karma is viewed as something that has immediate ripple effects. Cutting off someone in traffic could be the reason you get passed over for your raise; bigger ethical transgressions could be the cause of emergent health issues, for example. This understanding of karma is not based on the teachings of the Buddha but on a more Western, capitalistic understanding of success – those in power and wealth earned it through their actions in *this* life, and anyone else could do the same if only they were motivated to pull themselves up by the bootstraps. It bears great similarity to the evangelical 'prosperity gospel' that teaches that illness and misfortune can be overcome through acts of faith and prayer – and that those who continue to suffer simply have not been faithful enough.

However, if one subscribes to this worldview, one would expect those in positions of power to display profound ethics in their personal life in *this* life; how, then, can one reconcile the corruption and flagrantly grey ethics of various political and industrial leaders with their rise and hold on power? QAnon provides a comforting explanation: that they have made devilish deals with nefarious forces to get to where they are, but that karmic justice *is* coming – it just hasn't become public yet. Not only that, but each Anon's *belief* in the coming Storm brings its realisation closer by the day – only when a big enough portion of the society believes, after all, will the Storm be seen as justice rather than political overreach and be accepted by the American public (drops 35, 4008).

II. CORRUPTION AND PURIFICATION

The writings of Q also play on themes of corruption and purification in a way that mirrors biblical ideas of sin and sanctification and spiritualist ideas of cleansing. Q's rhetoric

surrounding the cabal evolves over time to suggest varying levels of ethical corruption. While traditional forms of political corruption, such as bribery and blackmail, are referenced repeatedly, the 'levels' of corruption here refer to corruption in the sense not of dishonesty and fraud but of debasement and decay. Over years of posting, while the criminal allegations remain more or less the same having started out so extreme, the rhetoric regarding the nature of the impact the cabal is having on the state evolves to suggest ever-increasing levels of threat to the sanctity and stability of the United States. What starts as a suggestion of 'dirtiness' in the institutions of government becomes a dire warning of an insidious 'disease' where survival is dependent on eradication. This evolution is outlined below, followed by an exploration of how Q's references to the various women identified by name in their posts reflects the notions of purity and corruption as related to femininity in both the evangelical faith and in New Age spiritualist teachings.

In drop 15, Q claims that they and their compatriots are part of a 'deep cleaning' that will remove the cabal from their places of power and cleanse American politics of their influence. According to Q, the American political system can only be fixed through use of the military, since all other structures are "[too] corrupt and dirty," (Drop 36). These statements paint the cabal and their sympathisers as mere filth to be scrubbed from existence. In drop 1916, Q calls upon their followers to act, saying that the "PEOPLE must unite to clean out these old institutions." This places some of the responsibility for purification at the feet of the reader, encouraging them to accept a role of active participation rather than mere observation and rhetorical deconstruction in the safety of online spaces. In evangelical Christianity, it is the chief responsibility of the believer to spread the word of God and thereby contribute to the spiritual purification of a world corrupted by sin; this call to action from Q is of familiar substance and character. To the New Ager, for whom environmental, bodily, and spiritual purity are closely tied, the obligation to excise what is contaminated or unclean is part and parcel of spiritual awakening. For the politically-motivated believer, efforts to purify the institutions around them are of little greater demand than the rituals that one performs upon themselves in the interests of higher consciousness and greater attunement to the rhythms of the universe.

In drop 31, Q says that “Trump and others are working to... purify our govt...,” suggesting that not only is this a consideration of the President but a primary *goal*. Suggesting such import to the task in the mind of Donald Trump elevates his role from mere tool or participant to a crusader – perhaps even a saviour, which Q goes on to explicitly term him in drop 111. While the implications of elevating Trump to a Messianic figure will be discussed at greater length in the following section, it is important to note that casting him in such a role fundamentally alters the perception of any attacks on the ethics of his behaviour. In Matthew 10:1, Jesus blesses his disciples with the ability to cast out disease and ‘unclean spirits,’ so believing that others besides Christ himself can engage in such activity in God’s name is not fundamentally in conflict with Scripture. While believers who closely follow the word of God cannot *actually* supplant Christ with Trump without violating laws against false idolatry, the mere metaphorical connection or even elevation to a disciple or prophet-like status makes any accusations of corruption *by* Trump disallowable. After all, those acting in service of God’s mission have had their actions ordained – they cannot be questioned by human ethical standards, and *certainly* not by agents of the corrupted ‘deep state’ or their sympathisers.

It’s this very same role-casting that situates Trump in the role of a ‘light-worker’ for some New Agers. If thoughts can shape reality, the thinking goes, then some awakened people who are very good at thinking ‘high-level’ thoughts are able to shape the world in grander, more positive ways than others. To these believers, if Trump’s goal is seen as purifying the government, and he has himself ‘ascended’ to the highest office in the land despite many pundits thinking he was bound to lose the 2016 election through his force of will, then who is to say he cannot perform greater works? Of course, those who are awakened enough to have such power manifest in ways like that must have an abnormally high level of spiritual purity – and here again arises a situation wherein Trump’s actions cannot be questioned without undermining extant spiritual understandings. For those of a Christian or New Age persuasion both, this metaphorical positioning laid over time by Q crafts a situation where the works of one man are taken as ethically unassailable.

Returning to the matter of the cabal's portrayal as unclean, drop 2161 goes further, referring to members of the cabal as "rats running" from impending justice. Not only are they filth, then, but vermin; where filth simply passively *exists*, rats actively eat away at their environment and corrupt the materials they come in contact with. This rhetorical shift mirrors a frequent duality that Q wavers between: both assigning the cabal agency as Satanists actively seeking to undermine the righteous destiny of America while also deriding them repeatedly as idiots ("these people are stupid," appears at least two dozen times) and mere puppets. Rats bear a similar metaphorical tension; they are both dangerous, as when they carried the plague, and powerless, used in labs at the whims of human researchers. Historically speaking, minority groups, especially under ethnocidal or genocidal regimes, have been referred to as rats or vermin in similar terms in order to fuel societal desensitisation to their persecution. Referring to the cabal in such terms is clearly dehumanising and works toward a similar purpose of diminishing resistance to any consequences that may befall them, no matter the severity.

Drop 1851 characterises the cabal not as a creature but as a cancer. "These people are SICK!" Q exclaims before apparently directing his words to the cabal themselves: "You people are a DISEASE. We, THE PEOPLE, are the CURE." In fact, Q characterises the cabal as 'sick' more than thirty times across the period analysed. This again changes the nature of the corruption's characterization; now it is neither filth nor environmentally hazardous vermin, but an active threat to the 'body' of the state. As a disease grows stronger, its host grows weaker; it is imperative to continued health and even existence to destroy the infection entirely. If the cabal is an infection within the United States, the stakes are elevated from widespread interpersonal violence to a threat to the very survival of the country as a whole. Both evangelical 'prosperity gospel' and New Age spiritualism suggest that illness in the body is a symptom of spiritual conflict and poor ethics; 'illness' in the state, then, can be extrapolated to have the same cause. This belief aligns neatly with harder-right ideologies espoused by some Christian leaders that suggest that the United States faces its current challenges as a result of increasing liberalisation of behaviour that in previous eras would have been seen as unethical (i.e. homosexuality, female empowerment, etc.). If one is to renew the vigour, so to speak, of the United States and

ensure its continued role on the world stage, then it is necessary under this framework of thinking to purge the ethically undesirable – which may indeed not be limited to the cabal, depending on individual views.

One of the more flagrant religious allusions comes in drop 1434, in which Q says simply that the “Flood is coming.” The Biblical flood in the Book of Genesis serves as both punishment and as an expression of mercy. After a generations-long devolution of human behaviour, God saw the world as corrupt and full of combat. Humanity was punished for its sins with a great flood which covered the entire world, with Noah and his family alone as survivors. In evangelical teachings, the flood is a symbol both of God’s wrath and the perils of sin, and a symbol of mercy in that God did spare Noah’s family and allowed the world to become renewed after forty days and nights of cleansing waters. When Q references a coming flood, it draws on an understanding of rampant evil and corruption that must be wholly annihilated and that in the wake of such large-scale destruction is to be found a world remade more holy. It also allows for a sense of moral superiority for readers; they, of course, will be on the proverbial ark, safe above the floodwaters as the wicked are punished all around them. And they will inherit a new world freshly born anew, if Q is to be believed, mirroring the promises made to the Christian faithful in Revelations.

Of note is both the volume and type of references made to women by Q. Political figures like Hillary Clinton, Huma Abedin, Diane Feinstein, Nancy Pelosi, Maxine Waters, and other major Democratic women feature frequently and prominently in Q’s posts playing a particular set of familiarly stereotyped roles. Huma Abedin, is portrayed in early posts as a hapless victim, forced to play along with a corrupt script for the sake of protecting her children since her husband is in prison (Drop 8). Diane Feinstein is referred to as “evil” in drop 2345 and as a “puppet master” in drop 2899. Hillary Clinton is perhaps the most frequently referenced woman in Q’s posts, portrayed as a mastermind of countless evils against the United States and children around the world and, at times, as a force nudging her husband along the same path. This mirrors the age-old history in certain Christian traditions of portraying women as untrustworthy temptresses, following in the footsteps of Eve and Bathsheba in bringing men and nations to ruin. Tradition holds a longstanding

sentiment that women have been a corrupting force since the Garden. Q plays up this aspect in his discussions of the women mentioned in their posts, frequently highlighting the women's relationships to their spouses and families to make the egregiousness of the allegations of child abuse all the more outrageous and alarming. At the same time, Q portrays some of the women, like Abedin and Congresswoman Lisa Murkowski as mere pawns of more conniving forces. Even Hillary Clinton, whose portrayal more often positions her as the manipulator, is positioned as a 'puppet' at times (drop 93). There is no middle ground for the women Q discusses; they are wicked temptresses or weak-willed minions of greater forces.

Such reductionist caricatures are no deterrent, though, to the women who follow Q. After all, women participating in a cabal that harms children have transgressed their very nature as nurturers of the youth; their diminishment is the result of their own choices to violate the natural order. For evangelical women, this is God's design. For New Age followers of Q, women's participation in the cabal is a departure from the "divine feminine" that women are expected to embrace. The notion that motherhood and maternal traits are part of a healthy spiritual life for women amplifies gender essentialism at the same time as it claims to empower women. This understanding also contributes to a dismissal of the feminine experiences of trans people or genderqueer individuals, whose violations of these norms would also be interpreted as spiritual weakness or corruption.

III. GOOD AND EVIL

In the posts of Q, a political struggle between Democrats and Republicans and an alleged legal struggle to bring to justice a large-scale trafficking ring are elevated from their secular scale to a battle of cosmic proportions. Having situated the cabal as explicitly Satanic as early as drop 3, Q elevates what otherwise would have been a criminal matter to a manifestation of the fight between universal forces of Good and Evil, precisely expressed as such in drop 97. This elevation ripples out widely – every action Donald Trump makes is a battle tactic, and every action by alleged members of the cabal becomes a weapon intended to coax more people into evil and sin. This is perhaps the purest distillation of the political

theological framework out of the themes highlighted here; through Q's writings, secular political activity becomes a battle for the very soul of the world.

In drop 3, Q claims that "many in our govt worship Satan. Not about Republicans v. Democrats at this stage." In the next post, they go on that "this was a hostile takeover from an evil, corrupt network of players (not just Democrats)." There is a repeated insistence here that the evil transcends party lines, although as the conspiracy evolves, alleged members of the (domestic) cabal are overwhelmingly Democrats and Republicans that later turn on Trump as various scandals arise. The reason for the emphasis that the problem is not one of party becomes apparent in the next post in which Q derides some of their peers for focusing over-much on the United States. "Also many are thinking from one point of view, US only, this evil is embedded globally. US is the first domino. Have faith," says the last lines of drop 5.

At this point, merely *five posts* into the conspiracy theory, Q has shaped a religious-political narrative in which Trump and his allies are forces for good and his enemies both domestic and abroad are avatars of evil who must be vanquished. It also suggests that the battle in the United States is the first step in a struggle that will eventually sweep the whole world; if the forces of good are to reach the rest of the world, then, it is *integral* that the forces of good (Trump) succeed in the United States. Support for Trump amongst Anons is not merely one of political interest and import but an expression of faith. Over the course of the next several dozen posts, Q fleshes out the narrative further. In drop 29, they write "we [Trump allies] pray every single day for God's guidance and direction as we are truly up against pure evil." Drop 51 says that "God is with us," and drop 67 calls upon Anons to "have faith" a phrase which will be repeated several times in later posts.

Q quotes from the Bible frequently, although it is of note that many of the verses are quoted repeatedly and many are fairly well-known. Like many of the religious allusions made in the Q drops, one can surmise a familiarity with Christian-evangelical religious material, but that does not mean that Q themselves is particularly devout or well-acquainted with the theologies being drawn upon. Q rarely cites the specific verses they reference, relying on Anons to identify them and often to fit them into the narrative being spun at the time. Q's

task is to cobble together a new political theology which bears similarity enough to others to seem unobtrusive; extensive knowledge is unnecessary and even potentially counterproductive. In drop 35, the first instance in which a Bible verse is specifically referenced, Q quotes, “For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in shall not perish but have eternal life. Love is patient, love is kind.” While Q encompasses the entire reference in quotation marks, there are actually two verses spliced together here; John 3:16, which is perhaps the most famous of all Bible verses, and an incomplete quote of 1 Corinthians 13:4, which is also fairly well-known from being oft-quoted in Christian weddings and similar settings. The inclusion of the second verse here makes sense in the larger context; in drops 34 and 35, Q is writing an open letter warning their followers of an impending mass mobilisation of the military and civil unrest. Drop 34 tells Anons that their unawakened neighbours have merely been brainwashed by the narrative of the cabal, and are not themselves necessarily evil and therefore won’t be targeted unless moving against the government. The reference to 1 Corinthians, then, serves a dual purpose: to encourage followers to remain patient in seeing the payoff and to promote solidarity with even those who are not yet followers of Q, as they have merely been misguided. This encouragement facilitates, in these early phases, conversation with the uninitiated to spread the word of Q – later on, Anons will become a far more insular community as awareness rises and sociopolitical backlash begins.

Drop 54 consists solely of a quote from Jeremiah 29:11, which declares that God has plans for each person to contribute to their prosperity and positive future. In drop 69, Q quotes from Psalm 23, another very famous verse that is in some Christian circles recited rote as a nightly prayer. At the end of drop 154, Q recites a common version of the Lord’s Prayer, which is one of the first prayers taught to young Christians; variations of it are referenced in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke as how Jesus himself taught his disciples to pray. The ending of the version of the Lord’s Prayer cited by Q reads, “Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us, and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil,” (drop 154). Ending on this note is a call on God to deliver the Anons, and America itself, from the ‘evil’ of the cabal – and, per the rest of the drop, the Democrats

themselves, who Q suggests are pushing for gun control for nefarious purposes, perhaps even a ‘mass extinction event.’

One of the most quoted Bible verses by Q is Ephesians 6:10-18, which is referenced at least nine times. In drop 1432, it is quoted alongside the full version of the aforementioned verse from 1 Corinthians. Drop 1432 reads,

“Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. Stand firm, then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.”

– Ephesians 6:10-18

“Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails.”

– 1 Cor 13:4-13

This verse aligns neatly with the political theology Q is crafting, identifying the enemy as governmental officials and structures and nebulous ‘forces of evil.’ The verse encourages Christian readers to draw on their faith as shield and weapon both and again serves to turn the struggle against the cabal from a political one taking place in the physical world to one of spiritual scale that requires the forces of good to call on divine intervention on their behalf. There are several hundred incidences throughout his posts where Q encourages his followers to pray for success. In drops 3593 and 3594, which are identical to each other except for the link provided at the top, Q quotes Ephesians 6:10-18 again and ends the post with a call to action for patriots: “Prepare. For God [&] Country. For Humanity. We FIGHT!” Of course for a battle against evil taking place on American soil, the preparations Anons might be expected to make are not only spiritual in nature. Particularly with the unrest

forecasted elsewhere, this call is apt to encourage Q's followers to arm themselves not only with the armour of God but with Kevlar and bullets – just in case. Holy war is still war, after all.

Some of the religious references Q makes are more esoteric in nature than the mainstream verses and prayers discussed until now, although they are likely familiar to those well-versed in other conspiracy theories. In drop 133 in particular, Q takes a step away from mainstream theology and into familiar conspiracy territory.

... Many governments of the world feed 'The Eye.'...
 Triangle has (3) sides.
 Eye of Providence.
 Follow the bloodlines.
 What is the keystone?
 Does Satan exist?
 Does the 'thought' of Satan exist?
 Who worships Satan?
 What is a cult?
 Epstein Island.
 What is a temple?
 What occurs in a temple?
 Worship?
 Why is the temple on top of a mountain?
 How many levels might exist below?
 What is the significance of the colors, design, and symbol above the dome?
 Why is this relevant?...

Within just a few lines, Q hints at a myriad of varying conspiracy theories and secret society symbologies that lurk in social consciousness – the Eye of Providence and the triangle reference may refer to ideas about the Freemasons and the Illuminati, respectively. Bloodlines is a potentially more insidious reference which could appeal to several different conspiracy theories Q's readers would be familiar with; it could be as simple as dynastic power in the most influential political families or as insidious as conspiracies about reptilian or alien DNA which are grounded in racism and antisemitism. The discussion of temples and the dome are all tied to the Epstein references and to the conspiracy theory that he held Satanic rituals in the temple-like structure seen from the air on top of the sex crimes committed at his private island residence. Lack of evidence tying any of these different threads together is no deterrent; in fact to many followers of Q, the absence of

evidence *is* evidence of a cover-up. Even faith leaders make reference to such conspiracy theories. In drops 4541-2, Q reposts an open letter from Bishop Carlo Maria Vigano to Donald Trump in which Vigano accuses more liberal bishops of being “mercenary infidels... [and] allies of the children of darkness” who support “the deep state... [and] the New World Order... [and] the Masonic ideals of those who want to dominate the world.”

In drop 153, Q first introduces a new member of the hellish cast behind the cabal. While prompting readers to consider why Donald Trump would pursue a Presidential run given his previous wealth and influence, Q suggests: “Perhaps he could not stomach the thought of mass murders occurring to satisfy Moloch?” This is a far more niche Biblical reference than most others that Q makes – but as will be discussed below, may be drawn from more well-known sources instead. Moloch/Molech appears only a handful of times in the Bible, primarily in the Book of Leviticus. There is some scholarly dispute over the meaning of the word; until 1935, Moloch was widely considered to be a Canaanite god and cultic figure, but scholars since then have debated if in fact the word is a mistranslation of the Punic word for sacrifice, *mlk* (Smelik, 1995). If indeed Moloch was a figure, theologians and archaeologists believe he was one worshipped through human sacrifice, particularly child sacrifice; if it is a mistranslation, the Biblical passages refer to the practice of sacrifice altogether rather than to a particular god (Smelik, 1995). Regardless, the Bible strictly and repeatedly forbids the Israelites from sacrifices to Moloch – these warnings, in fact, compose nearly all of the handful of references to Moloch.

The reference to Moloch is precisely selected to supplement Q’s overarching claims of a child-abusing and even cannibalistic cult in a way that provides multiple entry-points to understanding of the reference. It also allows for those who may have merely a passing familiarity from pop culture references in Milton’s *Paradise Lost* or TV serial *Supernatural* to, through ‘doing their own research,’ uncover ancient texts that seem to support the broader conspiracy being laid out. Christian followers who investigate the reference will find that it is reflected in their holy book – that it conflicts with claims of a *Satanic* cult, Moloch being the deity of an entirely different ancient religion, can be easily overlooked or dismissed. Meanwhile, New Age followers with a somewhat more flexible belief structure

regarding the potential for a variety of different ancient pantheons to ‘exist,’ in some real cosmological way, beside each other as avatars of various forces would see no conflict in the reference at all.

In the end, Q maintains that the success of Trump and his allies are inevitable. “Good will always defeat evil,” says drop 171. Throughout the drops, Anons are repeatedly assured that “Patriots are in control,” (i.e. drops 4, 2254,), and that the “Good guys are winning,” (drop 12). The perceived inevitability of success and the suggestions that their mission is divinely ordained is undoubtedly an incentivizing factor to some of the extreme activity that followers of Q have been seen to participate in over the last several years. Presumed success encourages recklessness; clothed with the ‘armour of god,’ followers may well think themselves invincible when they pursue violent action to encourage a speedy realisation of their divine mission.

IV. HEROISM AND RESPONSIBILITY

Every war has its heroes, and the holy war being waged against the cabal is no exception. Aside from Donald Trump, who is of course *the* hero of the narrative being spun, Q offers an opportunity for Anons themselves to gain heroic status if they answer the call to participate in the fight. Q’s alleged allies are lauded alongside actual U.S. military soldiers throughout the posts, suggesting that the war against the cabal is no less real or important than the war in Afghanistan to which U.S. soldiers were deployed until last year. Many of Q’s posts are undergirded with a strong element of patriotism and American exceptionalism throughout; on occasion, their rhetoric veers into nationalism and militarism. Q elevates the United States military to the status of Savior, recreating the image of Christ in masculinity and militarism, and proposes a peaceful utopia maintained by the threat of violence for its disruption.

In drop 96, Q tells followers that “Your president needs your help,” to spread the word about his war against the cabal to the uninitiated “crumb dumbs” of the greater internet. Anons largely take this on as one of their missions, crafting memes and social media posts on more publicly-used platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter to increase

exposure to the conspiracy theory. Drop 4509 is one of the starkest posts in which Q relates online activity to warfare:

You have been selected to help serve your Country.
 Never retreat from the battlefield [Twitter, FB, etc.].
 Use other platforms as a form of centralized command and control.
 Organize and connect [bridge through linking].
 Source meme(s) material from battlefield and/or garage [highlight & share][take & drop]
 Mission 1: Dispute [reject] propaganda push through posting of research and facts
 Mission 2: Support role of other digital soldiers [one falls another stands (rises)]
 Mission 3: Guide [awaken] others through use of facts [DECLAS 1-99 material and other relevant facts] and memes [decouple MSDNC control of info stream] _ask 'counter' questions to initiate 'thought' vs repeat [echo] of MSDNC propaganda
 Mission 4: Learn use of camouflage [digitally] _primary account suspended-terminated _use of secondary
 Mission 5: Identify strengths / weaknesses [personal and designated target(s)] re: Twitter & FB [+other]
 [...]
 Game theory.
 Information warfare.
 Welcome to the Digital Battlefield.
 Together we win.

Q explicitly frames engagement with their posts, dissemination of memes, and getting into online arguments with the uninitiated as participating in warfare. Military-style language like 'command and control' and reference to camouflage and DECLAS material immerses the reader in a pseudo-militarized environment; Q not only calls the Anons 'digital soldiers' but attempts to create an online environment that in broad sweeps mimics a watered-down version of military briefings. Encouraging readers to view themselves as soldiers promotes a greater sense of camaraderie amongst Anons as part of the same 'digital army' and nudges them into further investment in the success of Q's outlined objectives as a leadership figure. Identification as a 'digital soldier' also serves to distance Anons from the uninitiated; after all, if one is to follow through on the military comparison, anyone who isn't part of the digital army is at best a bystander and at worst an enemy combatant. Either way, a soldier is not meant to fraternise. Accepting comparisons to army life means that those in an already-insular social media community become ever more isolated in an echo-chamber of conspiracism.

Beyond the 'digital battlefield,' Q repeatedly lauds the United States military, often thanking the "brave men and women" of the armed forces for their service and heroism (i.e. drops 69, 490, 856, 1350). This sort of standard-fare patriotism isn't, on its own, particularly noteworthy, but the other rhetoric used surrounding the military is a step more extreme than the average patriotic sentiments. In drop 114, Q says that the "US military = Savior of mankind." It is, of course, not an uncommon belief in the United States that the country is, broadly speaking, a force for good in the world and that military engagements abroad are generally for noble causes. But "Savior of mankind" goes beyond even that, ascribing a Messianic role to the U.S. armed forces. Use of the capitalised 'Savior' also yet again ascribes an element of divine blessing and ordainment to their activities. It suggests that their positive impact is not restricted merely to the United States or to the countries in which the military currently operates but instead extends to all of humanity – across the world and stretching from the present into the future.

It also ascribes a masculinized, militarised lens to the image of the Messiah. This conflicts with mainstream Christian images of Christ, who, while it is little-discussed, embodies traditionally feminine traits. Through his healing works, his egalitarian teachings, his method of spreading faith through discussion rather than force, his embrace of women as both followers and leaders of early ministry, the penetrative imagery of his death on the cross, his death and resurrection witnessed by his female compatriots – all of these align more closely with cultural notions of femininity than masculinity. But in elevating the U.S. military to the status of capital-S Savior, Q's conflation of the two goes both ways – the military is elevated to the messianic status of Christ, while the image of Christ himself becomes contaminated with the hypermasculine notions of power, control, and domination that militarism is laden with.

The specific way in which the U.S. military will serve this Savior function must be drawn together from disparate posts. But one can extrapolate from discussions of their proposed domestic operations during the Storm that Q anticipates the U.S. military will move into other countries to expose and excise the members of the cabal abroad. For all intents and purposes, this notion suggests a future where the United States engages in a series of coups

against the governments of countless allies and enemies, democratically elected or otherwise, and instituting new leaders. It also presumes that as a matter of course, the United States military has the *capacity* to overwhelm forces that would no doubt be mobilised against them in those countries while also maintaining their control in back home and in already-vanquished countries. This subtle, natural mythologization of the power of the United States military doesn't require proof of concept or any particular persuasion from Q. Instead, Anons are guided in the right direction and left to fill in the blanks on their own, building on presumptions of American exceptionalism and military might so naturally as to avoid question.

The mythologization is not limited to simply the role of the United States military. Drop 2219 is a longer post expressing nostalgia for a nebulous better time in U.S. history and is repeated in its entirety in drop 2431 with the addition of several quotes from Ronald Reagan. Drop 2431 reads:

There was a time when our children stood at attention, put their hand on their heart, and in one UNITED voice, recited the PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE.
 There was a time when STRENGTH and HONOR meant something.
 There was a time when standing for our FLAG meant something.
 There was a time when our history (heritage) was taught with PRIDE and RESPECT.
 There was a time when respect was given to those who serve(d), bled, and died to protect and defend our GOD GIVEN FREEDOM.
 There was a time when we were GRATEFUL.
 There was a time when these UNITED STATES OF AMERICA, ONE NATION UNDER GOD, was UNITED.
 There was a time when these UNITED STATES OF AMERICA, ONE NATION UNDER GOD, was UNITED UNDER ONE FLAG.
 There was a time when, WE, THE PEOPLE, decided our future.
 There was a time when, WE, THE PEOPLE, had a voice.
 There was a time when, WE, THE PEOPLE, were UNITED and STRONG.
 I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one Nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.
 "Freedom is never more than one generation away from extinction. We didn't pass it to our children in the bloodstream. It must be fought for, protected, and handed on for them to do the same, or one day we will spend our sunset years telling our children and our children's children what it was once like in the United States where men were free."
 "You and I have the courage to say to our enemies, "There is a price we will not pay."
 "There is a point beyond which they must not advance."

"We'll preserve for our children this, the last best hope of man on earth, or we'll sentence them to take the last step into a thousand years of darkness."

-Ronald Reagan

It is time, WE, THE PEOPLE, reclaim what is rightfully ours.

Will you answer the call?

Your Country needs you.

Your VOTE matters!

WE STAND TOGETHER.

"Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be courageous; be strong."

- 1 Corinthians 16:13

Q

This lengthy post covers a fair bit of rhetorical ground. It starts with the repetition of "There was a time," followed by a list of values that Q suggests have waned in recent years: unity, strength, honour, respect, and gratitude. Q does not offer a specific time in history that these values were at their peak – Anons are left to fill in the blanks on their own of what they feel to have been the high point of American history. Three separate lines are committed to different aspects of respect: respect for the American flag, for U.S. "history (heritage)," and for military veterans. These are three separate angles of patriotism that are claimed to be disappearing, a claim which mirrors mainstream right-wing talking points about how the younger generation is being taught to hate the United States.

The use of 'heritage' in parentheses is also a dog-whistle; Americans who grew up in the South or in rural areas are likely familiar with the phrase 'Heritage not Hate,' which can be found on countless items of Confederate flag-themed merchandise. Southern states' educational systems are often known to reproduce the 'Lost Cause' narrative which diminishes the role of slavery in the Civil War and portrays sympathy or support for the Confederacy as not treasonous and racist but in fact *patriotic*. The nod to 'heritage' in Q's post would immediately draw this to mind for many Americans. For those on the far right, the dog-whistle may be even more insidious, alluding to false but pervasive notions particularly in white supremacist and even Christian nationalist circles that the United States is a nation for white people that has been 'corrupted' by racial integration and immigration. Q repeatedly decries racial divisions in their posts (drops 563, 1646), but the forums in which Q was active are well-known for being hotbeds of prejudice and hate

speech, and it is doubtful that they would be unaware of the racialized implications of the nod to heritage.

After the series of nostalgic statements, Q posts the Pledge of Allegiance followed by a series of quotes from Ronald Reagan. All four refer to an obligation to fight – for freedom in the first quote, against vague enemies in the second and third, and for hope and light in the last. The last quote in particular touts a worldview of American exceptionalism, referring to America as “the last best hope of man on earth.” In the context of the QAnon conspiracy, the reference emphasises the importance of success in purging the cabal from the U.S. government – if America were to fall or be otherwise corrupted, then all of humanity would pay the price.

The final section of the post is a call to action, encouraging Anons to vote in the next day’s election and to ‘reclaim what is rightfully ours.’ Throughout the following day, Q echoes these sentiments, repeatedly encouraging followers to head to the polls and “RETURN OLD GLORY TO HER FORMER STATE,” (drop 2437) and tells them that “You are the saviors of mankind,” (drop 2442).

In drop 4959, one of the first posts after their return from hiatus, Q writes on 6 November 2022, just days before election day, “How do you control a country? Are you ready to take back control? Your vote matters. You have all the tools you need. Q.” Drop 4961 describes the stakes:

Endless lies.
 Endless wars.
 Endless inflation.
 Endless 'printing'.
 Endless oppression.
 Endless subjugation.
 Endless surveillance.
 Who will put an end to the endless?
 Taking control.
 Q

The role of Anons, then, is not merely as foot soldiers. They are *saviors*, heroes contributing to the continued existence of their country, ending all societal ills and spreading light

throughout the world. In a world and politics where problems seem overwhelmingly large and personal action seems ever less significant, this message is *empowering*. And that empowerment requires no great action that risks life and limb, only social media posts and a drive to the polls.

Q also repeatedly uses the quote, “Peace through strength,” (drops 972, 1026, 1350), which has been used by numerous leaders throughout history, but most famously in the modern era by Ronald Reagan. This maxim encourages the construction of a strong military as a means of avoiding conflict through deterrence; it is no great surprise that Reagan latched onto the idea given the arms race of the Cold War era. But it is not deterrence that Q is advocating for with this usage of the phrase – after all, the Storm requires the U.S. military to actively overthrow corrupt leaders in other nations, not to simply intimidate them. Instead, the phrase insidiously twists; rather than peace through *show of strength*, it becomes peace through *exercise of strength*. This very inversion has been warned about for years. In 2010, Professor Andrew J. Bacevich wrote that, “Belief in the efficacy of military power almost inevitably breeds the temptation to put that power to work. ‘*Peace through strength*’ easily enough becomes ‘*peace through war*,’” [emphasis added]. It is a dangerous rhetorical flourish, entreating for peace while subtly encouraging the very violence being decried – but of course, violence by a God-ordained United States military can be of no lesser moral value than peace itself. The peace resulting from such an idea, by extension is not a passive, harmonious, feminised peace, but a peace built of strength and intimidation and latent threat of righteous violence, much like the ‘order’ imposed in fascist regimes. The Storm and its aftermath are, despite Q’s outward acknowledgment of the role of women in the military and the building QAnon community, inherently masculinized. The Storm is a violent and bloody grab at the power the Anons feel entitled to, and extends beyond American borders to penetrate the government and society of other nations and subdue them under a U.S.-led coup. The ‘egalitarian,’ peaceful world built in the aftermath is one with a looming hammer of military violence held over the world, ready to strike.

V. KNOWLEDGE AND BELIEF

Q's posts craft an epistemology that aligns heavily with New Age notions of knowledge and belief, portraying a world in which intuition is on par with evidence and every ripple in the universe is laden with meaning. From the very concept of "The Great Awakening" first mentioned in drop 9 to the myriad commands that followers "expand [their] thinking," Q deftly exploits the language of spirituality. QAnon as a conspiracy can be said to hinge on three core notions about reality: 1) that nothing is random or insignificant, 2) that individuals are capable of interpreting events in their grander significance through individualised 'research' and intuition, and 3) that when a critical mass of individuals has reached this higher level of understanding, that awareness will bring about a utopian rupture of the global status-quo.

The first point is set up quite succinctly very early on. In drop 123, Q tells their followers that "Nothing is random. Everything has meaning." This warning is applied to both real-world events and to the various quirks of Q's unique style of writing. Particularly in the first several months, Q intersperses coherent statements and hunches with 'clues' that come in the form of seemingly-random strings of numbers or symbols and pop culture references. This complex way of conveying information is defended by Q as necessary to avoid detection by malicious elements in the intelligence community. Decoding the symbolism of Q's posts becomes over time part of the appeal of the conspiracy; some Anons begin calling themselves 'bakers' who decode Q's 'crumbs' to discover what real life event or person is being referred to. Interactions with Q drops, then, is not an act merely of consumption but of interactive story-telling and meaning-production. Other scholars have noted that this mirrors the way that evangelicals are taught to read the Bible and come to understand it through communal discussions (Mendoza III, 2021). The suggestion that nothing is random echoes Christian notions of predestination and divine ordainment.

This drop also appeals to spiritualist ideas that coincidences do not exist but are instead the universe laying out a path or revealing a truth to anyone awakened enough to perceive it. In a worldview where everything is interconnected and shaped by individual thoughts and experiences, there can *be* no coincidences. Whatever happens must be the result of

karma, or of manifestation, or of opportunities being laid out before you by the cosmic powers-that-be. Recurring symbolism such as a frequent observation of a particular set of numbers *must* be cosmic forces attempting to communicate. Failure to get that job must be due to not wanting it badly enough, or conversely a boon from the universe to help avoid a toxic workplace. In the world of New Age spiritualism, the search for meaning in everything is not merely common practice, but an integral part of spiritual growth and proof that one is in alignment with the world around them. The focus on intuition and alignment is attributed to explicitly feminine power, as the 'divine feminine' is responsible for emotion and intuition while the 'divine masculine' is more logical and practical.

More spiritualist themes are brought out again in drop 167, when Q writes that,

POTUS opened the door of all doors.

Expand your thinking.

What is the keystone?

Q

'The door of all doors' and the 'keystone' sound like the sort of thing one might find in a fantasy novel, uttered by some oracle to an adventuring party on their quest. There is not much in the way of further context in the post or its predecessor, either, leaving readers to draw on instinct and personal experience to interpret the post. Perhaps Q is referring to some sort of dimensional door – that would certainly require a so-called expansion in thinking. Perhaps the door is metaphorical in nature, suggesting that he has allowed some other force into the cosmic fight being outlined. Perhaps it is the door to the White House itself. The keystone is equally vague. Is it some sort of Rosetta Stone, offering the key to another language or story? Is it some mysterious object of unknown power? Is it a reference to the Keystone Pipeline, which had a large oil leak just three days before the drop was posted in November 2017? Readers are left to determine the meaning of the strange phraseology for themselves, based on their own knowledge and intuitive connections. It is in this drop, even more than most, that Q follows the tradition of countless self-proclaimed prophets and soothsayers and horoscope writers before him and creates an illusion of profundity while in fact saying nothing.

The second core idea, focusing on individual interpretation, is not merely implied but explicit; drop 1822 tells Anons: “Research for yourself. Think for yourself. Trust yourself.” The idea of ‘doing your own research’ is a pervasive one in QAnon and in various conspiratorial circles. The research being done, however, is a corrupted mirror of scientific research. Both begin with a question and a proposed answer. But where scientific inquiry tests that hypothesis with experimentation or in-depth analysis and shows its work for others to check for accuracy, both of these processes become integrated for the ‘do your own research’ crowd. The evidence collected is often anecdotal and decontextualized; samples are selected specifically for their agreement with the chosen narrative rather than analysed wholesale for alignment. And where scientific inquiry embraces critique and re-analysis, efforts to highlight potential flaws in a conspiracy narrative are rejected outright and seen as an attack by the establishment. Accepting common belief becomes viewed as morally deficient, a sign of lack of weakness, gullibility, and passivity in the face of power, while rejection is a sign of independence and intelligence. “Many choose the path of least resistance,” Q writes in drop 4685, “For many you cannot tell them the truth. You must show them. Only at the precipice will people find the will [strength] to change and break the system of control [be free].”

After all, “The Great Awakening” encompasses two types of metaphorical awakening. The first is shaking off the influence of existing notions of reality presented by the media and government; ‘waking up’ from the stupor of passive acceptance of the mainstream narrative. You see this idea of awakening alluded to in Q’s various references to The Matrix movies, in which taking the red pill shows that humanity is not free but instead in a stasis, enslaved to a higher power and convinced of their freedom through a collective dream narrative (drops 566, 749, 3211). The second is a spiritual awakening, a greater understanding of humanity and the cosmic order revealed through the events of the Storm. These two ‘awakenings’ go hand-in-hand, representing a rapturous evolution of spirit in The Great Awakening. The existing state is implicitly deficient; the awakened state is elevated, beautiful, independent, honest, whole.

The Great Awakening is made great, of course, in its universality. This third notion regarding the creation of a new utopian future through the Great Awakening is made explicit in drop 2450, which reads:

We are going to show you a new world.
 Those who are blind will soon see the light.
 A beautiful brave new world lies ahead.
 We take this journey together.
 One step at a time.
 WWG1WGA

It suggests that the uninitiated are currently blinded, but the work of Q and the Anons will reveal to them ‘the light’ and wake them up to the truth. Only when these blinders are removed does the new world become possible – not the “New World Order” of conspiracy fame, which is what Q suggests the cabal is working toward, but instead a “brave new world.” This world is a collective effort and therefore the awakening must be overwhelming, a point made doubly through the line about a journey made together and the final line. “WW1WGA” is the common acronym in QAnon for the phrase “where we go one, we go all,” a sort of twist on the well-known motto, “all for one and one for all” used by the titular characters of Alexandre Dumas’ *The Three Musketeers*. It states that everyone is in this together, one way or another, and therefore the fate of the world hangs altogether on awakening those who have not yet come to see the ‘truth’ of Q.

Drop 1886 quotes 1 Corinthians 13:12 (incorrectly cited in-text as ‘Corinthians 13:4-13’), which says “For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.” In this verse in the Bible, the apostle Paul is describing that humans will be unable to comprehend the face and being of God until the Second Coming, but that humans are known in their entirety by God. Without this context given in the post by Q, however, the verse takes on a different suggestiveness. A reader unfamiliar with the surrounding Bible verses but having read the drops over the previous hour hinting at foreign corruption and the purging of the CIA would be liable to interpret this verse as referring to the exposure of the cabal.

The world in the end, then, is one where the evils of the cabal have been destroyed and everyone remaining has been 'awakened' and can live in utopian bliss with each other. This is a secularised vision of the ending of the Book of Revelations, in which the many plagues and tribulations end with the world being inherited only by believers, who live in harmony under the righteousness of God's grace.

DISCUSSION

In the mythology of Q, there can be no doubt about the evilness of the cabal – the sexual exploitation of children is culturally amongst the most egregious of crimes, even before the proposed sacrifices to Satan or Moloch and more classically religious figures of evil. Mere political corruption is not visceral enough to trigger the sort of mobilisation Q seeks to encourage – the cabal's wickedness must be exaggerated to a scale that would be almost comedic were it not for the nature of the allegations and the number of people who have accepted them. The cabal is powerful, finding its place in all major institutions both inside the United States and in the leadership of foreign nations. But it is not too powerful; it cannot be, lest followers fall prey to despair and nihilism.

Instead, followers are empowered as soldiers for the forces of good, who far outnumber the cabal. Those exposed to QAnon are drafted into a cosmic army, battling not only to free the children but to restore American values and create a nostalgic utopia where all the ills of society are eliminated and freedom reigns. Their mission is not combat in the classic sense, but to spread 'awakening' to enough people that the military coup necessary to bring about the retributive justice of the Storm can come to pass.

QAnon provides an easy shortcut to solving political discontent. Instead of a complex understanding of the various systems and historical legacies that contribute to the current status quo, Q presents a single collective enemy, the Deep State, that causes *all* of society's ills. And the defeat of the Deep State requires not the hard work of collective organising in the classic sense; instead, one can, from the safety of their home, use their phone or computer to simply evangelise the scripture of Q through memes and thereby awaken

others. It is paradoxical – the stakes could not be higher, the motivation could not be more compelling, but the action expected is astonishingly minimal.

And yet, no less powerful.

The independent thought promoted by Q is a volatile thing, liable to be fashioned against Q as well the cabal. While Q *says* that the only action needed is memes and voting and that violence is the task of the military, ‘free thinking’ followers may well draw their own differing conclusions based on their existing political beliefs and propensities for violence. If one *genuinely* accepts the premise that children are being sex trafficked at this very moment, and the alleged perpetrators are able to be found, tracked, *hunted*, then the leap to real-world violent action is not just predictable – it is arguably more *ethical* to engage in a rescue attempt than to sit idle behind one’s keyboard. That’s exactly what sparked the incident in Comet Ping-Pong and has prompted countless other incidents fuelled by QAnon including child abduction plots, assassinations, terroristic threats, and tragic acts of domestic violence (Beckett, 2020; Hernandez, 2021). Furthermore, Q’s suggestions that voting is one of the essential actions for Anons to change the world mean that when prominent Republicans, including Trump himself, claim that elections are rigged, Anons are highly motivated to remove any perceived obstacles to free and fair elections. This is true no matter whether the obstacles are local election officials or the Vice President of the United States, as seen on January 6, 2021 during the Capitol insurrection.

The particularly feminist lens of political theology, focusing on the replication of systems of oppression through religious-political transference, yields insights regarding the way that QAnon’s borrowed theologies reproduce sexism and transphobia. The conspiracy’s usurpation of elements of evangelical Christianity means that it replicates certain notions of the female relationship to evil and corruption: women may be either the victim or the temptress, the passive vessel or the manipulative Eve. The role of saviour, though, is masculinised – it is aggressive military action and violence that will bring about the Storm and the new world after it, characterised by a peace built on latent threat. The New Age spiritualism drawn on by Q, on the other hand, incorporates a welcome to more feminised motifs, entreating followers to trust their intuition and accept anecdotes as equally - or

more - valid than the rational evidence supplied by mainstream narratives. The sacralised maternity of New Age feminism renders the alleged actions of women involved in the conspiracy as a particularly egregious transgression of the natural order.

Mothers who support Q have their experiences turned into something of reassuring cosmic importance – *they* protected their children from the wicked machinations of the cabal, they've done their duty to protect their family, the state, and the very spirits of both. Meanwhile, the more likely source of threat comes not from Democratic leaders but from the much less visible and much more insidious threat of predatory male friends and family members. The vast majority of sex abuse victims are women, and young women who have been victims of sex crimes themselves are all the more apt to cling to the assurances that QAnon provides – it provides a *reason* for the violation and promises an easy way to spare others the same trauma that they themselves experienced. The QAnon mythology promises heroic valour and transcendent cosmic reward to Anons who help stop the cabal of paedophiles, but the alleged victims themselves are mentioned only in passing as illustrative props. But to women drawn to QAnon, the victims themselves are an essential motivating factor.

The suggestion that maternity is tied to femininity and that its violation is transgressive also makes vulnerable trans and nonbinary women, who in recent months have been increasingly targeted – rhetorically, legally, and physically – by the American right and so-called 'radical feminist' strains of the political left. The evangelical Christian framework centres a cisgender heterosexual relationship as the family unit; New Age spiritualism suggests that men and women have natural energies and inclinations that they are – or ought to be – more attuned to. The experiences of trans women and nonbinary individuals violates the order of both of these worldviews and therefore find no refuge in the mythology of QAnon. While I did not come into contact with any particular drops addressing the matter, Q repeatedly draws on a nostalgic image of American history where traditionalism reigned and there were no pesky questions of how various minority groups fit into the status quo like there are today. Not because they weren't there, of course – but because their voices were not centred and therefore could be assumed to be non-existent.

CONCLUSION

I. Summary of findings

In this study, I used the lens of feminist political theology to analyse how the central figure in QAnon, Q, borrows from evangelical Christianity and New Age spiritualism to shape a political mythology that replicates the gendered structures of its source material. By identifying and exploring five overarching themes in the canon of Q drops, I was able to assess the specific theological underpinnings of Q's mythos surrounding those subjects and their implications. This exploratory study serves as an early bridge between the political, religious and gender studies factions of scholarly research on the QAnon phenomenon. It also may provide valuable insights in the pursuit of deradicalizing those who have latched onto the conspiracy and to those attempting to inoculate people against QAnon and adjacent conspiracies.

After extensive reading of many of Q's posts from 2017-2022, there emerged five themes that I felt were essential to the construction of the QAnon mythos: justice and retribution, corruption and purification, good and evil, heroism and responsibility, and knowledge and belief. QAnon's concept of justice draws on New Age notions of karma and the fiery wrath of evangelical understandings of the Book of Revelations. Its theme of corruption and purification replicates draws on scripture and evangelical teachings that suggest women to be a corrupting force and that mass death is a path to a new, sin-free world. Q also draws on the related ideas of New Age manifestation and evangelical prosperity gospel to suggest that a corruption of the state is the result of a flawed spirit, and that one must be repaired to fix the other. QAnon forms distinct groups of 'good' and 'evil,' in its mythos, explicitly suggesting that the wicked cabal worships Satan while Q and their allies work beneath God's guidance and blessing. The notion of heroism portrayed by Q is highly masculinized and militarised, promoting a common American evangelical vision of the United States as a divinely-ordained singular force for good and elevating followers to the lofty role of saviours. QAnon's framing of knowledge has much in common with New Age ideas that there are no coincidences, that individual interpretation of events is supremely valuable, and that a critical mass of awakened, free-thinking individuals is essential to creating

utopian society. This final Great Awakening bears significant similarity to the global rebirth proposed at the end of the Book of Revelations.

Political theology suggests that in modern societies where secularism is perceived to dominate over religiosity, politics adapts to fill the transcendent space and becomes imbued itself with a sense of theological importance. There can be no doubt that the QAnon conspiracy has done just that. Q borrows liberally from extant religious beliefs, stealing scripture and religious teachings from evangelical Christianity here, motifs and transcendent philosophy from spiritualism there, and adding a noxious stream of conspiracism and extremist politics. The resulting blend is a uniquely political end-times prophecy, a politico-mythical treatise regarding the state of the world and the impending, revelatory Great Awakening that will remake it anew.

II. Implications

These days, QAnon has unspooled into something more diffuse. Q drops are still rare, despite the return from hiatus last year. Direct and visible association with QAnon is now a social liability more than a unifying asset as acts of violence tied to the conspiracy are far more well-known to the general public. But the beliefs espoused by QAnon have not disappeared, merely been repackaged. Current Democratic Presidential candidate Robert F. Kennedy, Jr., [RFK] has embraced New Age philosopher Charles Eisenstein as his senior advisor of messaging. Eisenstein has declared that a Kennedy presidency would shift America back into a different, morally superior timeline that died with the assassination the candidate's uncle, John F. Kennedy, in Dallas in 1963 (Goldberg, 2023). RFK himself has repeated Q-style declarations of cosmic warfare in his speeches. In a 2021 speech against COVID-19 mitigation mandates, he told a crowded evangelical church, "We are in the last battle. This is the apocalypse. We are fighting for the salvation of all humanity," (Goldberg, 2023).

While this paper has been dedicated to QAnon in its original environment of United States politics, scholars have noted how its global spread has come with new mythologies in the countries where it takes root. Q is not the architect in these spaces, but empowered

prophets follow in their footsteps. In Czechia and Slovakia, QAnon influencers seamlessly adapt the language of the conspiracy to reflect pan-Slavic paganism and even the theology of AllatRa, a pro-Russian pan-Slavic spiritual movement/sect that has spread into Eastern Europe in recent months (Cherici and Zabka, 2023). In Italy, the “Telegram channel Il Grande Risveglio (The Great Awakening)... is, by its own definition, a ‘Channel of Spiritual Growth, Awakening, Messages of Light from the Galaxy of Ascended Masters, Galactic Brothers, and Beings of Light,’” (Cherici and Zabka, 2022). Meanwhile, the Italian Telegram channel Liberaveritas shares “exotic historical reinterpretations in a neo-pagan context... side by side with Q-signed mystical conjectures,” (Cherici and Zabka, 2022). This change in theological backing also has implications for the gendered dimension of the conspiracy – in the Italian context, for example, current Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni assumes an empowered, heroic figure in lieu of Donald Trump in the United States (Cherici and Zabka, 2022). It has grown harder to say that specific modern political conspiracies *are* QAnon, as the conspiracy has grown so diverse and adaptable that the description becomes ever less precise – particularly in the years since Q’s hiatus began. But the millenarian mythology that undergirds it – the evil Deep State, the Great Awakening, the Storm, institutional corruption and spiritual redemption – are being endlessly replicated across modern cultural and political contexts.

III. Limitations and directions for future study

This study required individual in-depth analysis of the Q-drops referenced; due to time constraints, analysis that incorporates all 5000 posts was not possible, and there may have been some posts that were overlooked that could have enriched the study. More time to analyse *all* Q drops together could provide more comprehensive results; a coding software to elicit themes for the first round of analysis would also be immensely useful for future researchers.

Due to both personal expertise factors and the documented prevalence of these theologies within the QAnon sphere, the scope of religious analysis was limited to evangelical Christianity and New Age spiritualism. However, analysing the mythology of QAnon with an eye toward Catholic theology or other major religious sects could provide different insights

into how the conspiracy appeals to adherents of that faith. As mentioned in the previous section, QAnon in other countries and contexts draws on different theological backgrounds. A comprehensive comparative analysis of the mythological construction of the United States' version of QAnon versus that of other countries' QAnon-adjacent conspiracy theories would be both increasingly relevant and highly compelling.

Dissecting Q's racial politics was not the goal of this paper, although in line with the principles of feminist political theology, I did find and briefly highlight the instances I found where racial systems of oppression were replicated. Q claims to desire a post-racial society and suggests that they themselves don't care about race, but underhanded references to matters of heritage and the disdainful discussions of the protests of Black people against police brutality in the United States undercut these assertions. Future studies of the QAnon phenomenon highlighting specifically racial structures of oppression would be of great scholarly value. It is particularly notable that there is a seeming disparity between the written text of Q's drops and the virulent racism of the commentary surrounding them on the forums. I am unsure whether this is exclusively due to the famously noxious nature of the forums themselves or if there are dog whistles deployed in Q's posts that I as a white researcher was less primed to identify. Regardless, future interrogations of the racial politics of the canon of Q drops would be a valuable contribution to the literature.

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