The Perfect Weed for this Spoiling Soil: The Ideology, Orientation, Organization, Cohesion, Social Control, and Deleterious Effects of Pseudolaw Social Constructs

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The Perfect Weed for this Spoiling Soil: The Ideology, Orientation, Organization, Cohesion, Social Control, and Deleterious Effects of Pseudolaw Social Constructs

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ABSTRACT

Pseudolaw is a system of not-law rules that has become broadly disseminated, worldwide. Pseudolaw promises its users extraordinary empowerment, via a secret law that is concealed from the public. This article introduces pseudolaw, its known characteristics, and discusses the relationship between pseudolaw and religion.

The social character and organization of pseudolaw populations and individual users is only poorly understood. This article introduces six studies on that subject, collected in this special issue of the International Journal of Coercion, Abuse, and Manipulation.

Keywords: Pseudolaw, Organized Pseudolegal Commercial Arguments, OPCA, Sovereign Citizen, Freemen-on-the-Land

I. What is Pseudolaw?

This special issue of the *International Journal of Coercion, Abuse, and Manipulation* is the first collection of studies that investigates, evaluates, and describes the social structure, organization, and operations of various groups that employ an array of false-law concepts that are commonly referred to as "pseudolaw." Pseudolaw is a composite of several parts.

A. Pseudolaw is a Unique Legal System

First, pseudolaw is "law," a system of rules and principles that structure interpersonal interactions. Pseudolaw is, functionally, a separate and unique legal system (Koniak, 1997; Netolitzky, 2018c, pp. 3-4; Netolitzky, 2021, pp. 183-186).

Unlike "conventional" legal systems that trace back to antecedents that are hundreds, and sometimes even thousands of years old, pseudolaw is a comparative recent legal system that crystalized in the US around 2000 (Netolitzky, 2018b, p. 2; Netolitzky, 2021, pp. 166-167). The rules that make up pseudolaw are framed like law, and use legal language (McRoberts, 2019, pp. 637-644; Netolitzky, 2018a, pp. 420-421; Netolitzky, 2018c; Netolitzky, 2021, pp. 164-170), but some of pseudolaw's rules diverge from, and are rejected by, conventional courts and legal systems (Kalinowski, 2019; McRoberts, 2019; Netolitzky, 2019; Sarteschi, 2020). In many ways, pseudolaw is a variation on conventional, mainstream legal traditions, rather than a completely novel construct (Netolitzky, 2018c, pp. 7-9). To date, pseudolaw has grounded most of its rules and structure in a scheme that is recognizable as primarily derived from the historical UK-type "common law" tradition.

For example, pseudolaw emphasizes binding voluntary agreements between two equal bargainers, what are usually called "contracts." Rules that govern contracts are pretty much universal in all legal systems, worldwide. That universality makes sense, given how "bargaining" has always been a core human activity. Even Soviet legal systems employed a type of contract law to organize economic functions (Farnsworth & Mozolin, 1987). Bargaining is just something people do every day, and so there is positive social value in establishing ground rules for making those agreements, and especially what to do when such agreements are not completed.

Pseudolaw's approach to contracts is largely recognizable to those familiar with the dominant UK-derived common law and European civil law legal traditions. But pseudolaw's version of contract rules includes a number of variations that are different from, and rejected by, mainstream legal systems and courts. One example is whether or not "silence means agreement." Contract formation involves several parts. The first is the "offer": party A proposes an arrangement of goods and/or services in exchange for something from party B. Party B then can accept or reject the offer. If the offer proposed by party A is accepted by party B, then "a contract" has been formed. That contract binds both A and B.

Conventional legal systems almost universally demand that the "acceptance" of the offer is a positive step (e.g., in Canada, reviewed in *Meads v Meads*, 2012 ABQB 571, paras. 447-528). In conventional legal systems, if an offer were to include a part that states "here is the offer, and if I do not hear from you in 30 days, my offer is accepted and the

contract is now binding," then courts would reject that component of the offer. A contract offer cannot unilaterally bind party B, if party B does not do or say anything. A "silence means agreement" term is not valid and enforceable. Pseudolaw, however, takes the opposite branch, and, based on a dubious foundation of misquoted and obsolete legal concepts, says that silence is, indeed, agreement (Netolitzky, 2018d, pp. 1049-1051). This example illustrates how pseudolaw sometimes differs from conventional law. Pseudolaw has rules, but some of those rules apply different principles or a different test, and, as a consequence, come to different results.

All law functions as a kind of social engineering. So why are the contract rules different in law vs pseudolaw? The reason is that a "silence means agreement" rule makes paper weapons powerful. "Silence means agreement" permits a person to unilaterally force obligations on others. For example, in pseudolaw, a person sued to pay an outstanding debt could send the lender a document that says:

> You have 30 days to prove the money you loaned me is real lawful money, founded on precious metals, and not worthless fiat currency. If you do not prove that, you agree my debt does not exist.

Since modern currencies no longer operate on the gold standard, demanding proof in this way--and with the rule that "silence means agreement"--would miracle away debts and obtain money for nothing. Or at least that is the theory. This kind of foisted documentary claim is a quite commonplace pseudolaw strategy to eliminate debts based on spurious financial concepts (*Meads v Meads*, 2012 ABQB 571, para. 227; Netolitzky, 2018d, p. 1064), but never works.

"Silence means agreement" has a dark side, too, which is why this rule is consistently rejected by mainstream legal systems. Every day would require endless vigilance, to detect and reject contract offers. Documents concealed within an unopened envelope could unilaterally impose unwanted services. An unanswered telephone call might create a contract. And pseudolaw adherents take this principle even further, imagining "Invisible Contracts" that result from apparently innocent acts, like using a postal code purportedly creates government jurisdiction and authority via a concealed trickster's bargain (*Meads v Meads*, 2012 ABQB 571, paras. 231-234; Netolitzky, 2021, p. 179).

But not all pseudolaw operates simply on the basis that law took a different path when legal rules were developed in past centuries. Some aspects of pseudolaw are probably best described as magic (Dew, 2016, pp. 87-91; Netolitzky, 2018d; Wessinger, 2000, p. 160). For example, some pseudolaw documents cannot, rationally, have the claimed effect and authority, and can only be explained as sympathetic magic (Netolitzky, 2018d, pp. 1053-1056). Other pseudolaw practices appear to be "cargo cult" imitations of processes pseudolaw's users did not understand, but were perceived as having importance and/or power (Netolitzky, 2018d, pp. 1057-1069).

Strangest of all is the one unique aspect of pseudolaw that has no parallel in any other legal system: the Strawman Theory doppelganger (reviewed in *d'Abadie v Her Majesty the Queen*, 2018 ABQB 298, paras. 57-70; Kalinowski, 2019, pp. 158-164; *Meads v Meads*, 2012 ABQB 571, paras. 417-446; Netolitzky, 2018d, pp. 1069-1078; *Pomerleau v Canada (Revenue Agency)*, 2017 ABQB 123, paras. 67-88; *Rothweiler v Payette*, 2018 ABQB 134, paras. 10-17; *Rothweiler v Payette*, 2018 ABQB 399, paras. 25-33).

Worldwide, pseudolaw schemes almost always claim that what we usually think of as a single entity instead has two separable halves: a "flesh and blood" human being, and an immaterial legal entity, often called "the Strawman," or "the person." According to Strawman Theory, human beings are not born with a Strawman, but, rather, that the Strawman is created by birth documentation as a concealed trickster contract, and then attached to the human being as a kind of dark legal doppelganger. The Strawman is identified by a name in all capital letters, such as "DONALD NETOLITZKY," while the proper identifier for a human is a mixed case name, or a name with an atypical structure and/or punctuation, such as ":Donald-Netolitzky:," or "Donald of the Netolitzky Family."

According to Strawman Theory, governments have no authority over human beings, but instead chain that authority via contracts from the government to the Strawman, then through the Strawman to the flesh and blood individual. To escape state authority and law, one needs to sever the contract-based Strawman to human linkage, and/or denounce and reject the Strawman's obligations as not one's own.

There is no "real world" legal antecedent or parallel to the Strawman. Strawman Theory is purely a pseudolaw construct. Strawman Theory is also second-order pseudolaw, since Strawman Theory is constructed atop false claims concerning government, state authority, and contract law. One aspect that makes Strawman Theory particularly strange is that if Strawman Theory really worked in the common law tradition, and allowed one to shed your "legal personality," then that step would not result in extraordinary freedom, but, instead, the human would be property: a slave (*Pomerleau v Canada (Revenue Agency)*, 2017 ABQB 123, paras. 88-95). Fortunately, this rejection of legal status is not possible under modern law.

The Strawman mesmerizes pseudolaw's promoters and adherents. Though there is no historical basis for the Strawman, Strawman Theory is present in practically all known pseudolaw schemes, worldwide. Why that would be the case is difficult to understand, though one possibility is this component of pseudolaw is redemption via ritual magic; the Strawman is a law-styled myth of clandestine possession, exorcism, and secret knowledge (Netolitzky, 2018d, pp. 1069-1078).

In short, while pseudolaw is a legal system, it is a strange one. Although its users and proponents put great effort into presenting pseudolaw as having antecedents and a basis grounded in history, traditional law, legal decisions, and other generally accepted legal references, much of pseudolaw has a far more tenuous foundation. Obviously, the thin basis for these schemes has not precluded substantial success for pseudolaw in the marketplace of ideas.

B. Pseudolaw has a Story

Pseudolaw operates in a competition of two laws. In that competition, pseudolaw teaches that one law is propagated by authorities to the ordinary person. This "regular law" is portrayed by state and institutional actors as the natural and universally accepted rules that govern societal conduct. This first law is government-made, but, according to pseudolaw narratives, that state-made law is in some sense limited or defective. Despite what the masses are told, that "regular law" is not actually binding on human beings.

Pseudolaw schemes claim that there is a second additional, different, and more fundamental law, a law that has been hidden away from the public. The names of these two kinds of law differ depending on what specific pseudolaw scheme one follows. Commonly the state-made optional law is called "admiralty law," "maritime law," "law merchant," "military law," "martial law," "commercial law," "Roman civil law," or simply "legislation." The concealed but true and superior law is usually called "common law," but sometimes "natural law," "God's law," or "equity."

Pseudolaw schemes always have a story (Netolitzky, 2018c, p. 9), a conspiratorial narrative of how people became trapped within their current status, where false, illegitimate authority has denied and crushed everyone's actual inherent legal rights:

1. At one time the law was good. People lived in a free, fair, and just regime, ruled by legitimate law and authorities. In that age, those people had more freedom than is permitted in our modern society.
2. A new scheme of law and rules was imposed by nefarious actors that resulted in the current system of rules that are tyrannical and unjust, and which steal away peoples' legitimate rights. The process that suppressed the true law was hidden or disguised. As a consequence, people are in a prison of illegitimate authority, however, they are unaware of that truth.
3. The hidden away good law remains supreme. If one knows the correct methods, you can drill down through the false law to the original true and just legal system.
4. Pseudolaw's techniques allows one to remove the false legal authority imposed by the illegitimate law, and achieve the greater freedom and rights that were always there to be claimed. You just have to invoke the true law, though governments and other bad actors will resist attempts to defeat and nullify the superficial false-law's authority.

The stories of how the true law was sequestered away and suppressed exist in many different forms. Each is tailored to the specific people who use pseudolaw, the jurisdiction where they are located, and that jurisdiction's history. Almost every pseudolaw narrative includes a conspiratorial aspect, because the false superficial legal system is imposed by actors who seek to steal away the public's rights, for their own advantage. Sometimes the exact malevolent hidden hand is known and identified, but, often, those malignant agents are part of an amorphous, unknowable, improvisational millenialist "New World Order" (Barkun, 2013).

Some pseudolaw narratives are simple, but many are baroque constructs. For example, the recent Canadian "New Constitutionalist" movement (Netolitzky, 2023e, III(A)) explain that while the 1931 *Statute of Westminster* is claimed to have expanded the sovereignty of Canada, that legislation was intentionally sabotaged (the saboteurs identity is unclear), and the result, instead, was that the nation state of Canada created in 1867 ceased to exist. New Constitutionalists say the various levels of (so-called) Canadian government know that, but still pretend to be in control. New Constitutionalists now challenge those allegedly false authorities by filling the gap in "de jure" state authority by self-organizing new republics, whose geographic boundaries match the Canadian (not)

provinces, and where authority is derived from "We The People," who are subject only to the "common law."

Pseudolaw's backstories refashion accepted history and law along new paths. The US Sovereign Citizen communities frame themselves as the last true defenders of the American Revolution and its foundational documents. Their story claims the US Federal government is illegitimate, and explain how the 14th Amendment, that purportedly eliminated slavery, instead trapped common law "Citizens of the Several States" within a contract that stripped away freedoms and rights via a new replacement "commercial law" status: "Citizens of the United States" (Erickson, 1999, pp. 9-12, 34-35; Harris, 2005, pp. 294-297; Kalinowski, 2019, pp. 177-181; Koniak, 1996, pp. 68, 81-90; Sullivan, 1999, pp. 797-798, 804-811). Dew has concluded that the US "Aliite" pseudolaw communities are black Americans who relabel their citizenship--not as blacks--but as "Moors" or "Washitaw Indians," whose relationship with the state is defined by international treaty, or pre-colonial indigenous and treaty rights (Dew, 2019).

One can learn much about those who use pseudolaw by looking at these ahistorical fantasies. These stories frame the "who, what, where, when, and why" of the conflict of false and true laws, and the grievances, demands, and objectives of pseudolaw's users. Pseudolaw's narratives reveal the political and philosophical frameworks, and ideological motivations, of pseudolaw's communities.

C. Pseudolaw has a Purpose and Social Function

Pseudolaw's not-law rules and its conspiratorial narratives have a clear purpose and social function. Pseudolaw rebalances authority, removing and rejecting "conventional" state and institutional authority, and shifting that balance of power to individuals (Netolitzky, 2018c; Netolitzky, 2021). As such, pseudolaw is an anti-authority tool. Pseudolaw purports to subvert and/or negate government rule-making, and de-legitimizes authority over "subject" populations.

The net result is that pseudolaw spuriously empowers dissident, marginal, and anti-state individuals and populations. Pseudolaw does two dangerous things. First, pseudolaw's rules promote positive steps and resistance against the (supposedly) false, tyrannical state-made law (Netolitzky, 2021, pp. 178-191). In that way, pseudolaw promotes active conflict (Goldstein, 2015). The manifestations of that pattern are very well documented, ranging from refusal to pay income tax (Netolitzky, 2016a, pp. 616-624; Netolitzky, 2023a, pp. 814-817; Sarteschi, 2020, pp. 1-2), to roadside confrontations with between law enforcement and pseudolaw "Travellers" (Sarteschi, 2020, pp. 12-29), through to violent extremes, spree shootings, and even terrorist actions (Bell, 2016; Colacci, 2015, pp. 159-160; Mallek, 2016; Netolitzky, 2016b; Sarteschi, 2020, pp. 31-42, 66-68; Sarteschi, 2021).

Second, pseudolaw's narratives justify that conflict: "The law is on our side." The conspiratorial stories interwoven into pseudolaw schemes are not just about a difference of opinion, or alternative political philosophies, but a far more fundamental conflict: a potentially existential battle to regain lost freedom, stolen away by a dark design. Conventional government and institutional actors who do not "bend the knee" to pseudolaw are bad actors. Steps in response are discipline of "outlaws."

Combined, the shift of authority, and the narrative of oppression by a bad enemy, mean pseudolaw operates as an "adjuvant" (Netolitzky, 2021), a factor that aggravates the interface between two already opposed and conflicting systems. The adjuvant effect of pseudolaw is not so much the objective of pseudolaw, as a near inevitable consequence when pseudolaw ideas are introduced into an existing conflict or dispute.

Pseudolaw also tempers and modifies the form of government/dissident conflict, since pseudolaw operates as a "conflict of laws." Many pseudolaw users are political/social revolutionaries and/or reactionaries. Pseudolaw shifts the forum of conflict away from a "war of guns," to a "war of laws" (Netolitzky, 2023e, VII(D)(2-3)), and, indeed, there are numerous instances where pseudolaw adherents have attempted to radically rework legal and social systems by arguing that courts should impose their version of law (e.g., in Canada, Netolitzky & Warman, 2020). The potential for broad-based violence grounded in pseudolaw is most plausible when the "war of laws" has failed, and revolutionaries wielding pseudolaw conclude that not only are conventional authorities "outlaws," but also the courts and legal apparatus are equally corrupted and controlled by the dark tyrannical hidden hands (Netolitzky, 2023e, VII(D)(2)). If so, then only force can restore the "true Common Law."

D. Pseudolaw Operates in a Two-Part System: Law Virus and Anti-Authority Host

Pseudolaw is politically agnostic, since pseudolaw does not change or create ideologies (Netolitzky, 2021). Rather, pseudolaw, as an adjuvant, modifies the behaviour and activity of those who adopt pseudolaw's replacement legal system *as a tool* to obtain their particular objectives. Pseudolaw is a means to *many* potential ends (Netolitzky, 2021, pp. 171-178). Thus, pseudolaw is encountered in the wild as half of a two-part system (Netolitzky, 2018d, pp. 1080-1081). Pseudolaw provides the (not) law that is then employed by an infected host population. Pseudolaw's hosts are many and varied (Netolitzky, 2021, pp. 171-178).

Pseudolaw activities and groups often receive the "Sovereign Citizen" label. That practice is unfortunate, because that label conflates two separate subcomponents (Netolitzky, 2023a, pp. 719-801). Pseudolaw is a mimetic virus, a memeplex of law and story (Netolitzky, 2021). As previously described, pseudolaw purports to provide a mechanism to obtain extraordinary, but illusionary, authority. The Sovereign Citizens are a discrete example of a dissident population that engaged pseudolaw, and, since historically pseudolaw gestated within this population, much writing links pseudolaw to Sovereign Citizen ideology and history. Sovereign Citizens are roughly describable as US right-wing, conservative, anti-authority counterrevolutionaries, who seek to restore the US to a non-existent imaginary historical state where Federal government authority was much less than at present (Berlet & Sunshine, 2019; Harris, 2005). Historically, Sovereign Citizens were often racist, white, fundamentalist Christians, and predominately rural (Bell, 2016; Berlet & Sunshine, 2019; Harris, 2005; Mallek, 2016; Sarteschi, 2020, pp. 1-6).

When pseudolaw expanded outside its original Sovereign Citizen incubator, pseudolaw left behind most of the political beliefs and objectives of the Sovereign Citizen movement. What did remain was pseudolaw's general anti-authority function. For

example, in Canada pseudolaw circa 2000 ended up infecting a predominately criminal population of marijuana advocates, drug producers, and traffickers: the "Freemen-on-the-Land" (Netolitzky, 2016a, pp. 624-627; Netolitzky, 2023a, pp. 818-820. To the degree the Freemen were political, they were leftist egalitarian neohippies with pretentious anti-corporate and anti-globalist affiliations. Calling Freemen "Sovereign Citizens" actively confused and distorted public discussion and commentary on the political and threat characteristics of the Freemen, but that nevertheless did occur, particularly since US commentators simply grouped all pseudolaw users under the Sovereign Citizen banner, and declared that these were all right-wing extremists (Netolitzky, 2021, pp. 165-166). In truth, US Sovereign Citizens and Canadian Freemen-on-the-Land could hardly have been more different, as anti-authority populations go (Netolitzky, 2021, pp. 180-183).

This failure to appreciate that social manifestations of pseudolaw have two parts--a conserved and stereotypical false law scheme, hosted by highly variable anti-authority host populations--meant two very distinct cultures were grouped together, with no factual basis (Netolitzky, 2021, pp. 180-183). Similarly, the US Moorish law communities (Netolitzky, 2018b; Sarteschi, 2020, pp. 59-68), what Dew (2019) calls "Aliites," are certainly a pseudolaw phenomenon, but not organized on a counter-revolutionary *political* basis, but instead with a focus *on race*.

Table 1 surveys some of the known host populations for pseudolaw and illustrates the diversity of political and social characteristics of these groups:

Table 1 - Pseudolaw Groups and Movements Worldwide

Name	Nation	Political and Social Orientation	Racial Orientation	Additional Key Characteristics	Status
Sovereign Citizens	US	Right-wing, nationalist, Libertarian, Christian traditionalists	Originally white racist, now more diverse	Aligned with US conspiratorial interests, Q-Anon, right-wing political factions	Active, possibly expanding
Militias	US	Firearms ownership, anti-Federal, pro-state authority	Usually irrelevant	Some lack pseudolaw aspects	Active, probably expanding
Moors	US	Race-based identity	Black supremacist / separatist, Islamic or Indian trappings	Criminal, gang-affiliated	Active, probably expanding
Tax Protesters	US	Libertarian tendencies, otherwise apolitical	Irrelevant	Promoted and organized as a business	Dead or marginal
One People's Public Trust	US, Canada, & Austria	Left-wing, New Age, mystical	Egalitarian	Highly ceremonial, spiritual, irrational	Dead or marginal
Detaxers	Canada	Libertarian tendencies, otherwise apolitical	Some anti-Semitic banker conspiracy beliefs	Promoted and organized as a business	Dead
Freemen-on-the-Land	Canada	Left-wing, anti-authority reactionaries, anti-corporate, anti-globalization	Egalitarian and anti-racist	Predominately marginal social drop-outs and criminals / drug traffickers	Dead
Irish Freemen	Republic of Ireland	Anti-bank, anti-authority reactionaries	Irrelevant	Anti-debt claims triggered by property bubble	Dead
UK Freemen	UK	Anti-bank, anti-authority reactionaries	Xenophobic, secondarily racist, traditionalist, pro-Brexit	Low-income, "dole" recipient population, debt-oriented	Active, possibly expanding
Australia Pseudolaw Communities	Australia	Politically diverse, Libertarian, anti-authority	Diverse, some xenophobic, some Indigenous separatist	No dominant Australia-specific pseudolaw style, influenced by Canada, US, UK	Active, possibly expanding
New Zealand Indigenous Law	New Zealand	Left-wing, Indigenous rights, anti-authority	Indigenous supremacist / separatist	Resembles how Canadian Freemen have criminal aspect	Active but marginal
UBUNTU	South Africa	Socialist, New Age, communal	Egalitarian	Money for nothing, political party	Dead
Reichsbürgers	Germany & Austria	Right-wing, nationalist, traditionalist, reactionary	Xenophobic, anti-immigrant, anti-Islam	Claim previous state/governments are true authority	Active, possibly expanding
One Nation	France	Separatist, New Age, mystical	Egalitarian	Pandemic reactionary	Active
NeoSoviets	Russia	Communist, conservative, reactionary	Irrelevant	Claim Soviet government is true authority	Active, possibly expanding
The Second Republic of Poland	Poland	Reactionary, socialist, anti-vaccine, conspiratorial	Xenophobic, anti-Semitic, anti-Ukrainian	Claim Polish 1918-1939 government is true authority	Active, possibly expanding
Legitimate Creditors of the Czech Republic	Czechia	Money-for-nothing, anti-authority, revolutionary	None identified	Claim pre-1992 Czechoslovakia is true government	Active but marginal

Table 1 - Summary of certain major pseudolaw movements and populations world-wide (in part derived from Netolitzky, 2023a). The described characteristics are "loose"; many named pseudolaw groups exhibit substantial diversity, and include "satellite groups" that vary from these core traits. Characteristics of some groups, particularly the Sovereign Citizen pseudolaw movement, also have evolved and shifted over time.

In short, any instance where pseudolaw is publicly encountered has two parts: 1) the largely stereotypic set of not-law rules, 2) employed by an anti-authority, dissident, marginal population. Understanding both halves of this partnering--or parasitic relationship (Netolitzky, 2021)--is necessary to describe and evaluate an instance of pseudolaw activity.

II. Characterized Aspects of Pseudolaw, Pseudolaw Groups, and Pseudolaw's Uses

Pseudolaw is not an unknown subject. For decades, substantial investigation has been conducted into pseudolaw and pseudolaw schemes. For example, many highly detailed academic and legal publications have described and dissected pseudolaw's concepts, and documented how and why these ideas are wrong in law (e.g., DeForrest & Vaché, 1999/2000; Harris, 2005; Kalinowski, 2019; Koniak, 1996; McRoberts, 2019; *Meads v Meads*, 2012 ABQB 571; Netolitzky, 2018c; Netolitzky, 2018d; Netolitzky, 2021; Sullivan, 1999; Vaché & DeForrest, 1996/1997). The kinds of disputes and legal proceedings where pseudolaw is employed have been examined in the US (Slater, 2016, pp. 44-47) and Canada (Netolitzky, 2018c, pp. 6-7; Netolitzky, 2023a, pp. 807-813).

Within the US, legal and political scholarship has tracked the emergence and evolution of pseudolaw from its precursors through to the modern pseudolaw ecosystem (e.g., Bell, 2015; Berger, 2016; Harris, 2005; Sarteschi, 2020, pp. 1-6; Sullivan, 1999). The complex and intertwining international spread of pseudolaw worldwide, into a diverse range of communities, has at least been partially traced and documented (e.g., Cash, 2022; Netolitzky, 2018b; Sarteschi, 2020; Sarteschi, 2022). Merging of nation-specific and US sourced components of pseudolaw have been observed and described (e.g., Buchmayr, 2021; Cash, 2022; Young, Hobbs & McIntyre, 2023). The stereotype that pseudolaw is a right-wing, racist phenomenon is now debunked; pseudolaw is apolitical and has been observed in many different and distinct functional niches (Netolitzky, 2021).

The key symbiotic relationship between pseudolaw and conspiracy culture was identified, examined, and illustrated by Barkun (2013), along with the critical fact that these two phenomena are inextricably linked. Mental health professionals have uniformly concluded that the atypical and sometimes bizarre conduct and speech of those who employ pseudolaw reflects marginal and extremist political belief, rather than psychiatric disorder (Paradis, Owen & McCullough, 2018; Parker, 2014; Parker, 2018; Pytyck & Chaimowitz, 2013).

Misuse of legal processes, "paper terrorism," has been investigated and described (e.g., March-Safbom, 2018; Sarteschi, 2020, pp. 47-54). Investigators have examined the potential that physical violence will emerge from pseudolaw populations, but there is little reason at present to be confident we understand when and how persons influenced by pseudolaw, or who have adopted pseudolaw, become violent (Netolitzky, 2021, p. 180). Threat assessment and legal investigators have examined strategies to potentially minimize and mitigate the negative effects of pseudolaw on government, institutions, courts, and pseudolaw's adherents (e.g., Barrows, 2021; Ligon, 2021; March-Safbom, 2018; McRoberts, 2019).

Despite these investigations, sometimes even very basic data is not available. For example, commonly encountered population claims for the number of Sovereign Citizens, or other pseudolaw groups, are nothing more than guesses (Mallek, 2016; Netolitzky, 2023a, pp. 807-809). Attempts to measure the volume of court activity by pseudolaw users should be approached with caution (Slater, 2016; Netolitzky, 2023a, pp. 807-813).

III. Pseudolaw and Religion

Then there is the interrelationship between pseudolaw and religion. Pseudolaw and religion frequently *co-locate*, but these domains are not necessarily linked. As previously discussed, some pseudolaw is only explicable as magic (Arnold & Fletcher, 2023; Dew, 2016, pp. 87-91; Netolitzky, 2018d; Wessinger, 2000, p. 160). That explanation, however, does not explicitly mean that the persons who use pseudolaw do so on what they perceive as a metaphysical or supernatural basis. Instead, some of these persons are "re-enchanted" (Partridge, 2004), and so operate in a manner that is consistent with their perception of what is rational and reasonable (Netolitzky, 2018d, pp. 1081-1087). Other times the overall character of a pseudolaw scheme may not align with the policy--and rules-based structure--of "conventional" law. For example, Muniesa (2022) recently examined the One People's Public Trust money-for-nothing Strawman scheme as a metaphysical narrative on the nature and origin of wealth.

Sometimes the co-location of religion and pseudolaw has a more tangible link. For example, one of the conflicts of law that potentially ground pseudolaw systems can be "God's Law" versus secular law. Certain precursors to the modern Sovereign Citizen movement, such as the Christian Identity Movement (Barkun, 1994, pp. 200-209), and the Montana Freemen (Wessinger, 2000, p. 165), operated in that context. However, in many other instances, what might appear at first to be conflict of religious versus secular law is more superficial than substantial. For example, Moorish law groups described by Compari (2014), Dew (2019), and Palmer (2010) have a clear spiritual, organized religious aspect. However, the pseudolaw employed by these groups is not grounded in religion, but either: 1) is crudely adapted from Sovereign Citizen antecedents (Nuwaubians), 2) points to law-based status that originated from cultural identity (Washitaw), or 3) grounds itself in international treaties and history (Moorish Science).

In other instances, religion-like trappings are more mythmaking than anything else. For example, the Sovran Unity Nations Embassy claimed supraconstitutional religion- and marijuana-based matriarchal authority via an obviously fictitious and absurd document, the "Camel's Eye Treaty" (Camel's Eye, n.d.) that supposedly dated from 408 AD. Subsequently, the leader of this faction, "Maitreya Isis Maryjane Blackshear," sued Canada for blasphemy against her and $108 quadrillion (Netolitzky, 2021, p. 176; Netolitzky, 2023a, p. 830).

However, in one critical sense, pseudolaw schemes derived from the Sovereign Citizen parent memeplex have a religion-like character. The story of pseudolaw, as the hidden, secret, true law, masked behind a superficial false law, has a strongly Gnostic flavour (Palmer, 2021). Oddly, to date, no pseudolaw scheme has been identified that explicitly presents itself in that manner.

IV. Examining Pseudolaw in a Social Context

Despite decades of investigation, there remains a significant gap in our understanding of the pseudolaw phenomenon, worldwide. We know that pseudolaw is a social phenomenon. In theory, a person could become involved in and adopt pseudolaw by simply reading books, or, in the more recent environment, by watching Internet YouTube

videos (Netolitzky, 2021, pp. 184-185). That said, true "lone wolf" pseudolaw users are very unusual. Instead, investigation of pseudolaw's adherents almost always reveals these persons are part of an often sequestered and/or marginalized social community where the pseudolaw adherent interacts with other aligned parties (Netolitzky, 2016a, pp. 635-636). Many of these "meeting spaces" are located on the Internet, and are publicly visible.

But what are those social interactions? Are there leadership figures? How are these communities structured, or are these groups structured at all? Some prior investigation has commented on facets of this subject. The conventional hypothesis is pseudolaw is "guru-centric." That model is most clearly laid out by Alberta Court of King's Bench Associate Chief Justice Rooke in the 2012 court judgment of *Meads v Meads* (2012 ABQB 571). Associate Chief Justice Rooke describes that pseudolaw-using groups have an obvious central organizing figure, who holds that position based on (claimed) special privileged knowledge of law, conspiratorial government control structures, and secret hidden histories (*Meads v Meads*, 2012 ABQB 571, paras. 85-158). The usual practice is to call these persons "gurus." However, the social activity of these gurus is little studied, as are the mechanisms by which in-group identity and membership are established in pseudolaw communities, and how discipline and orthodoxy are maintained. More recent research (Netolitzky, 2021, pp. 183-186) argues that gurus are now less significant as organizer and leader figures, since pseudolaw's incorporation within the cultic milieu has created an information ecosystem where pseudolaw is readily available, in numerous forms, to persons who seek its extraordinary authority and advantages. At least in Canada, entirely new variations on pseudolaw have emerged during the COVID-19 pandemic (Netolitzky, 2023e), and have taken on forms very different from their pre-pandemic predecessors.

Investigators have drawn parallels between "religious cults" and pseudolaw's expressions as "legal cults" (Kent & Willey, 2013; Netolitzky, 2023a). A further larger parallel likely exists with terrorist communities (Banisadr, 2009; Centner, 2003; Challacombe, 2022; Levine, 1999). But are these social groupings really equivalents? Or is our understanding of pseudolaw social communities perhaps distorted by the fact some pseudolaw groups have, or have adopted, a religious aspect, as discussed above?

This special issue the *International Journal of Coercion, Abuse, and Manipulation* cannot provide a comprehensive answer in response to these questions, but, instead, presents a set of detailed studies:

1. that attempt to look inside specific pseudolaw communities, and describe their structure, and organization;
2. that examine social group processes and cues encountered in association with pseudolaw;
3. that observe how pseudolaw movements recruit, evolve, and, typically, collapse; and
4. that examine how persons inside pseudolaw movements frame their relationships with the opposing, tyrannical New World Order.

This special issue provides the first detailed investigations of three pseudolaw movements as social constructs. First, Donald Netolitzky, "Ten Seconds to Implosion:

The Magna Carta Lawful Rebellion," conducts a detailed longitudinal review of the rise and fall of a UK and Canada pseudolaw group between 2014 to 2022: the Magna Carta Lawful Rebels [MCLR]. The MCLR, a predominately Internet-based phenomenon, drew from an uneducated and low economic status population, and originally was organized around a key guru personality: David Robinson. However, when Robinson died in late 2020, Canadian "Jacquie Phoenix" immediately relocated to the UK and seized the MCLR's leadership niche. Over the next year Phoenix conducted numerous in-person gatherings in the UK in breach of pandemic mitigation regulations, what Phoenix called the "Redress" process. "Redress" was to culminate in the seizure of public buildings and a general revolution to execute existing government authorities--traitors and seditionists--by hanging. Instead, "Redress" fizzled, the MCLR imploded, and Phoenix largely disappeared.

The MCLR's dramatic 2019-2021 expansion was likely supercharged by social stresses resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. Up to its sudden dissolution, the MCLR was a surprisingly cohesive online community, linked by consistent graphic design, rigorous and aggressive online forum moderation, and purges of any non-compliant affiliates, who were denounced as government "controlled opposition" agents.

The second study of this type is Christine Sarteschi, "The Social Phenomenon of Romana Didulo: 'Queen of Canada'." Sarteschi examines the unprecedented social phenomenon that has developed around Romana Didulo, a middle-aged Canadian Filipino immigrant, who claims to exercise sole jurisdiction in Canada, as Queen of that nation (and sometimes beyond). Despite providing neither tangible evidence to support her claims, nor demonstrating any actual authority, Didulo has accumulated around 60,000-70,000 followers, and progressed from her initial status as an online personality, to now travelling across Canada in a multi-RV convoy, accompanied by an inner supporter group of uniformed cadres, conducting in person "meet and greets" with her followers.

Didulo initially grounded her claims and status in a QAnon framework, but, subsequently, has developed her own individual mythology of extraterrestrials and supernatural entities. Didulo's success has led to similar interrelated "monarchs" in other jurisdictions. Didulo is obtaining substantial funding from her follower base, who assert Didulo's authority in numerous contexts, including refusing to pay debts and for utilities, and even physical confrontation and conflict with law enforcement.

Third, Donald Netolitzky, "Jesus Built My Strawman: The Church of the Ecumenical Redemption International and "minister" Edward Robin Jay Belanger," examines Canada's longest standing pseudolaw movement: the Church of the Ecumenical Redemption International [CERI]. CERI purports to be a "religious cult," a congregation of King James Bible literalists. However, CERI's religious identity is a false front for a "legal cult" directed by artist and criminal Edward Jay Robin Belanger. Netolitzky reviews 21 legal proceedings that involved CERI to illustrate how CERI is neither a social, nor a religious community, but, instead, primarily a vehicle for Belanger to recruit short-duration personal partners from those already embedded in pseudolaw circles. Despite CERI having been in operation for over 20 years, CERI's scheme has not undergone any tangible evolution. CERI is not a social entity, so much as a litigation engine, where Belanger has repeatedly engaged in hopeless and inept court activities, in

what appears to be a primarily parasitic arrangement with Belanger's disposable followers.

This special issue also includes articles that drill down to examine certain specific social aspects of pseudolaw populations, activities, and materials.

Researchers have observed that the relationship between Sovereign Citizens and Child Protective Services (CPS) is inherently antagonistic (Hines, 2021). A number of high-profile CPS cases indicate that QAnon adherents are increasingly adopting sovereign citizen tactics in an effort to regain custody of their children. Conspiracy-oriented activists target CPS agencies with the false claim that instead of helping children, they are killing them, and selling their blood and harvested organs. In "Sovereign Citizens, QAnon, and Child Protective Services (CPS): Exploring the Overlaps," Christine Sarteschi examines the ways in which the two ideologies intersect in child custody disputes. Violence, or its threat, often accompanies these encounters. In at least one instance, this strategy has resulted in death. Relevant case studies are explored using extensive news accounts and court documents.

The mechanisms and factors by which pseudolaw's adherents are recruited is largely unexplored, though published sources commonly assume social media is the primary medium that introduces people to pseudolaw. Donald Netolitzky, "A Ride With My Best Friend: Recruitment into the Fiscal Arbitrators Tax Denial Pseudolaw Movement," is the first examination of how a pseudolaw movement recruited members/customers. In Tax Court of Canada court proceedings, customers of the anti-tax Fiscal Arbitrators scheme described how and why they employed Fiscal Arbitrators to prepare and file their income tax returns. Those tax returns illegally rejected tax obligations, and also typically made retroactive demands for very large tax refunds from previous years. Interestingly, this study population describe their introduction to pseudolaw was via personal "real world" contacts. Monetary benefits were the chief inducement and recruitment factor. The Fiscal Arbitrators clientele were largely non-ideological, and abandoned pseudolaw when confronted with negative consequences.

Documents are pseudolaw users' primary mechanism to communicate with opposing actors: institutions, government, law enforcement, and courts. Pseudolaw documents often include atypical features that both reflect pseudolaw theory (*Meads v Meads*, 2012 ABQB 571, paras. 203-241), but also appear to have ceremonial functions (Netolitzky, 2018d). However, to date, little investigation has occurred on how the language used in pseudolaw documents illustrates the perspectives and beliefs of pseudolaw adherents. While the documents produced by members of the Sovereign Citizen movement are not legitimate legal documents, there is a distinctly legal character to them. David Griffin, "'I Hereby and Herein Claim Liberties': Identity and Power in Sovereign Citizen Pseudolegal Courtroom Filings," examines the ways that Sovereign Citizen pseudolegal documents acquire that legal-seeming character by considering the degree to which the language present in pseudolaw materials resembles that of documents written by actual attorneys. A comparison of a corpus of Sovereign Citizen documents filed in an American courthouse to a corpus of attorney-authored documents obtained from that same courthouse reveals that while the authors of the pseudolegal courtroom filings (PCFs) examined are generally adept at identifying those features of legitimate courtroom filings (LCFs) that most clearly differentiate LCFs from documents written in more

"standard" varieties of English, these Sovereign Citizen authors did more than simply imitate. They frequently heighten or in some way emphasize those features of LCFs that appear to them to be the most legally or authoritatively salient. By considering both the features of LCFs that have been heightened in this way, and those features of PCFs that have no immediately clear legitimate legal analogue, several trends became apparent: 1) PCFs are highly and perhaps primarily concerned with establishing the identity and power of their authors as individuals; 2) PCFs frame judges and other representatives of the legitimate legal system as a single collective out-group; and 3) PCFs present their authors as the representatives of the true legal system while simultaneously, if grudgingly, acknowledging the real-world power that the legitimate legal system wields over them.

Collectively, these articles significantly expand our "insiders' perspective" understanding of pseudolaw as a social phenomenon. These publications also demonstrate that, despite its unifying elements, pseudolaw, expressions of pseudolaw, and pseudolaw's hosts, exhibit significant variation, both internally, and with other cult-like belief systems.

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