

S. Zohreh Kermani, *Pagan Family Values: Childhood and the Religious Imagination in Contemporary American Paganism* (New York: New York University Press, 2013), 235 pp., \$27.00 (paper).

*Pagan Family Values* is an ethnography of Pagan family organizations across New Hampshire, Texas, Massachusetts, and Ohio. Kermani's data collection methods included fieldwork, qualitative interviews, photographs, and online surveys. Within the ethnography, Kermani is able to discuss Pagan organizations SpiralScouts and Covenant of Unitarian Universalist Pagans (CUUPS), as well as cross-affiliated groups: the Society for Creative Anachronism and believers in an "Indigo Children" generation.

Kermani's greatest contribution to the fields of American religion, childhood studies, and contemporary Pagan studies is her articulation of the tension between Pagan adults' glorification of childhood as a spiritual state of wonder (connected with faerie and spirit realms) and the reality of childhood in human development. Kermani posits that "Pagan family values" inscribe a worldview wherein childhood is a magical, divinely inspired state and in which adults can experience spiritual childhood at any point in their lives. This definition, Kermani finds, displaces actual children, for the worldview uplifts children to a standard beyond their emotional and intellectual capabilities. The connection between North American adult Pagan spirituality and a childhood "imaginary" has been established in works such as Sarah M. Pike's *Earthly Bodies, Magical Selves* (2001). Pike discovered that "Neopagans describe childhood landscapes of myth and fantasy, of nature spirits and supernatural powers" to explain the origins of their involvement in magic and witchcraft (158). Kermani's work builds on Pike's initial observations.

Kermani begins the book with an episode that was her first experience in fieldwork: observing a Pagan mother and four year-old son attending their first and last Spiral Scouts event. As per Kermani's interpretation, the group failed to respond to the child ("none of the adults or children offered the crying child juice or crackers"). Kermani notes the "irony" of "a crying child begging for an apple while the adults around him ignore him in favor of a discussion of the food pyramid." This trend continued with an adult speaking about

economics beyond the child's intellectual comprehension (2). Initially concerned with the book's opening that could invoke antipathy from readers, I have come to understand the significance of this episode, as it relates to Kermani's thesis. As an aside, my response to this instance in ethnographic writing provoked me to ponder in new light recent debates on insider/outsider perspectives in Pagan studies research.

Pagan families' construction of Pagan family values takes place alongside and in opposition to the construction of family values of the mainstream and of the Christian political right-wing, thus inviting a comparative framework for analysis. Helen A. Berger has pointed out in *Sociology of Religion* the need for comparison between Pagan families and their socioeconomic counterpart families in other American religious and secular groups. For example, the ways that non-Pagan families highlight their children's accomplishments in athletics, studies and religious spaces could be compared to the ways Pagan families highlight accomplishments in spellwork or ritual artwork. Additionally, comparing differences within and across Pagan and Wiccan traditions, such as CUUPS, Reclaiming, Wiccan and Pagan solitaries, British Traditional Witchcraft, and Feri would be a next step. While Kermani briefly addresses literature like *Circle Round: Raising Children in Goddess Traditions*, a book whose rituals Kermani reports she "saw used...from California to New Hampshire" (106), there remains a great deal unknown about parental trends across traditions. I would like to learn more about the role of the internet in Pagan family values, in particular with regard to the role of the Pagan Families Blog (which originated in 2011 and is currently hosted on the Pagan Channel of Patheos). Hopefully others will continue to extend Kermani's work with more studies.

Kermani has done remarkable work in producing the first book-length study of contemporary American Pagan families. *Pagan Family Values*, while contributing something new, adds to existing literature produced by Margot Adler (*Drawing Down the Moon*, 1986), Helen A. Berger (*A Community of Witches*, 1999), as well as Berger and Douglas Ezzy's volume *Teenage Witches* (2007). It is an important study of a new religious movement in North America at a critical phase in its development: as second, third, and fourth generation contemporary Pagans come of age and enter universities. It should serve as a point of departure for further studies that revise and extend her findings. Furthermore, *Pagan Family Values*,

examining how a contemporary countercultural movement in the twenty-first century relates to mainstream North American cultures, recalls wisdom from R. Laurence Moore, *Religious Outsiders and the Making of Americans* (1986), and reminds the reader of the applicability of Moore's analysis.

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