

Gaslit Nation Transcript

14 December 2022

“The Merchant of Death Rides Again”

<https://www.patreon.com/posts/merchant-of-75895942>

[intro - theme music]

Sarah Kendzior (00:11):

I am Sarah Kendzior, the author of the bestsellers, *The View from Flyover Country* and *Hiding in Plain Sight*, and of the new book, *They Knew: How a Culture of Conspiracy Keeps America Complacent*, which is out now and makes an excellent holiday gift.

Andrea Chalupa (00:27):

I'm Andrea Chalupa, a journalist and filmmaker and the writer and producer of the journalistic thriller, *Mr. Jones*, about Stalin's genocide famine in Ukraine. And speaking of the holidays, if you've got any fascists at your holiday table this year, give them the gift of *Mr. Jones*. [bells SFX up and under]

Sarah Kendzior (00:45):

[laughs] Everyone's gonna get their gifts and just be sort of staring out, waiting for Santa to return and do refunds. But anyways, [laughs] A traumatized crowd.

Andrea Chalupa (00:55):

Yeah, so make the token fascists in your family watch *Mr. Jones*. They see what their edgelord, Master Incel Putin, is up to in Ukraine today. They will love the passive aggressive nature of that gift. [bells SFX up and under] So this is the holiday special of *Gaslit Nation*, if you haven't figured that out yet. [Santa ho-ho-ho laugh SFX]. And what else are we working on?

Sarah Kendzior (01:17):

Well first let's remember to introduce the podcast here. This is *Gaslit Nation*, a podcast covering corruption in the United States and rising autocracy around the world. This is a very special *Gaslit Nation* that is going to showcase the cumulative exhaustion of the year 2022, but all the fun [laughs] that we've been having will extend into the new year because we have a treat for you. On Tuesday, January 24th, we are going to do a live taping of the show where you can watch Andrea and I discuss a variety of political and apocalyptic and sci-fi-as-real-life issues, as we have had to do lately in real time, and also ask us your questions afterwards. And you can do that by joining our Patreon and subscribing at the Democracy Defender level or higher. We did one of these in the fall.

Sarah Kendzior (02:19):

It was really fun. It's great to get to see our audience and have them witness our various humiliations that we endure recording this fine program, so we hope to see you there. I think it's time to turn over the show to Andrea. We had a lot of news last week. One of the biggest stories was the trading of basketball player Brittney Griner, who was captured in Russia, for the notorious arms dealer, Viktor Bout, in a historic swap. So Andrea is going to fill us in on the ramifications of that.

Andrea Chalupa (02:58):

What a story. So, a lot to get through. Obviously, first and foremost, we're very grateful and happy that WNBA star Brittney Griner is home safe. That is wonderful. I mean, if that was anyone's loved one, they would move heaven and earth for that outcome. And that's great; a big sigh of relief. The thing we wanna point out though, which has been hard to watch during this whole horrific story, is the fact that Brittney Griner even went to Russia in the first place when it's extremely well known that they hate gay people there. There's been an international boycott of Russia in response to their anti-gay laws. They certainly hate Black people there. That's well known. There's a Russian member of parliament that taunted the Obamas with a banana. She did this not to their faces, but it was a thing that she did.

Andrea Chalupa (03:47):

This is so well known that when Nelson George, who was a guest on the show, he was the writer of the hip hop movement that came outta Brooklyn, we had him on an episode talking about that moment in time, what it means today, and the power of making art. Nelson, for a time, several years ago, did a travel show for Black people and one of the countries that he skipped was Russia. And what he told me at the time was that he didn't wanna go to Russia because they don't like Black people there. Why go to Russia? And so I understand that the whole Brittney Griner story has drawn attention to the ongoing problem that women athletes are just not paid as well as men by any measure. And she went to Russia to earn more money. But when you look up how much she earns at the WNBA, certainly it's not enough.

Sarah Kendzior:

Equal pay.

Andrea Chalupa (04:38):

WNBA stars should be paid more. Equal pay. But if you look up how much Brittney Griner earns a year, it's nearly a quarter of a million dollars. Yes, she should absolutely earn more but, you know, she's making a quarter of a million dollars; you do not need to risk your life to cross a picket line by going to Russia, a country that openly hates you. You know this country's been at war with Ukraine, with other neighbors. It's mass murdered civilians in Syria. It's carried out some of the worst human rights abuses against its own citizens and people around the world. It's backed up vicious dictators from the murderous millennial of North Korea to the dictator in Venezuela whose corruption has created a massive famine in Venezuela and so on—and you're crossing a picket line to go earn money in Russia when you're making a quarter of a million dollars?

Andrea Chalupa (05:33):

So now that she's home safe, I'm glad she's home safe. But we also have to talk about that. And the big message there is, for the love of God, no amount of money is worth going to Russia. Nobody should be going to Russia right now, or any sort of dictatorship. People need to stand in solidarity with the countless victims around the world who are suffering under Russian aggression. No one should go to Russia. And the trade with Viktor Bout. Viktor Bout... I'm sorry, but you have people like Michael McFaul on TV with a straight face, Michael McFaul, who gave us the Russian reset, saying, "Oh, Viktor Bout is just another evil guy in a den of vipers. He's not gonna make any difference in this war of Russia against Ukraine and global democracies. No difference whatsoever." That's entirely wrong because you know what Viktor Bout's specialty is?

Andrea Chalupa (06:24):

It's not just being another mustache-twirling, evil Russian villain. You know, this guy's nicknamed "The Merchant of Death". The Nicholas Cage character in *The Lord of War* was based on him. Viktor Bout,

notorious for getting a massive amount of weapons anywhere in the world, including inside some hostile terrain. This is a guy that helped innovate the assembly line efficiency of wars across Africa, including creating child soldiers in Africa. He's as evil as they come, through and through. But wanna know where his genius lies, that makes Viktor Bout extremely dangerous? Viktor Bout is a logistics expert. Logistics. Logistics. And one of the major areas where Russia is currently getting crushed in its genocide in Ukraine is logistics. They're getting hammered with logistics, right? Which is also because, you know, Ukraine is being very strategic with the limited deck of cards they're playing with because they're still outgunned by Russia.

Andrea Chalupa (07:33):

Russia being the second most powerful military in the world. Ukraine has had to deliberately target their logistics; blowing up factories, producing arms, blowing up weapons depots, targeting the trucks that are carting around soldiers and so on and so on. But at the same time, Viktor Bout is somebody that can bring efficiency to a very chaotic situation for Russia and that's really where the danger lies, is that Viktor Bout can basically become an adult in the room and be your substitute player that takes some other tired, tattered failing players off the field and rejuvenate all that Russia's doing. Also, Russia, as we all know and as the idiot tankies, the pro imperialist/anti-imperialist left want you to forget, Russia's an empire. Russia has these imperialistic ambitions. Russia has its hand in many different places, creating disaster wherever it goes, including propping up mass murdering dictator Assad, which gives Russia the first time ever military base on the Mediterranean, which it could use to terrorize Europe and so on.

Andrea Chalupa (08:43):

Russia has had to pull soldiers out of Syria, pull soldiers out of countries in Africa where they're terrorizing the local populations in order to prop up its failing war in Ukraine. So Viktor Bout coming along means there's more talent there—war criminal talent—to better man these other areas that have basically less cover now because the talent—the war criminal talent for Russia—is getting sucked into the Ukrainian meat grinder. And so now Viktor Bout can come along and get Syria into shape for Russia, further the African operation; he's an expert in terrorizing Africa. So Viktor Bout is going to be like a Henry Ford of war crimes for Putin, and that's not a good thing—to make the Russian War machine significantly more efficient. He's a young guy, he's still got energy left. He's still got years ahead of him. And Russia desperately needs him in this moment.

Andrea Chalupa (09:43):

And so we're going to see the Viktor Bout effect unfortunately in the months and years to come. And anyone who tries to play this down clearly has some motive. And that motive would be trying to make the Biden administration look as good as possible and trying to sort of play down that this isn't great. We should never have been in this situation because there's zero excuse to go to Russia right now. If you go to Russia, you have a target on your head. They need hostages. They need hostages in order to do what they just did. Even if we release every single Russian to them that we might have, or anybody that might be useful to them, they will still take hostages in order to have leverage over us. So for the love of God, there's zero reason to go to Russia. And it is very disappointing that Brittney Griner, who makes a quarter of a million, nearly a quarter of a million dollars a year, decided to do that. And she crossed a picket line by doing that.

Sarah Kendzior (10:40):

Yeah, I mean, I was amazed to see all of these people on Twitter who had never heard of Viktor Bout before he and Griner were both freed in the swap, trying to defend him, trying to play what he has done down. This is a notorious war criminal arms trafficker, credibly rumored to have armed Al-Qaeda, a longtime lackey of Putin, an extremely dangerous individual who is not “out of the game” as wishful

thinkers keep claiming. And, you know, as for Griner, yes, it's very good that she got out and no one should be spending their life or any time in a Russian prison, including all of the people who Russia has been putting into Russian prisons all over the world because this is a global problem. This is a transnational crisis. Viktor Bout is one of these many masters of transnational crises that is of great utility to dictators and warlords worldwide.

Sarah Kendzior (11:44):

And one thing everyone should keep in mind—we keep emphasizing this in the show—is that the Trump crime cult, which is a branch of the Putin crime cult, you know, it works like *Celebrity Apprentice*. They find these people who seem like washed up has-beens, who you just haven't heard of in a while but who have a long track record of horrific criminal activity or activity in criminal coverups, and they reinstall them. You know, we saw this with Bill Barr, we saw it with Manafort and Stone, going back to the days of the Torturers Lobby that they had in the early '80s. We saw it with the return of war criminal John Bolton. We saw it with Ghislaine Maxwell, daughter of Robert Maxwell. We see it with the continuity of Netanyahu, who is once again back in power with an extremist far right at his side.

Sarah Kendzior (12:35):

We see it with the fact that Putin has been in power for the entirety of the 21st century. They like people they can trust. They like people who have been in their inner circle, who have proven their merit, who understand, as Andrea noted, the logistics of the situation. And it's not going to be particularly hard for Viktor Bout to catch up. And, you know, for, I guess, the tankies out there, or for the Republicans—people like Donald Trump, Jr. who tried to score points on Twitter by criticizing the swap, you know, and he made some points that I agreed with, this was not a good trade and this is a national security problem for America. It was also in many ways an impossible situation for the Biden administration because of the circumstances where of course you don't wanna let an American rot in a Russian prison cell.

Sarah Kendzior (13:31):

That said, who has tried to free Viktor Bout in the past? Oh, hey, it was the Republicans! Specifically, it was former US Attorney General John Ashcroft from the George W. Bush administration, who back in 2014 was trying to get Bout released, claiming he needed a new trial, claiming he had new evidence. Preet Bahara was sympathetic to this point. Nonetheless, Bout remained in prison because he is extraordinarily dangerous. There was no move to let him out. He did not, you know, as the Biden Bots claim, “serve his time and learn his lesson”. I don't know where people get these propaganda narratives. Whoever's cooking them up for the Biden administration needs new material. The Ashcroft connection with Bout is particularly interesting because I've said, you know, Bout has worked for some of the most brutal administrations in the world, and that includes the United States.

Sarah Kendzior (14:32):

It includes the United States under George W. Bush and specifically during the Iraq War. There was an article from 2006 about him that was in *The New Republic*. I'm just gonna read a little bit of that. It says, “*The New Republic* has learned that the Defense Department has largely turned a blind eye to Bout's activities”—This is activity working with contractors in Iraq, Afghanistan, and with the United Nations in Sudan—and has continued to supply Bout with contracts in violation of the executive order and despite the fact that other more legitimate air carriers are available.” And this is not new from the United States government. This is very reminiscent of Iran Contra. And as we've noted on this show many times, Iran Contra is where this crime cult really consolidated and has continued to carry out this illicit activity through the present day.

Sarah Kendzior (15:27):

Another part of this article I'm gonna quote, this is from Paul Wolfowitz, formerly of the Bush Administration. He wrote in a January, 2005 letter that "both the US Army and the Coalition Provisional Authority in Iraq did conduct business with companies that in turn subcontracted work to second tier suppliers who leased aircraft owned by companies associated with Mr. Bout. Although we are aware of a few companies that are connected to Mr. Bout, most notably AirBoss and JetLine, we suspect Mr. Bout has other companies or enterprises unknown to the government." So think about this for a second. Think about the fact that Bout had been working with warlords and terrorists and dictators all over the world, knows their secrets, knows their crimes and their hypocrisies, was aiding the US government—aiding the Pentagon—in the immediate 9/11 aftermath while allegedly funding Al-Qaeda in the runup to 9/11.

Sarah Kendzior (16:29):

So this is an individual who may have a wealth of information about 9/11, which is a subject that I do not think was thoroughly investigated in its time due to fear of being labeled, you know, a conspiracy theorist thanks to the contamination of that movement by propagandists like Alex Jones, due to the trauma of the attacks themselves, which naturally stirred a kind of defensive patriotic posture. But the 9/11 Commission did a terrible job. 9/11 was obviously used as a pretext to go to war in Iraq. I don't think anybody doubts that at this point. And so it's worth going back and looking at a lot of the beneficiaries of this conflict. And one of the beneficiaries is Viktor Bout, who is now going to return to Russia. He's already being paraded on RT, along with Maria Butina, the NRA lackey and spy who the United States also let go.

(17:27):

So again, for the Republicans out there, that was what Trump did. Trump created a lot of these circumstances because Trump is a Kremlin asset. Bout went on and did his little, you know, his best Matt Taibbi, Bari Weiss imitation, going on and on about evil transgender people and how there's 72 genders—I kept thinking of the 72 virgins line from the 9/11 hijacking—and, you know, making himself a propaganda face for a new generation of Russians who may not know who he is. That's why Butina, I think, was selected to introduce him in that context. So, yes, people should be alarmed by this. And I'm alarmed by the lack of alarm. It's like, yes, there are many, many arms dealers and warlords and evil individuals and mafiosos to choose from in this day and age who you can hire out to do your horrific work. That doesn't make Bout himself any less dangerous. He's coming in with expertise and he's coming in with intelligence on everybody, so folks should be aware of that.

Andrea Chalupa (18:40):

Russia and China have been making massive inroads across the continent in Africa as the US has been pulling out. That was all really ramped up during Rex Tillerson. Remember Rex Tillerson, the former CEO of Exxon, who became our Secretary of State. So that Trump's US and Putin's Russia could get rid of sanctions and drill together in the Arctic, make a bunch of money together. That's according to member of Congress, Maxine Waters, and so on, right? So, as part of his role in helping dismantle US democracy in the Trump years was basically coming out and saying the State Department doesn't stand up for human rights and pulling us out of Africa, where the US does have programs helping fund anti-corruption reformers and independent journalists and so on. So what's Russia doing in Africa? Russia has a presence in CAR (the Central African Republic), Mozambique, Libya, and Mali, where they're committing massive amounts of war crimes.

Andrea Chalupa (19:38):

They have what's called Wagner, a mercenary group that's an extension of the Russian military. It's privately owned and operated by a close Russian oligarch to Putin, a man that looks like a piranha. His head looks like a piranha. He's got the mouth and teeth of a piranha and just the weird dead-eye look of

a piranha. His name is Prigozhin and he is known as “Putin’s chef”. His celebrity status in Russia has gone up as he is in this civil war against the clown car running Russia's Ministry of Defense and the FSB. They're all in this big pissing contest. They're sharks and they smell blood in the water. Putin led this disastrous war and now Prigozhin versus his political rivals, they're all trying to fight each other to see who's gonna emerge as the hero to save Russia from this disastrous situation.

Andrea Chalupa (20:27):

And they're all sort of tripping over their shoelaces because it was a doomed effort to begin with for a variety of reasons. Because of corruption. They're trying to basically enslave a free people and they just can't do it. It's hard. What I'm saying is that in the meantime, Russia has a massive operation inside Africa and I want to slow it down for people what that means. For instance, there was a horrific story coming out from several outlets that in the Central African Republic, drunk Russian mercenaries stormed a maternity hospital and raped women who had just given birth. That's Russia in Africa. And that story barely made a blip, barely made a blip. I don't think most people are aware of that. Imagine having just given birth and getting raped by a drunk Russian mercenary. Apparently that happened several times. So that's Russia in Africa. That's what Russia's doing.

Andrea Chalupa (21:24):

And Viktor Bout is going to allow that to happen more and more and more and in further places because he's going to increase the efficiency of Russia's war crime machine, right? So that's what's happened. And as Sarah pointed out, war criminals are all in bed together. George W. Bush worked with Bout in Iraq for his invasion where hundreds of thousands of civilians were needlessly killed by George W. Bush. Viktor Bout helped in that effort. What's really interesting to watch is that Putin is done. Putin just canceled his marathon end-of-the-year speech. First time he's done this in 10 years. There's also a video of Putin recently where he's holding a glass of champagne and slurring and blaming Ukraine for starting Russia's genocidal war. The fact that he appears drunk in this video is extremely important because alcoholism in Russia is obviously a problem. Drinking too much and collapsing the street is an issue there.

Andrea Chalupa (22:20):

Yeltsin was a notorious drunk who oversaw a chaotic period known as the Car Bomb 1990s. So Putin comes in, an extremely sober and serious figure, and brings stability to Russia. And that's the social contract that Russians have with him. He is the serious, strong, hardline leader and in return, Russians get stability. Well, no more, because the Car Bomb '90s are back and now Putin is drunk. And now he's canceling his major end-of-the-year speech. First time he has done this in 10 years. And there's also a fun rumor that's out there that's been reported on—it may just be a rumor—that Putin fell down the stairs and shit himself. And all of this is happening against the backdrop for Russians of Ukrainians consolidating their efforts and positioning themselves to liberate Crimea, which one military expert General Ben Hodges believes could be liberated by August, which is major because in Crimea, it's been a cesspool of human rights violations since the Russian occupation, especially against the indigenous group, Crimean Tatars, who have been repressed, who have been arrested, who've had their media shut down.

Andrea Chalupa (23:26):

You know, people beaten a death, tortured and so on since the start of the occupation of Crimea in 2014. So Ukraine is going for it. Ukraine is going for it. We're seeing signs of partisan resistance in Crimea. Russians went from being untouchable to suddenly digging trenches in Crimea. Russian army barracks in Crimea of fully mobilized Russian troops blew up into a fiery blaze, and so did a shopping mall in Moscow. So the war Russia started has come home to Russians and drunk Putin—canceling his a big

end-of-the-year speech for the first time in 10 years—is to blame for this. And everyone knows this, and the sharks around Putin smell blood in the water. Putin is done. So what comes next? Well, Viktor Bout is back. He's obviously going to be put to work and that is going to free up Prigozhin to make his move to maybe fill the power vacuum that could be there should Putin not last another year in power, should Putin, you know, go to bed one night and not wake up.

Andrea Chalupa (24:27):

So we'll see what happens there. It's going to be very interesting. And those are some things to look out for. I wanna point out the one silver lining to this whole thing is that Viktor Bout was once considered untouchable, and the operation by the DEA to get him was called Operation Relentless. And all I wanna say is we need an Operation Relentless to finally get Trump and all the others, including the insurrectionists still in Congress, who were sending these text messages around January 6th saying, "Call in martial law." We need an Operation Relentless for all the people who seem untouchable now.

Sarah Kendzior (25:07):

Yeah, absolutely. And if we sound, you know, somewhat discombobulated in this show, I think it's because—

Andrea Chalupa (25:13):

Because the holidays and we're letting it all out.

Sarah Kendzior (25:15):

It's the holidays, it's Festivus... Although it's Festivus every week on *Gaslit Nation*. But the headlines sound like something out of a dystopian nightmare. You know, it's evil tech barons backed by Nazis and coup plotters immersed in cults involved in pedophile trafficking as artificial intelligence produces monsters, produces robot police dogs. It's like the news was written by Bill Barr's dad, the noted sci-fi writer of *Space Relations*, a novel he wrote—which I read parts of, taking one for the team here on *Gaslit Nation*—about intergalactic pedophile rings. You know, purely coincidental that this is the guy who hired Jeffrey Epstein. So I'm gonna switch gears here and start talking about financial crimes. This little portion of the show, which I will call Defund the Pelosi, is inspired by Elon Musk.

Sarah Kendzior (26:18):

You could say it's brought to us by Elon Musk since there's quite literally financial investments that are going to be discussed here. And, you know, we're both so sick of Elon Musk. We're on Twitter. We have to witness this circus of pain on a daily basis. It's genuinely frightening and alarming in many ways, the threats that it has inspired and so forth, but it's also... Ugh, God. We are seeing the culmination of a lot of criminality, a lot of extremism that people wanted to look the other way at for their own personal gain, their profit margins, or maybe their failed Silicon Valley idealism, and now they're being confronted with it. Anyway, I'm gonna talk about Paul Pelosi and Nancy Pelosi and stock trading because over the weekend I learned something interesting, which is that Paul Pelosi, one of the biggest investments that he has is in Tesla.

Sarah Kendzior (27:21):

And I'm gonna get into the details of this, but there was a report about this from *Business Insider*, and I asked the editor, given that Elon Musk accused Paul Pelosi of fabricating being bludgeoned on the head with a hammer, and then Musk then accused Pelosi of using that as a cover story for a rendezvous gone wrong with a gay prostitute. You know, "Did the Pelosi's drop their millions and millions of dollars of stock in Tesla?" And he said, "No." To his knowledge, they still have it. which I find just exceptionally

weird. But anyway, I'm gonna start from the beginning, which is the allegations of insider stock trading against Nancy Pelosi and the broad movement to forbid members of Congress from owning stock and trading stock, and also forbid their spouses because there has been an enormous increase in the wealth of Congress.

(28:17):

This is a political body of millionaires and billionaires, not just out of touch with the average American, but with an incentive to stay out of touch with the average American and work purely for their donors. So since 2021, Paul Pelosi, Nancy Pelosi's husband, has traded tens of millions of dollars in stock and stock options. He is a beneficiary of the massive wealth transfer that has taken place since Covid 19, you know, where you have like a trillion dollars that's gone upward. His wealth is one of the main reasons that Nancy Pelosi has been reluctant to back a popular bill to ban spouses of representatives from owning and trading stocks. Madison Hall, a reporter at *Business Insider*, noted "Pelosi has access to confidential intelligence and the power to effect with words or actions the fortunes of companies in which her husband invests in trades."

Sarah Kendzior (29:16):

And so, you know, Pelosi has been accused of insider trading for over a decade. There are videos of her being confronted about this during the early years of the Obama administration. She generally refuses to answer questions, much like she refuses public debates for her entire tenure in office. The accusations have increased in recent years, along with their fortune, which is estimated to be at least \$46 million, making Pelosi the 14th wealthiest member of Congress. As everyone knows, the Pelosis have had a rough year in general, particularly with the law. They began the year, as I said, raking in millions of dollars in stocks with a windfall from Tesla. In March, Paul Pelosi, and I'm gonna quote *Business Insider* here again since I don't understand stocks since I am not of this rarefied class.

Sarah Kendzior (30:10):

"Paul Pelosi exercised 25 call options, or 2,500 shares of Tesla, at a strike price of \$500 together valued between 1 million and 5 million." And so, yeah, he's a major investor in Musk's company and he has stayed there despite the attack. A few months later in August, 2022, Paul Pelosi was arrested for DUI. The year only got worse from there because, as we all know, in October, police reported that Paul Pelosi was attacked in the dead of night by a hammer-wielding maniac and he ended up in the hospital in serious condition. We covered this attack in a previous episode, as well as the various rumors about it spread by people like Musk. And I wanna just make this very clear here, which is that one, obviously no one deserves to get bludgeoned with a hammer regardless if they've engaged in improper stock activity.

Sarah Kendzior (31:15):

I mean, there's no excuse for an attack like this and this certainly isn't an attempt to imply that there is. Second, there is no evidence for Musk's claims. There's no evidence for the claims that Paul Pelosi was voluntarily engaged with a gay prostitute. This is a story that he made up. That said, as Musk unleashed this tale, I started digging into, well, you know, who is the attacker and what did happen with the attack? I wanted to make sure I got the facts correct on this and I also wanted to respect the sensitivity of the situation because, you know, it is very frightening. It is a big story if the husband of the third most powerful person in the US government is attacked in this way, especially in the context of a broader rise of political violence.

Sarah Kendzior (32:04):

So it's important to look at, well, who is behind this violence? What is inspiring them? What is their network? How did this happen? So I'm gonna run through this story today and what I found. This is a very, very strange tale. This is a strange episode. This is gonna tap into my dystopian sci-fi feeling.



Anyway, the man who attacked Paul Pelosi is named Dennis Depe. At the time, there was a lot of debate about his political affiliations and his motivations because neither the Democrats nor the Republicans want to claim a hammer-wielding maniac as one of their own. I don't think he really fits neatly into a political category. I looked at his website before it was removed along with a lot of the other primary source materials about this guy and his network.

Sarah Kendzior (32:53):

He was basically a sponge for conspiracies of all kinds. According to his friends though, the theory that basically broke his brain was Pizzagate, the belief that the Democrats are involved in a satanic child trafficking cabal run out of a pizza parlor. This theory was launched in 2016 with the help of people like Michael Flynn and was a precursor to Qanon. As I wrote in my book, *They Knew*, this was a form of preemptive narrative inversion. Pizzagate served to divert attention away from the real Jeffrey Epstein/Ghislaine Maxwell pedophile trafficking ring, a ring which implicates members of both parties, including Trump, who was accused in court of rape by an Epstein-trafficked victim, and also with Bill Clinton, who socialized with Epstein on multiple occasions. And so therefore, if Epstein were to be discussed during the 2016 election, that would be bad for both candidates.

Sarah Kendzior (33:54):

And so there was a very harsh effort to suppress the story coming mostly from the Trump end, including death threats to victims and to their lawyers. I will also make clear there's no credence to the claim that there was a trafficking child sex dungeon run out of Comet Ping Pong in Washington, DC., for the record. So there's that, but where the story gets really weird—we're not even close to the weird stuff yet—is that Dennis Depape was a decades-long associate of a woman named Gypsy Taub. Gypsy Taub's real name is Oxana Chornenky. She's from Russia originally. Gypsy Taub attempted to abduct a 14-year-old boy, allegedly to force him into sexual acts, and she is now in prison for child abuse. She's been there for three years. She comes from a family that is seemingly obsessed with scientific developments and technology, ritualistic sex practices and the occult.

Sarah Kendzior (35:02):

And so you have to wonder if DePape's interest in something like Pizzagate, which also combined all of these topics, was maybe spurred by the criminal woman with whom he was residing for over a decade and was in a relationship with on and off. And this gets even more complex because Tau's brother who, as I will describe, also has a long history with secret societies, was working first for the Trump administration in 2019 and then for the Biden administration on—and I'm gonna quote—"artificial intelligence and public health". So those are two phrases I, generally speaking, don't like to see together, but definitely not in this context. And so I just kept looking to see, well, you know, why in the world are all these people connected? What are the odds here? So again, I'll break this down as best I can.

Sarah Kendzior (35:57):

Gypsy Taub, aka Oxana Chornenky, was best known for being a nudist activist in San Francisco. And when I was reading about her history of activism, I immediately thought that this was reminiscent of the tactics of Alex Jones because she would do things like insert herself into what I think are worthy causes, like the initial offshoot of the 9/11 Truth Movement where they were genuinely trying to get to the bottom of intelligence failures and so forth, and then behaves outlandishly to divert attention to herself and to her wild claims and her wild behavior, and thereby tarnishes the rest of the activists by proxy. And she did this with other causes as well. At first I thought this was just a similarity. I recently discovered that they know each other and she appeared on his show multiple times. A lot of those episodes are now gone.

Sarah Kendzior (36:51):

I don't know the extent of their relationship. Going back a little further, Taub arrived in the United States in the late 1980s after her father was appointed to be a professor at MIT. There were a really strangely large amount of puff pieces written about her in San Francisco for someone who lives their life as a "nudist activist", but none of the articles accurately described her family's history. They all present her as this sort of, you know, striver coming over from poverty in Russia and living here until she could accumulate enough wealth to bring her family over. And, and none of that is true. Her father is Victor Chornenky, a biomedical scientist who began teaching at MIT in 1989 and then he moved on to private medical companies. She appears to have arrived with him in tandem.

Sarah Kendzior (37:46):

In the Soviet Union, they were quite wealthy, especially for people living during that declining time, and they immigrated during the end of the Gorbachev era. Instead of attending MIT where her father was working, according to *The San Francisco Chronicle*, Taub chose to begin working at a strip club at which, and I'm quoting them, "obscenely young girls performed". And so this article does not specify how obscenely young the girls with whom Taub was working were, but the whole story, of course, reminds me of the type of puff pieces that were put out about Jeffrey Epstein at around the same time, where they really try to gloss this over, make it look normal. Taub then became an activist who specialized in encouraging public child nudity. And even *The San Francisco Chronicle* flinched at this and they described her public exploitation of her own children as follows.

Sarah Kendzior (38:45):

And I quote, "A trio of nude kids, two of whom are visibly pubescent, is taboo enough to make some observers question Taub's parental ethics." You think? She wasn't just limited to encouraging child nudity. On the side, Taub was experimenting with psychoactive substances that she claimed could alter people's minds and she attempted to sell them to people. As she was doing that, she went back to Russia, got married to a Russian man who then promptly committed suicide, and then after that she started doing porn. But mostly she was working in the psychedelic and child nudity trades. One of the people that she drugged with psychedelics was DePape, who she lived with, as I said, for over a decade. It is not clear if he was a willing participant here, because on his blog, he accused her of drugging him and trying to install fake memories and fake viewpoints.

Sarah Kendzior (39:48):

You have to take that with a giant grain of salt, you know, because he said a lot of things on that blog that weren't true. It was a blog full of lies. This is a very unusually unsavory character. We cover a lot of really awful people on this show and she's just really a frightening person, which is why I'm kind of wondering, of all the people in the world to be tangentially related to the attack on Paul Pelosi, what exactly is going on here? She had her own website in which she described her psychoactive experiments. That website has now been taken offline. You could access it though through web archive. I'll put some links in the show notes. I'm gonna move on now to her family, because this is another interesting aspect of this.

Sarah Kendzior (40:30):

Her younger brother, Dennis Chornenky, seems to have immigrated along with the rest of the family in the late 1980s when he was a child. And as a 20-something in the 2000s, he did things like he went to work for Wells Fargo while single-handedly reviving the Freemason movement in San Francisco. And so, no, that's not a joke. Dennis Chornenky was so into the Freemasons, as a 20-something, that he brought back the Masonic order, became the president of the San Francisco branch, and wrote a large number of papers on initiation and rights. Much like his sister, he was emphasizing the ability to transform another person's mind outside of their will. This is the first paragraph of one of the many papers he wrote on the

topic. I'm gonna quote: "The terms Initiation, mystery, and salvation are deeply interrelated within the context of the teachings of the ancient Greco-Roman Mystery schools."

Sarah Kendzior (41:28):

"The main thesis is that the three terms combine to create a secret triad, which forms the esoteric teaching of rebirth found in most initiatic organizations." So this is a guy very into the Masons and just generally speaking into a cult philosophy. So, what's he doing now? Well, after he revived the Freemasons in San Francisco, he decided to move into the high finance and experimental technology sectors, after which he was selected by the Trump administration to be a Presidential Fellow. And so this is from his biography, still up on the US Government's website: "Dennis Chornenky is a senior advisor and strategy consultant in artificial intelligence and emerging technology with 20 years of experience in healthcare technology and financial services. He advises Fortune 500 companies, policy makers and startups. Throughout his business career, Dennis has managed senior leadership teams, M&A deal teams and product development and sales teams."

Sarah Kendzior (42:33):

"His experience includes investment banking at Lazard, alternative investments and trading business at Morgan Stanley, and founding an AI-driven telemedicine startup in Silicon Valley and a drone startup at MIT." And so he stayed there. He was reappointed by the Biden administration and left seemingly quite recently, sometime in 2022, to go work on artificial intelligence in healthcare in the private sector at the company, Optum. And so nothing about Dennis Chornenky and his government ties was mentioned in any of the coverage of DePape that I found and I'm gonna assume in good faith that it's because he's not tied to that attack. I don't see any indication of his involvement. I'm bringing him up because I find this all very creepy in its own right, and it becomes weirder the more you look at the rest of the family.

Sarah Kendzior (43:33):

And so we can go to the third Chornenky sibling, named Diana, who is also the subject of a *San Francisco Chronicle* puff piece. And again, I'm kind of wondering how these folks got in the paper so much. So while her brother was reviving the Masons and her sister was drugging people and parading around naked children, Diana started an organization called Women's Temple, which she described as a place where she would bring women to perform sexual acts on each other until, in her view, they "found God". She was also obsessed with the a cult, in particular the group Lazarus, while maintaining a number of romantic relationships with scientists and state officials in both the United States and Russia. So this is somebody operating at a fairly elite and rarefied strata of society while also in a position to witness a variety of sexual encounters and basically work as an observer with vital information.

Sarah Kendzior (44:40):

I mean, you're probably like, "Well, what is the point of all this?" And there is no point. Sometimes something just strikes me as emblematic of our time. When I Googled this guy, when I started digging into his background, I did not expect to find all this. I did not expect to find artificial intelligence and sex cults and the Masons and an imprisoned attempted child abductor. I thought this was just sort of a nut or a homicidal maniac who had a political agenda against the Pelosi family because that's how he was portrayed in the paper. It's also quite interesting to me that Musk invented this other narrative about Paul Pelosi, one that involves these sort of underground sex ties, you know, a narrative that I said that's doesn't seem to be based in anything real.

Sarah Kendzior (45:36):

But if you wanted to come up with the story to distract from this broader network that DePape was in, at least by his contact with Gypsy Taub and her family members, that's a pretty good way to do it. I'm sure there's some of you listening to me tell you this story thinking, well, this sounds nuts, or she sounds like

one of those people with the red string on the board. And to some degree it's because, you know, this is a crazy story. This is a crazy amalgamation of people. But it's also because Musk has planted the seeds in your mind of false narration. And so, because this attack was so abhorrent, because this was so violent, you certainly don't want to seem like you're justifying it or blaming the victim in some way, but what this does is it discourages people into digging into any of this, asking any kind of legitimate questions.

Sarah Kendzior (46:26):

And so, yeah, at this point it's been a month. A lot of the primary sources that I dug up back then have been deleted. I still have the copies of them. And yeah, I just think all of this is worth looking into, especially when you consider Elon Musk's own ties to people like Ghislaine Maxwell, with whom he has been photographed, to Epstein, who we know he at least met at meetings and parties involving people in Silicon Valley involving people interested in technology like the Edge Foundation and so forth. There's a lot of very frightening overlap between criminality, interest in topics like eugenics or artificial intelligence, and just these plans and schemes of people like Epstein, who at one point wanted to take the girls that he was abducting and trafficking and impregnate them with his sperm because he viewed himself as a genetically superior individual.

Sarah Kendzior (47:26):

And then there are all these other theories that Musk and Peter Thiel and people working in the technology field are into, like long-termism. All of these sadistic philosophies that are utterly disinterested in improving our lives in the present and are, in fact, deeply interested in making it worse. These are accelerationist and they work with dictators. They work with the worst financiers and they compromise Congress through the fact that we don't have campaign finance reform and that congresspeople are making enormous amounts of money through their investments and are bolstered by a donor network which is their real base, whereas they're supposed to be working for the American people. So yeah, a complicated web. I don't know. Andrea, do you have any thoughts or should we just send our audience to ruminate on that one for a while?

Andrea Chalupa (48:23):

That was like an ad advent calendar of grossness.

Sarah Kendzior (48:27):

Yes! Yes.

Andrea Chalupa (48:28):

That's my comment [laughs]. But it reminds me so much of Walter Duranty and that whole underworld because that's what first was my gateway drug into writing *Mr. Jones*, was how Walter Duranty was having these black magic sex orgies with Allister Crowley and all the disgusting stuff that they were up to. I swear, if you wanna find the criminals, [laughs], if you wanna know where the crimes are gonna happen before they happen, target the—

Sarah Kendzior (48:56):

Ultra rich?

Andrea Chalupa:

Yeah.

Sarah Kendzior:

It's just, it's wild to me. It's like these billionaires and political operatives with all of this money, all of this freedom that average people don't have simply trying to survive, this is where they choose to spend their time. And, you know, you might think this episode is very prurient, very salacious. That, again, was not my intention. Just as when Andrea was researching *Mr. Jones*, she wasn't looking to find satanic orgies or child trafficking or all these other things that we are continually finding when we investigate the political sphere. And I guess I'll just end on that, which is the reason there are so many conspiracy theories, many of them baseless—like the one about Paul Pelosi and a gay hooker—is because there is so much unpunished criminality of such sadistic, horrific proportions that it's just mind blowing.

Sarah Kendzior (49:57):

Something like Epstein and Maxwell, when you consider that it was allowed to continue for decades on end with people in power fully aware that it was happening doing nothing to stop it, when you read about this, when you see the accounts of the victims, you of course wonder what else is going on. And then you see a congressional body utterly unwilling to investigate it because it implicates them either as participants or witnesses or it implicates their donor network. You see a media unwilling to investigate it on the whole for some of those same reasons, but also they're afraid of looking crazy. They're afraid of looking like Alex Jones. They're afraid of looking like alarmists. And in my book, *They Knew*, I go into all these dynamics. But with Musk buying Twitter and the return of a lot of people who were banned from the network, in part for sharing libelous conspiracy theories, which, you know, I think are different than just wild ones.

Sarah Kendzior (50:58):

I think everyone has the right to say whatever they want to. It crosses a point when it leads to threats on innocent people. But the reason that this subculture is flourishing is because of a lack of accountability for criminal elites. If you want this subculture to go away or diminish, you need to reveal the full truth of all of these situations to the American public. You need complete brutal honesty. You need transparency. And I was hopeful in 2020 that we would finally start to get that because I saw no other way out of this entrenched corruption unless Americans and the Americans that work in agencies of accountability were willing to confront their own crimes and their institutions abetting of those crimes for decades on end, with Epstein being the most notable example.

Sarah Kendzior (51:51):

Instead, they moved completely the other way. They won't investigate anything. I mean, when it comes to something like the Pandemic, you know, which a lot of people have questions just about the handling of it, where it began, why isn't it being stopped? We just hear, "It doesn't exist." We hear things like, "The pandemic is over." That's the mentality of the Biden administration is that these problems aren't real. They're done, we're moving forward. Occasionally they kind of stick their heads out and are like, "Oh, hey, look, Nazis insurrectionists. Perhaps we should do something about that. Perhaps we should make a speech about democracy and how democracy is good and Nazis are bad," but they're reluctant. They have to be dragged into doing that. So if they're reluctant to vouch for democracy, they're not going to do the very difficult work of gutting out corruption, especially when it involves billions of dollars in financial corruption and espionage networks and so forth. So I don't know if we will know the truth, but I know that it's still worth looking.

[outro - music up and under, roll credits]

Andrea Chalupa (01:02:59):

Our discussion continues and you can get access to that bystanding up on our Patreon at the truth teller level or higher.

Sarah Kendzior (01:03:06):

We want to encourage you to donate to your local food bank, which is experiencing a spike in demand. We also encourage you to donate to Oil Change International, an advocacy group supported with the generous donation from the Greta Thunberg Foundation that exposes the true cost of fossil fuels and facilitates the ongoing transition to clean energy.

Andrea Chalupa (01:03:26):

We encourage you to help support Ukraine by donating to Razom for Ukraine at [razomforukraine.org](http://razomforukraine.org). We also encourage you to donate to the International Rescue Committee, a humanitarian relief organization helping refugees from Ukraine, Syria, and Afghanistan. Donate at [rescue.org](http://rescue.org). And if you want to help critically endangered orangutans already under pressure from the palm oil industry, donate to the Orangutan Project at [theorangutangproject.org](http://theorangutangproject.org).

*Gaslit Nation* is produced by Sarah Kendzior and Andrea Chalupa. If you like what we do, leave us a review on iTunes; it helps us reach more listeners. And check out our Patreon; it keeps us going.

Sarah Kendzior (01:04:03):

Our production manager is Nicholas Torres and our associate producer is Karlyn Daigle. Our episodes are edited by Nicholas Torres and our Patreon exclusive content is edited by Karlyn Daigle.

Andrea Chalupa (01:04:15):

Original music in *Gaslit Nation* is produced by David Whitehead, Martin Vissenberg, Nik Farr, Demian Arriaga, and Karlyn Daigle.

Sarah Kendzior (01:04:23):

Our logo design was donated to us by Hamish Smyth of the New York-based firm, Order. Thank you so much. Hamish

Andrea Chalupa (01:04:29):

*Gaslit Nation* would like to thank our supporters at the Producer level on Patreon and Higher...