

European Newspaper Coverage of the Eldorado Raid: Selected References

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“The horror of plural wifery cannot be described in words ... immorality ... has among the Mormons been owned and sanctified with the sacred name of marriage. Oh the greatness of depravity!” exclaimed a Finnish newspaper on April 9, 1886. Precisely 122 years later to the day, another paper in the same country reported on how “Authorities evacuated 401 children and 133 women from the closed base of a Mormon sect in Eldorado, Texas,” headlining its story “Abuse ended abruptly.”¹

The concept of religiously mandated plural marriage, more particularly polygyny and especially in connection with Mormonism, is indeed not a novelty to Europeans. During the nineteenth century, plural marriage was most probably Mormonism’s defining characteristic at least in the minds of those not personally connected to the movement. Numerous articles, books, exposés, and travel narratives covering this unconventional practice as manifested in Mormonism were published for European readers.² While some sought to make sense out of it, many publications scandalized it and warned the public against the perceived white slavery embodied by this type of marital arrangement. The practice of plural marriage was framed foremost as a moral issue, one crying out for decent citizens everywhere to take action to eradicate it.

Even after the Mormon mainstream abandoned plural marriage in the early 20th century,³ it has remained one of the chief mental associations to Mormonism among Europeans. This association is

¹ See “Mormoonilaisuus,” *Sanomia Turusta*, 9 April 1886, p. 3, and “Hyväksikäytölle tuli äkkiloppu,” *Savon Sanomat*, 9 April 2008, p. A9. The translations into English are those of this author.

² For a couple of examples, see Maria N. Ward, *Female life among the Mormons: a narrative of many years’ personal experience* (London: G. Routledge, 1855) and W. G. Marshall, *Through America: or, Nine months in the United States* (London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle, & Rivington, 1881) and their various European translations.

³ Although declared to be abandoned in 1890, the practice continued in a smaller scale for a number of years. See for example B. Carmon Hardy, *Solemn Covenant: The Mormon Polygamous Passage* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1992).

strengthened through sporadic news reports on polygynous fundamentalist Mormonism in the United States. Most recently this took place in the spring of 2008 through wide coverage of the Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (FLDS) and its Yearning for Zion ranch in Eldorado, Texas, due to the raid carried out by state authorities.

The greatest interest towards the Eldorado raid was naturally displayed in the host society, the United States. Media coverage was wide, with the matter discussed in news broadcasts and newspapers around the country, and for example on several episodes of the nationwide Larry King Live television show. Discussion on the matter was not restricted to the United States, however. Europe, for example, was another place where the topic was dealt with (see Fig. 1), not least because of its – in numerous ways – unusual magnitude and implications. While much of the reporting focused on child abuse, framed its narrative in a discourse of othering and did not seek to understand the FLDS church, the handling of the issue could to some extent also be nuanced, pondering for example the legal implications of the case and the rights of the FLDS mothers and fathers to their children.



Figure 1. European newspaper headlines and articles related to the Eldorado raid.

A selected list of references is here provided concerning the newspaper coverage of the Eldorado raid in nineteen European countries in a variety of languages. Other print media such as periodicals and magazines are not included. The list has been gathered by consulting electronic databases and following newspapers closely during this event. In terms of time, the references focus on the month of April 2008, during which the raid was carried out and the investigations of the state officials were reported to the media. A handful of references are also provided for May and June 2008, during which it became clear that the FLDS children would be returned to their parents by court order.

The references should not be regarded as a representative sample of all European print media coverage of the Eldorado raid; rather they are provided as helpful starting points for further research. For example, it is hoped that these references will assist scholars who desire to extend their view beyond the FLDS host society of the United States in evaluating how the Eldorado raid and its attendant issues and problems were framed in public treatment. They will also aid those wishing to examine the factual correctness of and the attitudes inherent in the media coverage – even the mere headlines included here tell their own story. Finally, it is hoped that the references will be helpful to those who conduct cross-national research concerning public discourse on religions and social groups that exist in significant tension with their host societies. Such examinations will naturally benefit further from an even more extensive sample of newspaper coverage than the preliminary list provided here.

Selected newspaper coverage of the Eldorado raid in 19 European countries, organized by country and chronologically

Austria

“Die Kinder der Polygamie-Ranch,” *Die Presse*, April 7, p. 6; in *Vorarlberger Nachrichten*: “130 Kinder aus Sekte befreit,” April 7, p. D8, “Sekten-Ranch wird geräumt,” April 9, p. D10, and

“Zwangsehen und sexueller Missbrauch,” April 10, p. D8; in *Salzburger Nachrichten*: “Polygame Sekte erhält Kinder zurück,” May 31, p. 31 and “Gericht verfügt Heimkehr der Sektenkinder,” June 4, p. 10.

Belgium

“52 filles évacuées d'une secte polygame,” *La Nouvelle Gazette*, April 6, p. 7, “Razzia policière dans une secte polygame,” *La Libre Belgique*, April 7, p. 10, “Tous les enfants du ranch sont évacués: Les autorités traquaient des mormons polygames,” *La Nouvelle Gazette*, April 13, p. 10; in *De Morgen*: “Texas mocht kinderen niet uit sekte halen,” May 24, p. 20, “Amerikaans hof stuurt Texaanse sektekinderen terug naar huis,” May 31, p. 19, and “Sektekinderen Texas terug bij ouders,” June 3, p. 1; “Sekte-ouders krijgen hun kinderen terug,” *Het Belang Van Limburg*, June 4, p. 17.

Denmark

In *Politiken*: “183 fjernet fra mormonsekt,” April 7, p. 8 and “400 børn fjernet fra fundamentalistisk sekt,” April 9, p. 14; “Sex-sekt tuder,” *Ekstra Bladet*, April 12, p. 10; in *Jyllands-Posten*: “Flerkoneri på prærien,” April 14, p. 12 and “Strid om sektens børn,” April 15, p. 9; “Sex-sekt dna-testes,” *Ekstra Bladet*, April 21, p. 15, “Børn sendt tilbage til flerkoneri,” *Jyllands-Posten*, May 31, p. 7; feature in *Ekstra Bladet* on June 29: “Børn misbruges i hellig sekt,” p. 26-27 and “De smed mig ud midt om natten,” p. 28-29.

Finland

“Yli 400 lasta otettiin huostaan uskonlahkon tilalta Texasissa,” *Helsingin Sanomat*, April 9, p. B2, “Hyväksikäytölle tuli äkkiloppu,” *Savon Sanomat*, April 9, p. A9, “Lapset halutaan turvaan lahkolta,” *Iltalehti*, April 19, p. 26-27, “Oikeus päätti lahkoon lasten huostaanotosta,” *Aamulehti*, April 20, p. A15, “Texasilaisen ääri-lahkon työillä on paljon lapsia,” *Helsingin Sanomat*, April 30, p. B1, “Texasilaislahkon teinityöistä yli puolet on jo äitejä,” *Keskisuomalainen*, April 30, p. 16,

“Oikeus: Huostaanotto lahkoon mailta laitton,” *Ilta-Sanomat*, May 23, p. 23, “Sektbarnen kanske på väg hem,” *Hufvudstadsbladet*, May 24, p. 13, “Texasin lahkolaisten lapset palautetaan perheisiin,” *Helsingin Sanomat*, May 31, p. B4.

France

In *Liberation*: “Au Texas, une secte très polygame,” April 9, p. 10 and “Le ranch des mormons polygames,” April 12, p. 8; “Le Texas confronté aux enfants de la polygamie,” *Le Figaro*, April 21, p. 6, “Faute de preuve, la justice texane laisse filer la secte de polygames,” *Liberation*, May 24, p. 11, “Quatre cents enfants d’une secte mormone polygame restitués à leurs mères,” *Le Figaro*, May 31, p. 4.

Germany

In *Berliner Morgenpost*: “Mädchen aus Polygamie-Sekte in Texas befreit: Minderjährige wurden sexuell missbraucht,” April 6, p. 10 and “Polygamisten-Sekte: Hälfte der Mädchen schwanger,” April 30, p. 14; “Polygamisten-Razzia illegal,” *Welt Kompakt*, May 23, p. 8, “Polygamisten haben ihre Kinder zurück,” *Die Welt*, June 6, p. 32.

Iceland

In *Morgunbladid*: “Börn flutt af búgarði í Texas vegna gruns um kynferðisofbeldi,” April 7, p. 14, “Grunaðir um misnotkun,” April 11, p. 17, and “Börnin aftur heim,” June 3, p. 17.

Italy

“I bimbi e le ragazze, poligami alla sbarra,” *Corriere della Sera*, April 18, p. 21, “Ranch poligami, 31 ragazze su 53 incinta,” *Libero*, April 30, p. 21.

Liechtenstein

In *Liechtensteiner Volksblatt*: “Sekten-Ranch wird geräumt: Hunderte Kinder und Frauen von Polygamisten-Sekte weggebracht,” April 9, p. 29, “Kinder von Polygamisten-Sekte rechtswidrig befreit,” May 23, p. 44, and “Kinder müssen zu Sekte zurückkehren,” May 31, p. 32.

Luxembourg

“Descente dans une secte polygame,” *La Voix du Luxembourg*, April 7, p. 16.

The Netherlands

“Politie halt vijftig meisjes weg bij sekte,” *Nederlands Dagblad*, April 7, p. 5, “‘Veel meer kinderen misbruikt door sekte’,” *Algemeen Dagblad*, April 10, p. 14, “Helse broedmachine,” *De Volkskrant*, April 14, p. 9, “Ruim helft meisjes sekte Texas zwanger,” *Nederlands Dagblad*, April 30, p. 2, and “Kinderen sekte terug bij ouders,” *NRC Handelsblad*, May 23, p. 4.

Norway

In *Aftenposten*: “183 sektmedlemmer fjernet fra ranch i Texas,” April 7, p. 12, and “Sekt mistenkes for mishandling,” April 11, p. 12, and “Barn i sekt sendes hjem,” May 31, p. 12; “Sekt får barna,” *Stavanger Aftenblad*, May 31, p. 16.

Portugal

In *Publico*: “Mais de 50 raparigas resgatadas de um rancho mórmon polígamo no Texas,” April 6, p. 17, “As perguntas incómodas do Eldorado,” April 9, p. 52-53, and “463 crianças retiradas a uma seita polígama do Texas começaram a ser entregues aos pais,” June 3, p. 19.

Romania

“Sok főfájást okoznak a szakadár szekták,” *Bihari Naplo*, April 18, p. 18.

Russia

“Сектанты из Техаса основали секс-Эльдорадо,” *Izvestiia*, April 7, p. 5, “Сектанты из Техаса основали секс-Эльдорадо,” *Izvestia Moscow edition*, April 7, p. 3, “Рейд на ранчо многоженцев в Техасе,” *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, April 7, p. 9, and (with English headline “Texas judge allows polygamist sect to retrieve children”) “Техасский суд позволил секте многоженцев вернуть своих детей,” *Kommersant*, June 4, p. 12.

Spain

“La Policía rescata a más de un centenar de niñas de una secta poligámica en Texas,” *ABC*, April 6, p. 38, “Rescatados 137 niños de una secta poligámica en Texas,” *La Vanguardia*, April 6, p. 6.

Sweden

“52 flickor omhändertagna från mormonsekt i Texas,” *Svenska Dagbladet*, April 6, p. 23, “USA: Flickor omhändertagna från sekt,” *Göteborgs-Posten*, April 6, p. 23, “Ny räd mot sekten i Texas,” *Dagens Nyheter*, April 7, p. 20, “Stor razzia mot mormonsekt i Texas,” *Göteborgs-Posten*, April 7, p. 17, “180 omhändertagna i Texas,” *Svenska Dagsbladet*, April 7, p. 14, “Oviss framtid för 400 sektbarn,” *Dagens Nyheter*, April 9, p. 24, “Osäkert för omhändertagna sektbarn,” *Göteborgs-Posten*, April 9, p. 14-15, “Flicka larmade om sexövergrepp i sekt,” *Göteborgs-Posten*, April 10, p. 27, “Sekt i Texas använde kyrka för sex,” *Svenska Dagbladet*, April 12, p. 28; in *Göteborgs-Posten*: “Kvinnorna vädjar: ta inte våra barn!,” April 27, p. 20-21 and “Övergrepp mot småpojkar,” May 4, p. 23; in *Svenska Dagbladet*: “Polygamisekten får rätt i Texasdomstol,” May 24, p. 29 and “Sektbarnen ges tillbaka,” June 3, p. 14.

Switzerland

“52 fillettes et ados évacuées d'une secte,” *Le Matin*, April 6, p. 14, and “Evacuation d'un ranch de mormons polygames,” *Tribune De Geneve*, April 7, p. 5, and “Sieg für die Polygamisten,”

Sonntagszeitung, June 1, part 2, p. 10.

United Kingdom

“180 taken from sect compound in Texas after abuse claims,” *The Guardian*, April 7, p. 6, “Police search goes on for abused girl at ranch of polygamy sect,” *The Herald*, April 7, p. 12, “400 cult children rescued,” *Daily Express*, April 9, p. 15, “State removes 400 children from sect,” *The Herald*, April 9, p. 10, “Sect ‘used its temple for sex with child wives,’” *The Daily Telegraph*, April 11, p. 19, “Dark Truth Behind Sex Slave Cult,” *Daily Express Weekend*, April 12, p. 40-41, “500 weeping women and children were led this week from a fortified compound. Victims of a polygamy cult, they had been brainwashed and sexually abused. One woman escaped . . . and lived to tell the tale,” *Daily Mail*, April 12, p. 32-33, “Sect victims face a reality shock,” *The Sunday Telegraph*, April 13, p. 23, “Sect hearing told girls of 13 may have had children,” *The Herald*, April 19, p. 14, “Sect girls forced into ‘marriage,’” *The Guardian*, April 30, p. 8, “Officials ‘had no right to seize 400 polygamist sect children’,” *The Herald*, May 23, p. 16, “‘No justification’ for raid on Texas Mormon ranch,” *The Independent*, May 24, p. 39; in *The Daily Telegraph*: “12-year-old ‘bride’,” May 30, p. 20 and “Polygamy cult youngsters allowed home,” June 3, p. 18; “Hundreds of sect children head home,” *The Herald*, June 4, p. 10.

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