

FOAFTALE NEWS
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From the Editor

As our annual meeting in Amsterdam approaches, I am thinking about the eruption of Mount Eyjafjallajökull in Iceland. Volcanos are important markers of what goes on beneath the Earth's crust. As a child I enjoyed reading Jules Verne's novel *Journey to the Center of the*

Earth (1864), in which young Axel finds an old piece of parchment inscribed with a dare from explorer Arne Saknussemm: "Descend into the crater of Yocul of Sneffels, which the shade of Scartaris caresses, before the kalends of July, audacious traveler, and you will reach the center of the earth. I did it." To reach the earth's center, Axel and his uncle must travel to Iceland, where a pathway down through a quiet volcano offers an amazing adventure.

Almost a century and a half after the publication of Verne's book, our own adventure beckons—and, as in the book, it must happen before the kalends of July. Theo Meder, Hetty Garcia, and other Meertens Instituut staff members have planned a wonderful conference for us in Amsterdam. Since mid-April, ash plumes from "Mount E" have made travel to northern Europe more intriguing. The last time this volcano erupted, back in 1821, smoke and ash spurted into the sky for two years, but scientists do not expect such a long period of activity this time. Air traffic moves normally now. Let us hope for smooth travel.

You will notice that this issue of our newsletter has slightly larger print than earlier issues had. My eyes appreciate larger print now; maybe others' do too.

During our meeting in Amsterdam, I hope to gather some material for *FOAftale News*. Of course, e-mail is also a good way to send contributions to the newsletter, so please send me a message any time.

Best wishes for a pleasant summer,

Elizabeth (Libby) Tucker

**Perspectives on Contemporary Legend
International Society for Contemporary
Legend Research
Twenty-eighth International Conference
Amsterdam, The Netherlands
June 28 – July 1, 2010**

The International Society for Contemporary Legend Research is pleased to announce that the 2010 Perspectives on Contemporary Legend Twenty-eighth International Conference is to be held at the Meertens Instituut in Amsterdam, the Netherlands.

The 2010 meeting will be organized as a series of seminars at which the majority of those who attend will present papers and/or contribute to discussion sessions. Concurrent sessions will be avoided so that all participants can hear all the papers.

Fax and e-mail addresses of the organizers can be found below.

Registration fee will be

- for ISCLR members
60 euros or
90 US dollars
- for non-ISCLR members
90 euros or
135 US dollars

For further questions, information or travel advice, please contact:

Abstracts, information on papers	Practical information, travel advice
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The registration form, including the possibility for hotel reservation, as well as more elaborate information can be found on this website:
www.meertens.knaw.nl/isclr2010

Hotel, conference location and travel

The recommended hotel, just seven minutes of walking distance from the Meertens, is the Mercure Hotel:

<http://www.mercure.com/gb/hotel-1244-mercure-hotel-amsterdam-aan-de-amstel/index.shtml> (see Map and Directions). If you want to stay at the Mercure Hotel, please let us know in the registration form, and we will book your room. The hotel can be reached from Schiphol Airport by train and subway. Travel by taxi is more comfortable, but more expensive.

For the location of the conference see: Meertens Instituut:
<http://www.meertens.knaw.nl> (see Contact).

PROGRAM

Monday, 28 June 2010

8:00-9:00 AM: Breakfast at the Meertens
9:00-9:30 AM: Registration and welcome
9:30-10:00 AM: Paul Smith, Just What Does the Bald Eagle Have to do with Urban Legends?: Exploring the use of the Term Urban Legend in Wikipedia
10:00-10:30 AM: Mikel Koven & Gunnella Thorgeirsdottir, Televisual Folklore: Rescuing Supernatural from the Fakelore Realms
10:30-11:00 AM: Coffee and tea break
11:00-11:30 AM: Willem de Blécourt, Werewolves, Vampires, and Race: The Development of Modern Belief Narratives
11:30-12:00 PM: Peter Burger, The New York Poison Needle Scare. Legend, News, and Popular Culture
12:00-1:30 PM: Lunch at the Meertens
1:30-2:00 PM: Theo Meder, In Search of the Dutch Lore of the Land: Old and New Legends throughout the Netherlands
2:00-2:30 PM: Jan Pohunek, Hans Hagen: between Serial Killer and Genius Loci
2:30-3:00 PM: Stijn Reijnders, Stalking the Count - Places of the Imagination in Dracula Country

3:00-3:30 PM: Coffee and tea break
3:30-4:00 PM: Mare Kalda, 'Seeing Things and Places You Wouldn't See Otherwise'. Insider Representation on Geocaching'
4:00-4:30 PM: Diane E. Goldstein, Crying Babies, Tiny Handprints and Terror on the Web: Virtual Legend Tripping
4:30 PM: Drinks at the Meertens

Tuesday, 29 June 2010

8:30-9:30 AM: Breakfast at the Meertens
9:30-10:00 AM: Aurore van de Winkel, The Construction of Belief: the Case of Contemporary Legends
10:00-10:30 AM: David Main, Emotional and Cognitive Aspects of Urban Legend Narratives
10:30-11:00 AM: Coffee and tea break
11:00-11:30 AM: Gail de Vos, A Meeting with the Devil at the Crossroads: a Contemporary Legend?
11:30-12:00 PM: Tjalling A. Beetstra, The Legendary Character of Satanic Ritual Abuse in Dispute
12:00-1:30 PM: Lunch at the Meertens
1:30-2:00 PM: David Clarke, If You Go Down to the Woods Today: Legend Tripping in a UFO Window
2:00-2:30 PM: Susan Lepselter, Connecting the Dots: Plot and Poetics in UFO Storytelling
2:30-3:00 PM: Violetta Krawczyk-Wasilewska, The Haiti Legend Revisited: Earthquake, Devil's Pact, Hoax and Net-Community Comments
3:00-3:30 PM: Coffee and tea break
3:30-4:00 PM: Virginia Fugarino, "The Things They Carried": Legends of Supply Acquisition and Cultural and Media Response in the Wake of Disaster
4:00-4:30 PM: Carl Lindahl, Paradises Built in Hell, Hells Built in Paradise: Legendry of Selflessness and Nihilism in the Wake of Hurricane Katrina
8:00-10:00 PM: Presentation of the movie S18n8 at the Mercure Hotel

Wednesday, 30 June 2010

8:30-9:30 AM: Breakfast at the Meertens
9:30-10:00 AM: Joel Conn, Gingerlore: Legal tales about Donoghue v Stevenson; the "Snail in the Bottle" case
10:00-10:30 AM: Eda Kalmre, Legends about Sausage Factories: a Source of Memoirs and Biographies
10:30-11:00 AM: Coffee and tea break
11:00-11:30 AM: Elizabeth Tucker, From Oral Tradition to Cyberspace: Tapeworm Diet Legends
11:30-12:00 AM: Carsten Bregenhøj, The Mother-in-Law Roof Box
12:00-1:30 PM: Lunch at the Meertens
1:30-2:00 PM: Cory W. Thorne, Bug Chasers, Gift Givers, & Russian Roulette: HIV Legends in "Post-AIDS" Queer Cultures
2:00-2:30 PM: Elissa R. Henken, Ten Years On: Developments in Legendry on Sex and Health
2:30-3:00 PM: Coffee and tea break
3:00-3:30 PM: Jeanmarie Rouhier-Willoughby, Clean or Unclean? Jews and Roma in Russian Folk Legends
3:30-4:00 PM: Patricia A. Turner, From Bloody Car Seats to the Olympic Torch: What the SNOPEs Hot 25 Reveals About Race
4:00-5:00 PM: Annual General Meeting and Closing Discussion
5:00 PM: Drinks at the Meertens
7:00 PM: Closing dinner in the inner city (Humphreys)

Thursday, 1 July 2010

8:00-9:00 AM: Breakfast at the Meertens
9:30 AM-12:00 PM: Guided Legend Tour through the Amsterdam City Centre (optional)

ABSTRACTS

Tjalling A. Beetstra (Apeldoorn, the Netherlands)

The legendary character of satanic ritual abuse in dispute

Since 1980 a growing amount of women in the United States and some other Western countries allege that they have been ritually abused in a satanic cult for years. They say that they have been abused, tortured and raped, had to participate in orgies and have been forced to prostitution, child sexual abuse, murder and cannibalism. In this article I discuss the phenomenon satanic ritual abuse as well as the ways in which societies have responded to the allegations of these cult survivors. Because elements in the stories of the cult survivors resemble the allegations of orators and writers to the first Christians in ancient Rome and the allegations of the church to Jews, heretics and witches in the Middle Ages, I discuss all these allegations and compare them with each other. All this in the context of pseudo-science and pseudo-history.

Furthermore, I discuss the (pseudo) scientific nature of the recovered memory therapy, that underlies most memories of satanic ritual abuse of the cult survivors, and the implications of this finding. Finally, I discuss whether satanic ritual abuse is a contemporary legend or not, and if it is not, what it really is. Doing so, I also discuss ostension and I examine the difference between myths, legends and sagas.

Willem de Blécourt (Maynards Green, England; research fellow Meertens Instituut)

Werewolves, Vampires, and Race: The development of modern belief narratives

In Western tradition werewolves are usually single, individual creatures. A similar observation can be made in the case of vampires. At least Dracula, the epitome of the Western Vampire, was only known to have brides. Yet lately both creatures also appear in groups. This adjustment of the contemporary imagination (also visible in, for instance novels), is

clearly influenced by popular American concepts of race. Whereas in movies such as the *Underworld* sequence, or *Blood and Chocolate*, werewolves are positioned in their presumed homeland Romania, in others, such as *The Howling* and more recently *Skinwalkers*, the USA context comes to the fore. This is further developed in the vampire movies *From Dusk to Dawn* and Carpenter's *Vampires* series, in which the supernatural creatures become metaphors of unwanted aliens.

The paper also discusses films as a vehicle for belief narratives, present day concepts, and indeed 'contemporary legends'.

Carsten Bregenhøj (Kerava, Finland)

The Mother-in-Law Roof Box

In my paper I am going to reconsider the origin of the European legend about the Stolen Grandma.

On June 25 1944 – on the day four years after the surrender of France during the WWII - the Danish newspaper Politiken brought a feature article by their former Paris correspondent, Andreas Vinding (1881-1950).

In his article he describes the flight from Paris in late May, early June 1940. In the village of Limours-en-Hurepoix he joined a Swedish friend of his from Cercle Swedois (The Swedish Club) named Gunnar S. and his French wife Denise and his mother-in-law. During the flight the mother-in-law dies etc. etc., as you may read in the handout.

Fact or fiction? In retrospect, knowing what we know today, it is "the same old story". However, do we have the analytical means to decide, that an eyewitness account is in fact a legend? Is it enough that the résumé of the content fits the main traits of the story from the 1960s and onwards? At the time of publication Andreas Vinding was around 63 years old and had had an exceptional career, so one small indiscretion could not rock his reputation. A skilful journalist could give the main points "flesh and blood" by expanding it into a personal experience story, or just plagiarize somebody else's story, but then again: Why would he do that?

Some of the variants that place the Mother-in-law incident in the war stricken areas of Europe are obviously retold at a much later time. I shall

pay attention to some of the car models from the 1930s very few of which had roof racks (except for taxis). Single-handed lifting a dead body to the roof of a car is another trait conforming to fictitious tales. Is Vinding just inventing all the plausible details?

Speaking of cars. A car roof box may in the Nordic languages be called a Mother-in-law roof box, "en Svigermorboks". Does that come from the legend?

Peter Burger (Leiden University, the Netherlands)

The New York Poison Needle Scare: Legend, News, and Popular Culture

In order to explore the relationship between legend, news, and popular culture from a rhetorical perspective, this paper takes as a starting point the New York poison needle scare of 1913-1915, when white slavers were said to drug and kidnap young women in film theatres, department stores and shopping streets. Law enforcement authorities, physicians, and the New York Times were quick to dismiss these allegations as rumor and hysteria. Simultaneously, however, numerous movies, stage plays, and newspaper serials, advertised as stories ripped from the headlines, employed the 'drugged and seduced' motif as a plot device. The moral effect of these mass market stories on their female audience was a matter of controversy: should they be valued as cautionary tales, or condemned as advertisements for sin? According to some moral crusaders, the movie theatre itself was an unsafe place for women.

These stories and discussions can be read as part of the contemporary struggle over cultural authority: who was authorized to tell legend from news, and who could legitimately stipulate what was, and what was not, proper conduct for women? The New York Times used the needle scare to bolster its freshly established journalistic authority, asserting the superiority of its reports over both informal talk and 'sensational' rival newspapers – a typical instance of the 'boundary rhetoric' professional groups use to maintain their status. The nascent film industry claimed the moral high ground as a purveyor of

uplifting true stories for an emerging female audience.

The women moviegoers themselves were denied a voice in these discussions, but apparently they were not deterred by the needle stories and relished the white slavery movies, in spite of the fact that white slavery discourse has been interpreted as a patriarchal means of social control. Studies of early twentieth century fan culture, however, suggest that female viewers did not identify with the drugged and abused protagonists so much as with the liberated, daredevil actresses that starred in these films. Which goes to show that the meaning of legends and other stories is not in the stories, but in the way they are used, and that more than scare stories are needed to keep girls from having fun.

David Clarke (Sheffield Hallam University, England)

If you go down to the woods today: Legend tripping in a UFO window

December 2010 marks the 30th anniversary of the Rendlesham Forest UFO Incident (RFI), often described as "Britain's Roswell" (Randles, 1998). During Christmas holidays of 1980 a group of US Air Force personnel experienced a close encounter with "anomalous lights" in the forest beyond the runway at RAF Woodbridge, Suffolk, UK. In three decades the basic story has evolved from an initial rumour to a tabloid sensation and is today a local legend with international significance for believers in ET visitations. Uniquely, the RFI has "official status" as a result of its appearance in British government files and the key locations that form the legend are today marked by a Forestry Commission "UFO Trail". The RFI is featured in tourist guidebooks and is the site of legend-tripping "pilgrimages" by UFO watchers. Dewan (2006) argues that Personal Experience Narratives/memorates (not legends or myths) are the foundation stone of the UFO phenomenon, following the experience-centred approach pioneered by David Hufford. The airmen whose stories form the core narrative of the RFI are alive and active in the dissemination of the "mystery" via TV programmes and internet podcasts and a reunion of the key percipients is

planned in the forest for the 30th anniversary. In this paper I will argue the RFI is an evolving contemporary legend with dynamic features that include ongoing legend tripping. The body of PENs that revolve around the RFI are tied to broader UFO and conspiracy beliefs (e.g. Roswell/alien abduction) and the wider UFO lore as a whole, one informing the other: "Belief informs memorate; memorate informs legend; legend informs belief" (Dewan, 188).

References

- Clarke, David (2009). *The UFO Files: The Inside Story of Real-Life Sightings*. Kew: The National Archives.
- Dewan, William J (2006). "A Saucerful of Secrets": An Interdisciplinary Analysis of UFO Experiences. *Journal of American Folklore* 119(472):184-202
- Randles, Jenny (1998). *UFO Crash Landing?* London: Blandford.

Joel Conn (Glasgow, Scotland) **Gingerlore: Legal tales about Donoghue v Stevenson; the "Snail in the Bottle" case**

The House of Lords case of *Donoghue v Stevenson*¹ has been called "probably the most famous case in the whole Commonwealth world of the Common Law"². A fundamental case on duties of care in delict/ tort in the legal systems of Scotland, England and much of the Commonwealth, it is most famous amongst lawyers as the "Snail in the Bottle" case and for the elegant comments of Lord Atkins on "who is my neighbour?", all of which arises from Mrs Donoghue's claim to have digested decomposed snail as part of her ginger beer ice cream float in a cafe in Paisley, Scotland on an August evening in 1928.

As the only case that most lawyers can still recite after a lifetime in the law, a modest collection of myths have grown up about the case and Mrs Stevenson, told by students, solicitors, lecturers and judges. These stories, however, advance far beyond the usual subject matter of food adulteration tales.

¹ 1932 SC (HL) 31, [1932] AC 562, 1932 SLT 317.

² Alan Rodger, "Mrs Donoghue and Alfenus Varus", (1988) 41 *Current Legal Problems* 1 at p 2.

Indeed, a large number fall into one of two subject matters; the potential illicit tryst that was being conducted by Mrs Donoghue during her visit to the café and the struggle of the Advocates to understand the nature of buying a ginger beer ice cream float in a "Tally Café" in Paisley (it being an activity way beneath their social position).

In this paper I shall consider briefly the case of *Donoghue v Stevenson* (briefly the significance of the case but with concentration on the narrative). I shall then examine the stories told about the case and compare these with existing studies of "Cokelore" and food adulteration. Finally I shall consider the reasons for any differences between the tales told about the case and the more common narrative of "Cokelore" legends.

Virginia Fugarino (Memorial University of Newfoundland, St. John's, Canada) **"The Things They Carried": Legends of Supply Acquisition and Cultural and Media Response in the Wake of Disaster**

On January 17, 2010, The Root published an article entitled "When Are Haitians Looters and When Are They Just Hungry?" in which the author, Natalie Hopkinson, discusses the ambiguities created in the media as to whether earthquake survivors were appropriately gathering supplies or stealing material goods. As Hopkinson points out, similar ambiguities were created in the wake of Hurricane Katrina in 2005. Legends of how people acquired supplies post-Katrina were prevalent after the storm, as were media representations of that acquisition, one of the most memorable being the media labeling black people acquiring supplies as "looting" and white people performing the same actions as "finding food."

In addition to ambiguities about looting versus gathering supplies are the rumors and legends that circulate around acquiring goods from government and service providers in the days and weeks after a disaster. In the wake of Hurricane Ike in 2008, hurricane survivors swapped stories about how to gain access to governmentally-provided supplies as well as what supplies used in the process of recovery, such as power generators, would be covered by aid relief. Sto-

ries also circulated about who would and would not be approved for assistance. Like the looting versus gathering ambiguities, these narratives of who was and was not able to access aid often hinged upon issues of race and socioeconomic status.

This paper will explore legends relating to supply acquisition and how these legends are represented and positioned within the media. This discussion will incorporate concepts related to limited good (Foster 1965; Gregory 1975) as well as issues of distrust and conspiracy theories relating to the government and media (Turner 1987 and 1994; Parsons et al 1999; Fine 2005; Birchall 2006).

References

- Birchall, Claire. 2006. *Knowledge goes pop: From conspiracy theory to gossip*. Oxford: Berg Publishers.
- Fine, Gary Alan, Véronique Campion-Vincent, and Chip Heath (eds.). 2005. *Rumor mills: The social impact of rumor and legend*. New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers.
- Foster, George M. 1965. Peasant society and the image of limited good. *American Anthropologist* (New Series) 67, no. 2: 293-315.
- Gregory, James R. 1975. Image of limited good, or expectation of reciprocity? *Current Anthropology* 16, no. 1: 73-92.
- Parsons, S., W. Simmons, F. Shinhoster, and J. Kilburn. 1999. A test of the grapevine: An empirical examination of conspiracy theories among African Americans. *Sociological Spectrum* 19, no. 2: 201-222.
- Turner, Patricia A. 1987. Church's fried chicken and the Klan: A rhetorical analysis of rumor in the black community. *Western Folklore* 46, no. 4: 294-306.
- ---. 1994. *I heard it through the grapevine: Rumor in African-American culture*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Diane E. Goldstein (Indiana University, Bloomington, IN, USA)

Crying Babies, Tiny Handprints and Terror on the Web: Virtual Legend Tripping

Legend tripping is an activity in which individuals make an excursion to a place where uncanny events are believed to have occurred in the interest of testing a local legend (Ellis 1996:439). Such legend quests constitute an improvised drama in which the players, visiting the site of a haunting or the scene of a crime, recreate the storied events and simultaneously expand the tale by adding their own experiences to the core narrative (Lindah 2005, 165). This paper explores the parallels between geographical on-site legend tripping and those occurring in digital environments.

Virtual legend tripping shares the recurring landscape found in real world legend tripping, including visits to abandoned buildings, remote bridges, tunnels, caves, woods, rivers and cemeteries, and focuses on popular contemporary legends themes such as cry baby bridges and bloody Mary in the mirror. Virtual legend tripping also exploits the possibilities of the internet not only to re-imagine the numinous but to directly experience it, from a distance. This paper explores the way Internet technology creates a venue for virtual legend tripping using interactive visual-auditory media for sharing in legend telling, legendary experience and legend communities. The analysis will discuss the relationship between the characteristics of real world legend trips and virtual trips, exploring the creation of a legendscape, the rituals of participation, the narrative act, the narrative second life, and the experiences of the liminal, *communitas* and the numinous.

References

- Ellis, Bill 1996. Legend Trip. In *American Folklore: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Jan Harold Brunvand, New York: Garland, pp. 439-40.
- Lindahl, Carl 2005. Ostensive Healing: Pilgrimage to the San Antonio Ghost Tracks. *Journal of American Folklore* 118(468):164-85.

Elissa R. Henken (University of Georgia, Athens, GA, USA)

Ten Years On: Developments in Legendry on Sex and Health

Ten years ago, Mariamne H. Whatley and I published *Did You Hear about the Girl Who...?*, a book on folklore and human sexuality. In this we used folklore we ourselves had recently collected, but even as we went to publication, some of the legends were fading from popularity and others were newly arising. The clearest changes have been in legends about sexually transmitted diseases. Not only has AIDS lost its place in the hierarchy of scary diseases and, indeed, in the list of American terrors, but the motivation for willful spread of it has also been reinterpreted. Other changes appear as certain activities, such as female masturbation, are increasingly presented as dangerous. In this study, I shall track the changes in legendry over these past ten years and examine what they indicate about changing mores and concerns in United States' culture, especially among young adults.

Mare Kalda (Estonian Literary Museum, Tartu, Estonia)

'Seeing things and places you wouldn't see otherwise'. Insider Representation on Geocaching

At the 2006 ISCLR Conference in Copenhagen, Denmark, I approached the topic of Geocaching, a global activity of which the basic idea is to hide and locate caches. In the years between, the game has rapidly advanced: at the present moment, 979,595 active geocaches have been hidden in different places of the world (at the time of the Copenhagen conference, there were 269,715 caches hidden in 221 countries). Until now, both applied and descriptive studies have been published on the topic. At this point it is my pleasure to highlight Lynne McNeill's article 'Portable Places: Serial Collaboration and the Creation of a New Sense of Place'; (*Western Folklore* 66, 3/4 Summer & Fall 2007 pp. 281-300), which explores the circulating objects, people passing by the objects, and also the experiences shared by participants who visit the same places.

The practice of geocaching is currently represented by the hobbyists themselves on the Geocaching website. The results of treasure hunting are posted on subpages of particular caches in the Internet. Logs are an important source of information about the game for the (potential) next seekers. In the course of years, the style and recurrent topics have been developed: players who post entries write about problems encountered during the search, contacts with non-geocachers, and encounters with other geocaching teams. Despite being game-related, the log entries refer to the physical and social reality that remains outside the game. The logs also convey immediate impressions, often repeating the phrase that has inspired a particular thread headline.

An alternative way of self-representation of a group is forum discussion: this gives a chance for holding heated debates and self-expression. In forums both the collective and the individual are at work: the community controls the course of the game, while individual players construct and reinforce their geocacher identity. In my paper I will analyse these processes on the example of Geocaching practices in Estonia and also present parallels with the global game.

Eda Kalmre (University of Tartu, Estonia)
Legends about sausage factories: a source of memoirs and biographies

Recollections of the past and biographies are largely based on old and established structures, and the most salient source of memoirs are traditional legends and rumours. While the narrator and audience of a rumour and legend are presumed to have the same iconographical scope and nothing needs to be explained because the mediator and the listener share a common contextual background, memoirs and biographies follow a completely different logic. These narratives reveal the distinctive reality created by the narrator; the point of departure for the presentation and investigation of that reality lies in the present. Events that are important for a community are schematically recorded in people's memories: over time these events have acquired new meanings, which are based on the present and have been adapted to the present needs. Thus the legends of the

sausage factory in post-war Tartu have several layers, because they speak of the past, the present and the past within the present. The sausage factory story has also been passed on from generation to generation as evidence of the horrors of the Soviet occupation. One of the most important functions of these stories is that they permit informants to express their opinion about both personally and collectively experienced history. The generation that survived the trials and horrors of the post-war era repeat this as a vivid example of the social and political problems of the time.

I will examine the narratives of four different informants, how they reacted to a similar rumour as a cultural text, and how they shaped their narratives and justified their beliefs and ways of thinking. I presume that each narrator's fate and the attitudes they acquired over time are important in the interpretation of this post-war event. The objective of my treatment is to demonstrate on the example of these narratives the mindset of the post-war generation in Estonia and certain different viewpoints from the past.

Mikel Koven & Gunnella Thorgeirsdottir
(University of Worcester & University of Sheffield, England)

Televisual Folklore: Rescuing Supernatural from the Fakelore Realms

According to interviews with the series' creator, Eric Kripke, *Supernatural* was from the start a conscious attempt at showcasing what Kripke felt was a uniquely American "mythology", urban legends. The notebook the Winchester brothers carry, inherited from their father, is not just a guide to demon hunting, but also a mini-guide to American contemporary folklore, urban legends in particular, like the file boxes behind Mulder's desk, the literal 'X-files', which Leslie Jones saw as being almost an encyclopedia of urban legendry. John Winchester's notebook specifically and the series' use of folklore more generally, are what folklorist Richard Dorson called 'fakelore'. Fakelore, at least as Dorson intended it, was the intentional invention of 'folksy'-like 'lore' often for commercial or advertising purposes. It might look like folklore and sound like folklore, but it was Lore-light: similar

flavor, but none of the contamination of authenticity. *Supernatural's* use of folklore would, from a conservative Dorson-inspired view, likely be saddled with the sobriquet of "fakelore". Such a labeling is neither fair nor accurate.

Juwen Zhang, in "Filmic Folklore and Chinese Cultural Identity" offers an alternative approach to Dorson's dismissive 'fakelore': Zhang argues that certain films (his examples come from Chinese cinema, but we can apply these ideas to American television), while certainly 'faking' their lore, or at least altering 'authentic' customs for dramatic and ideological purposes, firstly, do so for a purpose, and in any analysis, rather than simply dismissing such constructions as 'inaccurate' must be analyzed semiotically. But secondly, that such 'fakelore' can sometimes re-enter the cultural matrix, as folklore. The adoption of Robin Hardy's *The Wicker Man* by contemporary Pagan communities is one example (see Koven 2008). What *Supernatural* does, in its context of entertainment and science-fiction/horror, is to self-consciously play with the folklore of storytelling. The series writers developed a metatextual matrix with the material; the supernatural belief traditions, the television show, and the audience's own experience of storytelling (whether from folklore or popular culture). This matrix is made explicit in the episodes themselves beginning with the intertextuality of 'The Monster at the end of this book' in season four where the brothers are forced to question their own reality as they find out they are the heroic characters from a series of books, culminating in 'The Real Ghostbusters' from season five when the brothers attend a conference based on those books and find themselves LARPing to the aforementioned stories. Zhang's 'filmic folklore' becomes our 'televisual folklore' in regards to *Supernatural* when we recognize the series' self-conscious using of folklore, not to create an artificial 'folksy'-like narrative, but to present the legends under contemporary scrutiny regarding its veracity. This is the processes that legend tellers and their audiences have undertaken since storytelling began.

Supernatural, we argue, does not try to take ownership of the lore, or Kripke's version of it, as definitive or copywritten entities (as Disney does) but recognizes its function as variants within the larger folklore context. Televisual

folklore may not seem to follow the same rules as “traditional” folklore, we would however argue that it serves the same functions as the more traditional ways of transmitting folklore and as Bruce Jackson noted ‘the verbal and imaginative referents we utilize in ordinary face-to-face encounters are as likely to come from our separate-but-shared media experiences as anywhere else’.

Violetta Krawczyk-Wasilewska (University of Lodz, Poland)

The Haiti Legend Revisited: Earthquake, Devil’s Pact, Hoax and Net-Community Comments

The paper deals with post-earthquake e-folklore of a global character. The author’s study is based on Internet sources mainly. After the catastrophe, there had remained an old legend about a Haitian-Satanic pact and „God’s wrath” (cited by a CBN televangelist) on the one hand. On the other hand, the Polish media focussed on the black progeny of Poles from Haitian Cazale, who have awaited help from the old country for 200 years. Besides the author touches upon the Ghanaian earthquake hoax as an immediate reaction on the Haiti disaster and the power of e-folklore.

Susan Lepselter (Indiana University, Bloomington, IN, USA)

Connecting the Dots: Plot and Poetics in UFO Storytelling

This paper is based on ethnographic work with UFO believers in two sites. The first was a UFO experiencers’ support group in Austin, Texas; this was essentially a storytelling community that became a close social network. The second site was the hamlet of Rachel, Nevada. Rachel is a town known for its proximity to Area 51, a military base in Nevada whose existence was for many years denied by the U.S. federal government and which has been a magnet for UFO-based conspiracy theory for two decades. Here, my ethnographic research centers on the Little Ale’Le’Inn, a UFO-themed cafe whose reputation as a space-alien hangout attracted conspiracy-minded drifters and UFO believers

from around the world. I worked as an unpaid waitress in this cafe so I could listen to and record a wide range of conspiracy theories and uncanny stories.

This paper closely analyzes parts of two stories recorded in Texas and Nevada to argue that it is not primarily the referential content, but rather the poetics, of stories that create a sense of uncanny reality for many UFO believers in America, and perhaps in other locations as well. One story is a personal abduction narrative; the other is about cattle mutilation in the Nevada desert. I argue that these stories, like many others of their type, are deeply social and political, telling us at least as much about mainstream social anxieties as they do about individual psychological aberrations. I demonstrate that UFO storytellers and audiences create meaning through a specific narrative poetics that “works” by referencing similar themes in other stories, some of which are fabulous but some of which are historical. I argue that the intertextual parallels of various social memories emerge in uncanny stories. The marginal thereby reveals a popular theory of power in contemporary life.

Carl Lindahl (University of Houston, USA)
Paradises Built in Hell, Hells Built in Paradise: Legendry of Selflessness and Nihilism in the Wake of Hurricane Katrina

As news of Katrina’s devastation of New Orleans spread around the world, outsiders immediately assumed the worst: that most of those who had stayed behind in the city to face the storm remained only for the worst reasons: to steal, to loot, to prey upon the helpless, and to commit acts of nihilistic savagery so extreme as to defy any attempt to assign a motive: for example, shooting at rescue helicopters just to make the situation worse.

But, progressively, on-the-ground documentation and the narratives of the survivors themselves have produced an altogether different view of the motives and actions of the citizens who were trapped in the city. Rebecca Solnit’s book, *A Paradise Built in Hell*, has documented the actions of disaster survivors from the San Francisco earthquake of 1906 to Hurricane Katrina to discover a invariable pattern of re-

sponse. On the outside, government officials, the press, and the broader public assume the worst, circulate negative legendry, and sacrifice rescue efforts to “law-and-order” initiatives in responding to the disaster. Meanwhile, on the inside, survivors, with no or too little outside help, go about the business of saving each other with repeated acts of selflessness and sacrifice.

Solnit’s thesis finds strong confirmation among the 433 interviews so far archived by the Surviving Katrina and Rita in Houston project. The following trends can be easily identified: 1) survivors speak of themselves selflessly: no matter how heroic their actions may seem to outside listeners, they continually single out other survivors as heroes; 2) survivor reports of the negative behavior of fellow survivors almost always come from media or other secondary sources; 3) survivors reports of the positive behavior of fellow survivors almost always come from personal experience. Many survivors see the disaster as a two-sided exploration of human nature: it was, for example, almost proverbial among survivors to compare Katrina to war, and to summarize the situation with formulations such as “Katrina and war bring out the worst in people and bring out the best in people.” But, again, the best is almost invariably illustrated through the personal experience of the speaker and the worst through news reports. Characteristically, survivors speak so selflessly of their own motives and heroics that they conclude by reasoning that the only possessions, both material and spiritual, that they have been able to keep from the storm are those things that they gave away.

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David Main (University of the West of Scotland) **Emotional and Cognitive Aspects of Urban Legend Narratives**

In their recent collection, Gillian Bennett and Paul Smith do not offer a definition of “urban legend” but instead provide a list of nine common features. One of these is that legends are “often shaped along the lines of detective stories or jokes” (2007, p xvii). By this they mean

that key information is not provided to the audience until the end, or near the end. This paper examines some of the psychological aspects of this structural feature of legends. The new information leads to a “cognitive” shift, in that earlier events take on a new meaning or what was previously mysterious becomes clear. This feature of legends has sometimes been referred to as “psychic ambiguity” or “interstitiality” (see, for example, Clements, 1991, Lindahl, 1986, Pettitt, 2004). These concepts will be subjected to critical scrutiny. However, the cognitive shift would not be significant if it did not produce some emotional reaction in the audience and the various types of emotion aroused by urban legends will be explored.

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Theo Meder (Meertens Instituut, Amsterdam, The Netherlands)

In Search of the Dutch Lore of the Land: Old and New Legends throughout the Netherlands

In 2005 Jennifer Westwood and Jacqueline Simpson published *The Lore of the Land; A Guide to England's Legends, from Spring-Heeled Jack to the Witches of Warboys*. Like the title suggests, the book deals with the lore and legends in the English counties. Apart from the many descriptions of various local phenomena, the book contains maps representing every county, showing a distribution of devils, fairies, ghosts, phantom beasts, wizards, and so on. Several more important phenomena are

explained on separate green double pages, like mermaids, witches, giants, and haunted mines. In 2006 my publisher asked if I knew someone who could make the same kind of book for the Netherlands. I soon realized it had to be me, but I certainly could use some help. Three co-editors agreed to cooperate: Ruben A. Koman, Jurjen van der Kooi, and Willem de Blécourt. One of the advantages of having Van der Kooi in the team is that you do not have to skip the lore and legends of the Frisians, who have successfully claimed their own language and culture. Other scholars made a contribution to the book as well, like Peter Burger, Ludo Jongen, Fred van Lieburg, and Eric Venbrux. All in all, we selected over 350 local legends, spread all over the twelve provinces of the Netherlands; some real ecotypes, claimed by local communities with statues and all, others almost forgotten tales. More than expected, we found that quite some popular legends were composed by writers in the nineteenth century. As we added some contemporary legends as well, one turned out popular enough to get a statue and a song already. My presentation will give a brief overview of the more remarkable phenomena we found, like invention of tradition, appropriation, confiscation, rivalry, commercialization, musealization, and festivalization.

Jan Pohunek (Charles university, Prague, Czech Republic)

Hans Hagen: between serial killer and genius loci

This paper is an introduction to the phenomenon of Hans Hagen, a modern Czech folklore figure which is closely connected to an extensive complex of abandoned limestone quarries near Prague. This quarry system named „Amerika“, with its artificial lakes and underground galleries, has been a popular target of illegal recreational activities since the 1960s. Until recently, most visitors belonged to a Czech subcultural youth movement called tramping, which is an unorganised offshoot of boy scouting combined with E.T. Seton's woodcraft and is aesthetically inspired by the American Wild West.

These visits had a dimension of legend tripping represented by Hagen, a malevolent phantom of the quarries, who was most often described as a ghost of a Nazi soldier. The character has been associated with various places in the quarry system and became quite popular, which resulted in many variations of the legend, including their adaptations in various media. Some of these went beyond the typical image of a killer of teenagers and transformed the character into a protective *genius loci*. Such a shift in meaning allowed visitors to use Hagen as a symbol of their limited resistance to the communist police and nature preserve inspection workers who were seen as an opposing, persecuting force.

The paper discusses possible inspirational sources of the legend, its evolution, variation and appearance in relation to the social use of the place, including the pseudo-ostensive behavior of some visitors. The phenomenon of Hans Hagen is also probably the most developed example of legend tripping in the Czech Republic while its variational richness and specific local context extend beyond common definitions of such an activity, turning Hagen into a complex symbolic representation of the area.

Jeanmarie Rouhier-Willoughby (University of Kentucky, USA)

Clean or Unclean?: Jews and Roma in Russian Folk Legends

This paper examines two folk legend cycles told by Russians (cited in Kuznetsova 1990, 1999, 2007 and Belova 2004) about the role of Jews and Roma in Christ's birth and crucifixion. These legends, first attested in the nineteenth century, continue to exist within the Russian oral tradition. Legends have also often been associated with the promulgation of stereotypes about the "other," which can be variously defined, depending on the content of the legend. Goldstein (2004:7, 84-85), for example, examines the stereotypes associated with those suffering from AIDS as well as the ethnic slurs associated with its origin in Africa. However, as she (2004:85) notes, the picture legends portray is more complicated than simply spreading bad opinions about those who represent dan-

gerous outsiders to the tellers. Rather, when legends present such stereotypes, their tellers are trying to explain the nature of reality and to come to terms with it, to cope with, in essence, issues of belief, fear, and doubt within society. The Russian legends on Jews and Roma are consonant with this interpretation. Their main goal is not to disseminate ethnic stereotypes, either positive or negative, but in fact to cope with doubt about faith and the nature of God's world. The figures of the Jew and Roma within them then wear the mask of both positive and negative stereotypes, regardless of the actual perception of these peoples, but these masks are but a minor disguise in this cycle. Essentially these legends question the wisdom of adherence to God's very commands, employing the Roma and Jews as cover for criticism of the socio-religious system with which the populace is faced.

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Stijn Reijnders (Erasmus University Rotterdam, the Netherlands)

Stalking the Count - Places of the Imagination in Dracula Country

Large numbers of tourists travel to Transylvania every year, looking for traces of Count Dracula. They are inspired by Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897) or by one of the many film adaptations

from the 20th and 21st century. This article investigates why people feel the need to connect fictional stories, such as Dracula, with identifiable physical locations, and why they subsequently want to visit these locations. Based on participatory observation and 21 in-depth interviews, it is concluded that the inner experience of the Dracula tourist is characterised by a dynamic between two partially contradictory modes. First, Dracula tourists are driven by a desire to make a concrete comparison between the landscape they are visiting and the image they have created of that landscape based on the book or the film adaptations. On the other hand, this rational approach to trace reality and compare it to the imagination is contrasted with a more intuitive, emotional desire for a temporary symbiosis of both worlds. The two modes take place in and through the body and combine to form a common goal: to anchor the imagination in the physical reality.

Paul Smith (Memorial University of Newfoundland, St. John's, Canada)

Just What Does the Bald Eagle Have to do with Urban Legends?: Exploring the use of the Term Urban Legend in Wikipedia

This presentation looks at the way the term urban legend is employed in the articles in Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia "that anyone can edit." As of 1st February 2010, this online encyclopedia contains 3,180,235 articles in English, along with a range of other related material including "User Talk" and "Help" pages. Ranging from "Amway" to "Zero Patience," around 1400 articles and related items incorporate a link back to a central article for "Urban Legend." It would seem feasible to suppose, therefore, that because of this central entry a common usage of the term would exist. This, however, is not the case. Accordingly, I will be exploring a 10% sample of the articles containing the urban legend link in order to better understand and categorize the varieties of ways this expression has been employed in this mammoth reference tool.

Cory W. Thorne (Memorial University of Newfoundland, St. John's, Canada)

Bug Chasers, Gift Givers, & Russian Roulette: HIV Legends in "Post-AIDS" Queer Cultures

The practice of bug chasing, while well documented in relation to childhood disease, is a more ambiguous and contested practice when it involves lifelong, incurable viruses such as HIV/AIDS. Purposely infecting your child with chicken pox can be defended as protecting the child from more severe illness as they grow older. The decision to acquire HIV, however, is a bit more difficult to understand – especially when speaking outside the context of Western gay communities heavily affected by this virus.

The question of why one would purposely seek infection is well suited in spurring the development of legend. The reluctance of bug chasers (men looking to become HIV+) and gift givers (HIV+ men seeking to help spread the virus) to speak publicly is clearly linked to the culture of the virus. Through society's ambivalence toward open discussion about sex and sexuality, the use of homophobia and radical theologies in justifying the spread of the virus, ignorance over the ways the virus has affected the queer community, and ignorance over the ways treatments have altered the outcomes of HIV infection, society at large continues to treat HIV/AIDS as a mysterious other – if we don't think about it, we can pretend to be unaffected by it.

Within the context of "Post-AIDS" queer culture, I will discuss the folklore HIV infection, while 1) addressing stories of bug/barebacking/conversion parties; 2) discussing party variations such as Russian roulette (an orgy with a single unidentified gift giver) and gang bangs (an orgy organized to infect a single bug chaser), 3) examining passive chasing (frequent unprotected sex without explicit bug chasing identification), and 4) studying participant justifications of these activities (survivor guilt, community belonging, fatalistic control over inevitable infection, fetishization, and perceptions of the shift of HIV/AIDS into a chronic condition rather than deadly disease).

Elizabeth Tucker (Binghamton University, NY, USA)

From Oral Tradition to Cyberspace: Tapeworm Diet Legends

Thirty-three years ago, in "The Seven-Day Wonder Diet: Magic and Ritual in Diet Folklore" (1977), I analyzed some amazing and disgusting legends that were circulating among middle-aged women and college students who worried about their weight. Among these narratives, the one that seemed most horrifying to listeners was the legend that described a tapeworm crawling out of a woman's nose while she lay in bed next to her husband. Jan Brunvand included this text in the "More Dreadful Contaminations" chapter of his book *The Choking Doberman* (1984: 111), along with a comparable legend from Ronald Baker's *Hoosier Folk Legends* (1982). Both of these narratives reflect Americans' interest in quick weight loss in the 1960s and 1970s. That interest has continued up to the present time.

Currently, tapeworm diet legends circulate primarily in cyberspace. Barbara and David Mikkelson's *Urban Legends Reference Pages* include an entertainingly written summary of tapeworm diet lore, "As the Worm Squirms" (2006), which emphasizes tapeworm diet legends about such famous women as Maria Callas and Claudia Schiffer. Their summary does not mention Internet sites on which people debate the veracity of tapeworm narratives and wonder whether Web sites for the purchase of tapeworms are real. In this paper I will analyze dialogue from several Internet sites, referencing Trevor J. Blank's recently published *Folklore and the Internet: Vernacular Expression in a Digital World* (2009).

I will also consider why tapeworms have fascinated legend tellers and listeners for such a long time. Like other "bosom serpents," tapeworms protrude from the body in a shocking, inappropriate way. In some texts this protrusion seems phallic, but in others it just seems embarrassing. In the context of quick-weight-loss lore, the tapeworm signifies delegation of responsibility for weight control, which now belongs to a ravenously hungry little creature. This creature represents the "hungry self" astutely identified by Kim Chernin (1994). Both oral and Web-based tapeworm legends em-

phasize the ravenousness and insistence of the tapeworm, which expresses dieters' desires with simplicity but culturally rooted ambivalence.

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Patricia A. Turner (University of California Davis, USA)

From Bloody Car Seats to the Olympic Torch: What the SNOPEs Hot 25 Reveals About Race

The successful campaign and election of Barack Obama as the first black President of the United States has been used as a benchmark for the state of US racial relations. While some pundits have claimed that his ability to win over the American electorate is a decisive reflection of widespread racial harmony within the United States, others caution that racial discord remains prevalent despite the presence of a black man in the White House. Advocates of both positions can muster concrete evidence to support their claim.

In this paper I will address this question using an evidence base familiar to contemporary legend scholars. At any given time, the Mikkelsons, the couple who maintain the well-known and off-cited SNOPEs urban legend website, post the Hot 25 urban legends. These are the

texts their readers are most engaged in at that particular moment. Almost as old as the Internet itself, the SNOPEs website is a well-known resource where most savvy Internet users eager to find a quick evaluation of the veracity of a given "too good to be true" story. Indeed, within Internet vernacular, "to SNOPEs," has become a verb as can be seen in the remark, "I wish people would SNOPEs these stories themselves before forwarding them to everyone in their address book." Using a "Hot 25" list from early 2010, I will contextualize and analyze those texts that contain subtle or conspicuous racial motifs.

Gail de Vos (Seba Beach, Canada)
**A Meeting with the Devil at the Crossroads:
a Contemporary Legend?**

This paper is an inquiry regarding the validity of the celebrated meeting with the devil at the crossroads being considered a contemporary legend.

There has been a resurgence of recounting stories of meetings with the devil at the crossroads in the past decades, with many supplanting the customary name of blues musician Robert Johnson with those of other eminent musicians such as Bob Dylan, Justin Hawkins, and John Lennon as well as unnamed guitar players and fiddlers who acquire their expertise and fame in such a manner.

Although the story of another blues musician's experience with the devil at the crossroads preceded that of Robert Johnson's, it is his name that is most often identified with this legend. Robert Johnson was the unsophisticated but ambitious young musician who, in one fateful moment, sells his soul to the devil when he meets him at the crossroads, or at least chooses to believe he has, and who thereafter flashes all too briefly across the American musical landscape.

Related to, but distinct from, the "Pact with the Devil" legends, does the meeting with the devil at the crossroads occur only with those individuals connected to music? Can this legend be considered a contemporary legend? Does it fulfil the requirements that define a contemporary legend? Does the recent commodification of the story in popular culture and technology

aid in the further development of the contemporary legend status?

These questions, and others, will be addressed and analyzed with regards to the current interest in discussing the authenticity of the legend, the legend tripping exploits and consideration of the myriad of reworkings in print, on film, and online.

Aurore Van de Winkel (University of Leuven, Belgium)

The construction of belief: the case of contemporary legends

The phenomenon of collective communication is diffused by multiple sources (tracts, e-mail, blog, SMS, newspaper article, by word of mouth...); the contemporary legend is a subject of secular belief. It reveals itself to the believers in the form of a small news item or a strange, surprising or horrifying anecdote.

It is the belief which will influence the representations, behaviors and actions of those who will diffuse it. It will influence their choice of:

- diffusion source;
- the point of view of the receivers;
- the degree of entertainment value;
- the members of one of their social groups.

All this is in order to reaffirm the diffusers' norms and identity; this belief will establish a trusting relationship between the communication partners.

The story tellers will construct or reaffirm this trust while narrating and discussing the legend.

A semio-pragmatic analysis of the hundreds of written legends – recolted hazardly on Internet (blog's posts, e-mails, articles of specialized websites, press's articles or specialized books)

- has allowed us to clarify the intentions, identities and relationships that are at play between the subjects and the transmitters of these stories, as well as the possible effects they may have on social representations. Also, this analysis highlights the elements of the contents which reinforce the belief. The contemporary legends contain discursive processes that tend to decrease the critical reflexivity of the reader, while supporting a message which might:

- warn of danger;
- condemn a certain behaviour;

- illustrate the satisfaction of a socially reprehensible or justifiable bold act;
- simply surprise by adding an irrational element to everyday life.

Other processes in the statements and interaction, as well as the confrontation and discussion with the sceptics influence the belief in the narratives. All these elements can explain the inefficacy of denial. But there are various degrees of credibility and we cannot establish any radical opposition between scepticism and belief, which would caricaturise this very phenomenon.

Rumours around HIV and other Health Issues among Young People in Urban Cameroon

Lucas Tchegnina

A favourable context for rumours

The HIV prevalence rate in the general population in Cameroon is 5.5% (DHS, 2004). Among young people aged 15-24 this rate accounts for 3.2%, 4.8% of women and 1.4% of men. Antiretroviral treatments have been free of charge since May 2007, but people living with HIV still have to pay for laboratory tests and treatments for opportunistic infections. This paper examines some rumours on health issues among young people in Urban Cameroon. In-depth interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted among young people of both sexes aged 15-24 in urban areas between 2004 and 2007. These young people are from various profiles and backgrounds in and out of school, Christians as well as Muslims, living in poorer and richer neighbourhoods. Participants were met on the streets, in school, at stadiums, in the markets, in youths' associations and at home.

In the early nineties, just five years after the first case of HIV was diagnosed in Cameroon, the AIDS initials were contorted into many catch phrases such as "American Ideas to Discourage Sex." In the French speaking part of Cam-

eroon, AIDS was perceived as "Syndrome Inventé pour Décourager les Amoureux," "Salaire Impayé Depuis Avril," "Salaire Insuffisant Difficilement Acquis" (Beat-Songué, 1993)³; these last distortions gained currency in the difficult socioeconomic context Cameroon faced from 1989 onwards. In fact, Cameroon was characterized then by salary cuts and retrenchment of staff in both the public and the private sectors. AIDS was perceived as a dreadful disease for many reasons; it has to do with sexuality. Fighting against it supposed that each and everyone changes some aspects of his/her behaviour, really difficult to bear when it concerns sexuality. HIV/AIDS was also perceived as a rumour spread by the government or by foreign agencies (Feldman, Ndonko, Yang, 2004). With HIV, science was controlling people's sexuality by imposing on them some norms and practices. In the era of globalization, rumours linking HIV and other types of illnesses with conspiracy became more widespread. The Internet became a hub where information of various types is shared, mainly without disclaimers. The issue of conspiracy theory didn't occur in Cameroon with HIV/AIDS. It concerns so many domains. Rumours associated chronic degenerative diseases (hypertension, cancer, diabetes), some other illnesses like river blindness, natural catastrophes like the Lake Nyos disaster⁴ and implementation of public health policies (vaccines against poliomyelitis or family planning) with western conspiracy. In the Sévérin Cécile Abéga's novel *Les Bimanes* (1982), a lady in a southern village in Cameroon linked the high prevalence of river blindness to Western conspiracy. Mistrust in the Cameroonian context can be traced up to the late 1980s, when a widespread rumour described poliomyelitis vaccines causing infertility to young girls (Abéga, 1992; Feldman-Savelsberg, Ndonko, Schmidt-Ehry, 2000; Feldman, Ndonko, Yang, 2004; Tchegnina 2007). Parents were reluctant to get their offspring vaccinated. After the Lake Nyos disaster, which happened in Cameroon in 1986, during which a toxic gas came from the lake

³ Which respectively translate to conjured syndromes to discourage lovers, unpaid salary since April, Insufficient and hardly acquired salary: See BEAT-SONGUE P. (1993).

⁴ On August 21, 1986, Lake Nyos emitted a large cloud of CO₂, which killed about 1700 people and 3800 livestock in the North Western part of Cameroon.

and killed almost every human being and animals in that village, some people had a strong belief that a bomb had been put in the lake to kill people; others thought that it was a new western weapon tested in Africa before its production. The idea of conspiracy reappears with the widespread rumour about the arrival of two containers of infected condoms at the Douala harbour in 2004. People interviewed mentioned that Cameroonian authorities didn't let those alleged infected condoms in the country. If the idea of conspiracy has always been present in Cameroon, as in many other countries in the world, it is important to mention that the media, which inform Cameroonians about HIV conspiracy views in North America and South Africa, have reinforced it. The long and complex history of medicine in the USA and the accusation of racism and abuse of Black slaves by some physicians and surgeons created a context of friction between medical practitioner and African Americans (Washington, 2006). Africans and African Americans have in common skin colour, which has been a central issue in relation to conspiracy. Didier Fassin (2004, 2006) analysed the complex interrelation between the history of racial segregation in South Africa and Blacks' wariness of the Health system, and their perception of the high HIV prevalence rate among them in terms of the conspiracy from their white fellows. In Cameroon, as in Africa in general, there has been a certain type of identification of these people who almost have the same skin colour (African Americans, Black South Africans both dwelling in a context where Black and Whites live together and where the latter were perceived as being discriminated against).

Rumour, as Gary Fine pointed out (2007:7), intends to fill a gap in information, which can be incomplete or inaccurate. Sometimes, accurate information can exist but is unavailable, and conspiracy theories flourish in a context in which populations are more likely to believe in them. Rumours concerning HIV in Cameroon have to do with the dynamics of sex, risk and death among people who are really willing to practice full contact⁵ and this happens in a context of disease and uncertainties. In such a context where optimism about life is not that high,

⁵ Unprotected sex

where these young people who do not trust their government anymore are concerned about their future in terms of job opportunities and a complete state of well-being, the tendency is to try to explain the reasons why actions undertaken are not successful and why the context is a bleak one compared to other continents.

Trying to answer these questions leads to a certain tendency of self-justification. People have to justify why they are unable to succeed in one or various aspects of life. Véronique Campion-Vincent (2007:133) has pointed out that the decline of civil society leaves the poorest without social welfare and trust in their representatives. Groups well away from the system are more likely to explain things using conspiracy theories. Questioning their own role in this failure pushes these young people to accept the fact that they are somehow guilty, which is difficult to bear. Some young Cameroonians question why Africa is in such a state of deprivation. This is a part of the world that combines a lot of liabilities. Africa is a continent of scarcity in many domains. And as if that was not sufficient enough, AIDS comes as a coup de grace to this part of the world where people are not even able to feed accurately and to cure the most endemic diseases like malaria and typhoid. Francky⁶, one of the respondents, asks himself "why all these serious illnesses are mostly contracted by people in Africa though they start in the West and reach Africa at a twinkle of an eye, then spread in the whole continent."

This type of questioning by Francky can be heard from many people out there in Africa who seek to understand why Africa is suffering from so many plights. They sometimes fetch information from a continuum of past events (Black slavery, colonization, racial segregation during the Apartheid policy in South Africa, racism in some western countries, neocolonization, maintaining dictatorship in African countries) as well as in current events (suppressive migratory policies, the pitiful state of Africa stricken by many evils: famine, wars, epidemics, unemployment...) to find an attempt of explanation.

⁶ 20, football player, single, secondary school level of education, Christian, born and grew up in Urban areas.

These young people find it difficult to detach themselves from a past which they didn't even live.

These memories of the past are reactivated when young people have to explain their inability to succeed in various aspects of life. In this process of victimization, there is a high tendency for release from individual responsibility, which enables rationalization⁷ and justification of casual sex. This makes people look for the causes of misfortune and lack of success elsewhere. This leads to a process of rationalization of HIV risk, which questions suspicion and uncertainties on many issues. But above all, the most mentioned suspicion has to do with the relation to the West, science and technology. According to Adam Burgess (2007: 125), "Another important focus for analysis and response to mistrust is science and technology risk management." In addition to this prerequisite, Cameroonians' complex relation to the West has also made the construction of HIV in terms of conspiracy possible.

A complex relation to the west

The West is often present in these youths' discourses because of many reasons. Not only has the West played an important role in the history of Africa in general and that of Cameroon in particular, but it is also present in the history of the AIDS pandemic. The encounter between Europeans and Africans happened in a context of exploration, imperialism and colonization. White people were both technically and scientifically considered as superior. Their possession of scientific competence enabled them to make many things, which have had positive as well as negative effects on mankind.

Though African people were gifted in so many aspects of life, they did not have the same skills (scientific and technological) at that point in time. The complex relation to the West creates among these youths a relation of great fascination (modern lifestyle with its positive effects like high quality of life, leisure, the power of

technology, progress in medicine, increase in life expectancy, success, the myth of western Eldorado), mistrust (setback of modernisation in terms of pollution, perception of sexual mores and sexual practices perceived as deviant, perception of racism, proven or not) of what comes from the West, which partly induces the denial to protection.

Concerning the history of the pandemic, the western world, as the one who diagnosed the illness, identified the virus, and was the first to make preventive means like condoms and research for therapies or vaccines, is perceived as being very gifted and the one who masters science. Suspicions also question the power of the West in the mastering of science and technology...Those accused of conspiracy are those who are able to create a weapon (bacteriological or not) that would harm those who can't control anything because of their lack of competence in these domains.

A disease that comes from the west

It is important to mention that at the very beginning of the AIDS epidemic, the African origin of HIV was often mentioned in the West. Furthermore African culture and African sexual promiscuity were often cited as the cause for the proliferation of the disease. This tendency was criticized by many scholars like Sabatier, 1989; Gausset, 2001; Fassin, 2006. This made Africans angry and forced them to answer back, by returning the stigma and accusing Westerners of being sexually perverse and deviant and accusing this sexual deviance as being the cause of HIV.

HIV is said to have been caused by the West through two main means. The first has to do with the transgression of sexual norms governing sexuality that people interviewed linked to the alleged White "perverse sexuality," which, according to them, has caused the infection. The most mentioned "sexually perverse" practices by people interviewed have to do with zoophilia, homosexuality and orgy. The second means is the creation in western laboratories, either accidentally or knowingly, of a bacteriological weapon.

⁷ Fact of producing a discourse of rational justification of behaviour perceived as irrational or contestable.

Transgression of sexual norms governing sexuality

As far as the first means is concerned, many stories told about the origins of HIV in relation to sexuality put emphasis on Zoophilia, which constitutes the typical storyline in the collective representations.

In fact, according to the story, a white man asked an African girl to have sexual intercourse with his dog. She accepted and caught HIV during this practice. She then had sex with the white man and infected him. Then, she infected other African men.

Victorine⁸: It is said that a White man brought a dog. He called a Black girl and he proposed her a big amount of money if she has sex with his dog. The girl accepted. They went to the hotel and the girl did it there with the dog. That was all. It's from that time on that AIDS occurred.

Virginie: They forced Cameroonian girls to have sex with dogs. For me, it comes from their countries. They are the ones who brought it here. They have epidemics there and they bring them here to infect us.

The dog story was widespread in the entire Cameroon from the early nineties. It started in Douala, where two Cameroonian girls were said to have had sex with a dog belonging to a White man. The veracity of this story has never been proved out. Nonetheless, it has been diffused and taken for granted. "Urban legend and to an extent more general rumours, typically have a more spontaneous social character making them particularly difficult to trace" Burgess (2007:135).

Other stories mention a Black woman who caught HIV through sexual intercourse with either a monkey or a gorilla. All the discourses concerning zoophilia bring out the idea of deviance of the social norms governing sexuality and therefore portray AIDS as the result of punishment. These storylines are built up with three kinds of animals (dog, monkey, and gorilla) and a human being (black lady). The director is White. The White man compels the Black lady to have sex with his dog, proposing her an excellent cash reward. He appears here like a 'voyeur' since he doesn't take an active part to

the lovemaking. By organizing this, the White man's intention is not that of harming, but that of satisfying his fantasy. However, the implications of what he organizes are out of his control. The places of the actions change according to the stories. Africa, Europe, USA. On the one hand, if the Black lady is perceived as a victim who accepts the proposition because of poverty, on the other hand, she is to be blamed because she is also perceived as "money lover" and the one who brought the disease. This questions the relation between money, power and morality. He who has money has the power to obtain whatever he wants in a given context of deprivation where common sense contradicts necessity very often.

Though it doesn't have any link with HIV, Pascal Froissart (1995) found this example of modern rumour that portrays animals and sexuality in Guinea. In the Guinean case, pornographic photocopies showing a girl having sex with a foreigner's dog were even sold. According to Pascal Froissart (1995), Guinean girls and the Westerners are accused for many things. Foreigners are not well perceived for various reasons. They earn far much better than native Guineans, which also enables them to obtain everything they want, even material exchange for sex. Therefore, they are more likely to have the most desirable girls, thus challenging Guinean men. Furthermore, they are accused of being "perverts." On the other hand, some Guinean girls who break cultural norms regarding clothing, sexuality and endogamy become the targets of norms and values keepers. Both foreigners and "emancipated" girls are the ideal scapegoats in such a context because they concentrate many stakes.

Experiments in western laboratories

Some youths have a strong belief in the fact that HIV was created unknowingly during experiments in Western research laboratories. Mostly, the USA are quite often cited as the country where these were carried out. The reason why the USA are often cited could be that this country is perceived as being the most powerful in the world, both scientifically and technologically. According to Véronique Campion-Vincent (2006: 220), two evil entities come

⁸ 18, Student, Lower Sixth, single, no religion, born and grew up in urban areas.

out of the contemporary imaginary of conspiracy: Science and the USA are both paradigmatic figures of Western contemporaneity.

Westerners are perceived as very curious people in sexual as well as scientific domains. If in sexual aspects this curiosity is characterized by practices that are perceived as “abnormal,” “bizarre” or “against nature,” in scientific aspects, it has to do with the exploration of many things with the aim of making tremendous medical findings. The thesis of HIV through hazardous medical experiments doesn't point out conspiracy at all, since the scientists who carried them out were also surprised by the “weird” outcome of their research. Besides, these experiments are said to have surprised the scientists. There is a perception of other types of experiments whose intentions were to make bacteriological weapons either to impoverish or to kill Africans for several reasons. Young people interviewed mention:

- The Africans' high birth rate would be a threat for the Western population; this would be the rationale behind Family Planning programmes in African countries whereas paradoxically, there is an incitation to encourage birth in the West with allowances given to parents to help them bring their children up.
- Racism and the meanness of westerners towards Africans
- The ongoing enrichment of the West and the impoverishment of Africans through condom and antiretroviral sales. This reinforces the belief in conspiracy against Africa.

Condoms have suffered from some fantastic rumours, among which are that of being infected with HIV and that of containing tiny invisible holes. These condoms are so suspected since they are often very cheap or free of charge. This makes the population think that there surely must be a hidden price to pay for using this modern device (Burgess 2007; Tchegnina, 2008).

Condoms as weapons

Condoms do not arrive in communities as neutral, value-free objects; rather they enter a so-

cial setting permeated with ideas about health, self-protection and danger. (Kaler, 2004:105).

If a condom is presented by the biomedical discourse as protecting against HIV, thus preventing death, its effects on fertility is mostly questioned and suspected by many people. Westerners are suspected to create HIV to impose the use of condoms to Africans who were “stubborn enough” to refuse to use it. In such a context where the emphasis is placed on large families with many children, where manhood and womanhood is assessed according to the size of the family and the number of children, there is a social pressure not to use means that would prevent fertility thus, leading to people's reluctance to use condoms...

More than the condom itself, what is being condemned are the effects induced by its utilization (reduction of pleasure, the fear that it bursts during sexual intercourse, the fear that it remains stuck in the vagina, the fear that it frustrates the erection...). The will to save “full contact” that becomes more and more common is shared by people who say not to bear the idea of wearing condoms all their life. Saving “full contact” also means for some young people the freedom to procreation that condom use has limited. During face-to-face interviews and focus group, young people have often mentioned the implications of condom use on birth rate in Cameroon, emphasizing that the rationale behind the promotion of condom was a birth limitation policy imposed by the West. Some young girls were concerned about the possibility of not having children if they don't take the resolution to stop using condom at a certain point in time. This brings us to the analysis that though condom is perceived as being able to protect against HIV and death it induces to this context, it also blocks fertility and life. The use of condoms therefore has cultural and ideological implications in Cameroon, especially among young people who are willing to built up a more steady relationship with their partner or who are willing to have children secretly or openly.

In the following excerpt, Eloi perceives Westerners as very cynical people who are able to make the most of their opportunities.

Eloi⁹: They started with family planning. They said It's a system implemented for reducing poverty. White people don't want us to make a lot of children. They say we are poor, etc. As we haven't understood, they created HIV and armed conflicts between countries so that those who are killed contribute to the reduction of the population growth among Africans. The same thing with the invention of condoms. Since condom was made, it has contributed a lot to reduce birth in Africa. Rumours about HIV impregnated condoms, HIV as "slow-acting poison"¹⁰ affect local responses to public health campaigns (Feldman, Ndonko, Yang 2004; Tchetsnia, 2005). People who mention HIV impregnated condoms point it as one of the reasons why people are becoming more and more infected in Cameroon. Unprotected sex according to them, can not be the only reason for that increase. Regarding "slow-acting poison," the aim here is to prevent stigmatization and marginalization of AIDS patients. However, this render AIDS invisible, thus preventing people to be more concerned.

In the discourse of these youths, the general impression is that many of them are well informed about the initial (former) rationale behind family planning policy and are not so that convinced of the conspirationist theory. These rumours they tell and which they end up believing in by dint of telling are used anyhow. Some young people then criticize what they call "birth limitation policy", "one black child per family policy", "forced sterilization of Africans."

People who have a strong belief in conspiracy theory are more likely to mention that they don't trust cheap or free of charge condoms. Although some research undertaken in the USA (Bogart and Thorburn 2005) show the relationship between the belief in conspiracy theory and the reluctance to undergo an HIV test, and condom use, these types of quantitative re-

search work have not yet been carried out in Cameroon.

In September 2007, Maputo Archbishop Francisco Chimoio claimed on BBC that "Condoms are not sure because there are two countries in Europe; they are making condoms with the virus on purpose ...They want to finish with the African people. This is the programme. They want to colonise until up to now. If we are not careful we will finish in one century's time." AIDS activists in the country have been shocked by the archbishop's comments.¹¹

One can see behind the Archbishop's discourse the use of fear as an attempt to discourage the use of condoms against which the Roman Catholic Church is seriously opposed in favour of abstinence and fidelity to one's partner.

The suspicions towards condoms also extend to antiretrovirals. Peter, a 24-year-old man interviewed in a rural area, gave an amazing explanation why the prevalence of HIV is on the increase in Africa and why this is done to impoverished "poor people". His justifications have to do with the wickedness and the meanness of Westerners:

"When White people create a disease like Aids, they pretend trying to find some things that would enable people to protect themselves against the disease. They make condoms. And inside condoms, do you know what they put? Some harmful substances that will cause other types of diseases. After, they make some medicines to alleviate the pains of people who are HIV positive. What people don't know is that in these drugs, they put harmful substances that will have some effects maybe in 10 or 15 years. Those White people then send their children in the universities to be specialised in the illnesses that will appear in 10 or 15 years, so that is why they are always the first to find the virus and to find the cure for it. This is how they exploit poor people."

⁹ 22, student, Upper Sixth, single, Christian, born in rural areas and moved to Urban areas with his parents when he was 6.

¹⁰ French for poison lent. A slow-acting poison is socially perceived as causing the same symptoms as HIV/AIDS. Thus this renders the social visibility of AIDS stigma almost impossible.

¹¹ " HIV-Infected condoms sent to kill Africans, claims archbishop". This article was first published on guardian.co.uk on Thursday September 27 2007.

Condoms as a business tool

Condoms are being suspected of enriching their producers. According to a study undertaken among students at the University of Douala by Njikam Savage (2005), there is a profit rationale behind the promotion of condoms.

“They felt the propaganda to use condoms was driven by a huge commercial profit-making incentive and not so much by a concern or strategy to fight against HIV/AIDS as was often claimed. This, they insisted, was the reason for widespread adverts on condom usage all over the place, most of which carried no reference to HIV/AIDS. HIV/AIDS was simply used as an excuse to escalate the sales of condoms. According to these students, a cure of HIV/AIDS would therefore have a devastating effect on condom sales and may well be the reason for the foot-dragging in the funding of scientific research towards having a vaccine or a cure.” (Njikam Savage, 2005:58.)

The idea of a 'cure' found by the west and withheld from the developing world

Rumours stipulate “Foot-dragging and wavering around therapies.” These have to do with a big lie on the so-called research for an efficient therapy. This imposture is said to be organized to trick the entire world, making people believe that there would be an active research to find a therapy or vaccine. The West would have no interest to find the therapy because of the implications this would have on condom sales. There are talks about the fact that the West have already found a therapy but has refused to commercialize it.

According to Virginie¹², “ It seems as the Whites have found the medicine there in the West, but are not willing to share it. I have always said that the White doesn't like the Black. When a Black man is suffering from Aids here, he is cured when he goes to Europe whereas when you are Aids patients here in Cameroun, you die.”

¹² 24, single, shopkeeper, secondary school level of education, Christian, born and grew up in urban areas.

“Gifted Chinese researchers who are disqualified”

Also, respondents mentioned that since the West is reluctant to share the efficient therapy with the rest of the world, especially with the have nots, some other people have been successful to find an efficient therapy. There are talks about famous Chinese doctors who found the cure for Aids. However, these Chinese are either said to have been called charlatans or to have been killed by the West. This, as respondents mentioned, is because the West wants to be the only discoverer and owner of the therapy. According to these respondents, westerners are the only one to fix the rules and regulations under which a reliable trial protocol is carried out. They would not hesitate to invalidate and to cancel any researcher from the physician board. Whenever the person who finds the vaccine or therapy is not White, he is either killed or disqualified by the scientific establishment that is highly made up of Whites. This type of discourses should be understood as an “insertion in a local or continental rationale where racial issue is central” (Fassin, 2006:111).

Therapeutic trials undertaken by Africans and invalidated by the scientific establishment are perceived as denial to recognize the merits of Africans and are being considered as a mark of racism. According to Didier Fassin, (2006: 93), “Concerning medicines invented and promoted in Africa, there is but a particular dimension: the announced discoveries appear to be revenges of the colonial and post-colonial histories; in the same way, reservations had by the official science are denounced as deriving from racists intentions.”

The reconstruction of bird flu and atypical pneumonia under conspiracy theory

Bird flu was perceived in Cameroon by some youths as a disease caused artificially by the West to infect chickens in Africa, thereby forcing Africans to import their chickens from Europe and therefore making them more economically dependant on the West. One of the peer educators interviewed mentioned that bird flu is a conspiracy to retard the economic

growth of Bamileke, one of the most important ethnic groups renowned for its economic skill. Formerly, Cameroonians used to import thousands of chickens from Europe. After the Dioxin contaminated chicken in Belgium, they changed sides and started developing their own farming.

On the other hand, the atypical pneumonia that affected people in China for a while was perceived as a disease created by Westerners to kill Chinese people who are becoming more and more gifted, challenging them in many domains. According to people who have a strong belief in this thesis, Chinese people have successfully found a cure for the disease since they are cleverer than Africans. This kind of rationale finds its justification in the international relations where Chinese are more and more present. Populations perceive their presence in Africa and facilities they are building there as a mark of Chinese power.

Conclusion

In front of sex and death that constitute a double terrifying stake, some young Cameroonians interviewed throw the risk of sexuality and death to someone else in order "not to feel desperate." There is also a problem with their ability to manage risk at the heat of the moment, but there is also such a stake with sex and death that these young people are obliged to use defence mechanisms to cope. This sets off mechanisms through which the rationalization of risk is made possible. Scapegoats are easily found, and there is finger-pointing. The locus of control among these young people is an external one. Within this perspective, the responsibility for protection and decision making is perceived by the individual as being out of his sphere of competence. It's not his fault if he is infected, since he is likely to believe that unhappy events, which occur in his/her life, are out of his/her control. These scapegoats concern a number of factors among which are poverty, witchcraft, evil spirits, bad luck, ancestors, the unfaithful partner, weak blood, infected condoms, condoms of poor quality, love, the West, the government...just to name a few.

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Cat's Demise Prompts Rumours of Thatcher Death, Causes Fur to Fly (The Telegram, St. John's, Newfoundland, Nov. 11, 2009; submitted to FTN by Paul Smith)

Ottawa (CP)—A brief message about a felled feline really caused the fur to fly this week, prompting erroneous rumours about the demise of no less than Margaret Thatcher. The brouhaha at a gala Toronto tribute to Canada's military is a cautionary tale about how modern instant messaging and good old-fashioned gossip can combine to shake things up at even the highest levels. Some 1,700 luminaries, including Prime Minister Stephen Harper, were in the middle of dinner Tuesday night when smart phones throughout the room began to buzz with the news, "Lady Thatcher has passed away." Dinner chatter abruptly veered to expressions of shock and reminiscences of Margaret Thatcher, the 84-year-old former British prime minister, as news of her apparent passing spread like wildfire. It eventually reached the ears of Harper, or someone close to him. Harper aide Dimitri Soudas, back in Ottawa,

was dispatched to confirm the news and start preparing an official statement mourning the death of the Iron Lady, an icon to many in Harper's Conservative party. Soudas immediately e-mailed his contacts at Buckingham Palace and in British Prime Minister Gordon Brown's office. They had no idea what he was talking about. Lady Thatcher, they informed an embarrassed Soudas, was still very much alive.

About 20 minutes after the rumour mill started churning, a corrective e-mail message began to circulate among the diners at the Metro Toronto Convention Centre. Turns out it was Transport Minister John Baird's beloved 16-year-old cat—whom he'd named Thatcher out of admiration for one of his political heroes—who had ceased to be. Soudas is said to have quipped since: "If the cat wasn't dead, I'd have killed it by now."

REMINDER

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This newsletter is called **FOAFtale News** for the jocular term current among legend scholars for over twenty years. The term "foaf" was introduced by Rodney Dale (in his 1978 book, *The Tumour in the Whale*) for an oft-attributed but anonymous source of contemporary legends: a "friend of a friend." Dale pointed out that contemporary legends always seemed to be about someone just two or three steps from the teller — a boyfriend's cousin, a co-worker's aunt, or a neighbor of the teller's mechanic. "Foaf" became a popular term at the Sheffield legend conferences in the 1980s. It was only a short step to the pun "foaftale," a step taken by a yet-anonymous wag.

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