

# Panic(s) in Our Plates: Contemporary Legends and Conspiracy Theories on Food

JULIEN GIRY

*Université de Tours/PRIM*

The local newspaper *Paris-Normandie* reported a hospitalized cardiology patient found a dead field mouse in his spinach (Le Dauphiné Libéré 2018).<sup>1</sup> According to the hospital spokesman, the rodent was captured by a spinach-harvesting farm machine and then later frozen. It had not, he insisted, come from the hospital kitchens. Questioned by local media, the company that produces the frozen spinach insisted nothing unusual had been found in the factory, especially not a field mouse. The rodent was sent to a laboratory to verify it was not carrying any infectious diseases.

In the same vein, I was told in Cincinnati in 2010 that an Ohio college student was disgusted when she ate at Burger King. Here is, roughly, the story stated from memory:

Last week, Mary, 22, was having lunch with her friends when she decided to order another burger. She was halfway through the burger when she noticed an extra clump of mayonnaise on the side of the bun. She licked it off, tasted it, and immediately realized things were not right. ‘I’m not gonna lie,’ she said. ‘Sometimes I give my boyfriend a little something extra in the bedroom, see? So, when I licked the sauce, the texture and taste were familiar.’ Mary immediately called over the manager who denied the allegations, so she contacted the local health department. They sent the ‘mayo’ remains off for testing and the results were positive for two different sort of semen. In the following days, things went even worse when Mary woke with a giant red rash on her lip. The rash spread and developed into severe blisters. The physician was able to verify that she had contracted the herpes virus, which she claims was a result of her tainted burger. The manager confirmed that two employees were fired as a result of her allegations and the positive semen test results. He added, “We can’t always keep an eye on our employees’ conduct. We can only hope, during the interview process, that we are able to hire employees that meet our company’s standards.”

Since the late 1970s, researchers have identified a wide range of contemporary legends based on narratives related to food issues (Bell 1976; Dorowitz 1979; Fine 1979, 1980; Kapeferer 1987; Koenig 1985, Tucker 1978) as well as compiled notes on strange food offered in some “exotic” restaurants (Hobbs 1966; Smith and Smith 1974; Sorrocks 1975, 1980). Despite numerous case studies on specific anecdotes or hearsay, very few books (Le Quellec 1991; Meurger 1988; Webb and Lang 1987; Kalmre 2013a) or research consider “food legends” or “food panics” (Campion-Vincent and Renard 1992) as a central issue. On the contrary, they are often seen as a sub-category or a sub-genre of Fine’s seminal tripartite classification of urban legends (1992): new technologies, love/sex, and assaults against physical integrity. But sometimes contemporary legends on food accumulate and exceed the moral blaming or the warning statement. From an isolated anecdote or joke, many narratives flourish and aggregate in an apparently coherent and political way which turns into a conspiratorial vision of the world in which an omnipotent and vile enemy pulls the secret strings of power for an evil design. Food is a strong means for that purpose.

This article explores contemporary food legends and conspiracy theories and their connection to social narratives reflecting societal fears and anxieties. I analyze how food legends offer moralistic tales addressing identity issues, industrialization dangers, and love or sexual affairs, with food central to these anecdotes. Contemporary legends are characterised by their ability to mutate and adapt through various contexts, offering fresh insights into their significance in modern society. Those anecdotes are often accidental and localized, and, in any case, not planned in a malicious or harmful global intention. In contrast, conspiracy theories, defined as “the conviction that a secret, omnipotent individual or group covertly controls the political and social order or some part thereof, circulates solely on the margins of society” (Fenster 2008:1), use food as a mere tool in theorizing clandestine worldwide control by an unseen malevolent orchestrator. Conspiracism constitutes then a systemic and global vision of the world and social relationships in which everything, from the most insignificant things to extraordinary events (e.g., Oscars results, pandemics, poverty, 9/11 attacks, JFK assassination, etc.), is organized, planned, and manipulated by an evil force (Giry and Tika 2020). Stated simply, the conspiracy is everywhere. In this respect, conspiracy theories on food, in opposition with contemporary legends, results from a harmful plot organized long in advance by evil elites. In sum, I argue that there are three main differences between contemporary legends and conspiracy theories on food: the narrative scale (local vs. global), the issue of intentionality of the threat (accidents vs. orchestrated plot), and the social dimension (moral vs. political).

## Overview of Contemporary Legends about Food

It is generally argued that contemporary legends are “stories of unusual, humorous or horrible events that contain themes related to the modern world, are told as something that did or may have happened, variations of which are found in numerous places and times and contain moral implications” (Bordia and DiFonzo 2007, 28). They are anonymous narratives or “FOAF tales” (Dale 1978), i.e., a story retrieved from someone two or three steps away from the narrator—literally a “friend of friend,” or possibly someone like a cousin or a neighbor, with several variations told as true or plausible, brief accounts linked to modern fears, concerns, or expectation of a society or a social group (Abbot 2013; Renard 2013). Thus, contemporary legends express the need to (re)create sense in uncertain social situations through narratives that mobilize or strengthen moral and culturally dominant symbols and values (Giry 2017a). They affirm a triple necessity of identity, understanding the social turmoil, and taking control. For those reasons, from a functionalist point of view, the *moral* aspect is central in contemporary legends because it expresses a kind of punishment due to a failure or a lack of prudence within a given cultural framework. In the “Kentucky Fried Rat” legends for instance, where KFC restaurants *accidentally* offer rat meat instead of chicken to consumers, victims, despite many variations, are often women who instead of following their traditional assigned gender role (cooking fresh food to their family) feed their children with industrial ready-made dishes or junk food (Fine 1980). In the discussion that follows, I first highlight the main concerns and themes tackled by food legends (internal analysis) and then their functions and modes of narration (external analysis).

## The Contents and Concerns of Food Legends

A great deal of the legends on food collected and analyzed by scholars since the late 1970s address eating taboos or inedibility—mostly from a Western perspective. Topics in these texts include the impurity of certain animals (rats, bats, spiders, etc.), the inappropriate or tragic consumption of pets or beloved animals (dogs, cats, horses, etc.), the eating of non-authorized flesh (pigs, seafood, horses, etc.), zoophilia and bestiality (donkeys, goats, sheep, etc.), crude flesh or still living animals, and the eating of carrion and voluntary or involuntary cannibalism. While the topics run the gamut, from a theoretical point of view, food legends seem to have three main concerns: industrial food and its dangers, identity issues, and love/sex.

*Industrialized Food and Its Dangers*

Contemporary food legends tend to assert that it is necessary to be careful of industrial food produced by large, greedy companies, whether they are depicted as careless like in the “Kentucky Fried Rat” legend (Fine 1980), deceptive like in the “salad-rinsing” story (i.e., supermarket chains are accused to “wash” spoiled salads to refresh and then sell them) (Kalmre 2016), or evil. I will examine this last issue further through the example of Church’s Fried Chicken’s purported secret recipe to sterilize African American males (Turner 1987). There are the numerous narratives about “fake foodstuffs” in supermarkets or restaurants (Brunvand 2001; Fine 1980; Le Quellec 1991, Villeneuve 2016; Kalmre 2016), poisoned foods<sup>3</sup> (Campion-Vincent and Renard 2014, 266-268) and candies (Kapeferer 1987), tapeworm diet pills (Le Quellec 1991, 71-73), calamari made of pig anuses (Burger 2013; Van de Winkel 2017: 33), mice in sodas (Bell 1976; Fine 1979), cockroaches or cockroach eggs in tacos at Taco Bell (*Snopes* 2014); KFC mutant chicken with six thighs and wings (*Snopes* 1999), carcinogenic margarine<sup>4</sup> (Kapeferer 1987; Roberge 2010), and spider eggs in Bubble Yum chewing gum (Brunvand 1999: 92-93). In this respect, “contemporary legends (assume) a prominent place in the anti-corporate arsenal and serve unconsciously as a form of resistance” (Fine and Turner 2000: 636) to futile and frivolous purchases, needs, or goods. Therefore, they usually target famous big companies (e.g., see the “Goliath effect” theorized by Fine 1985) such as McDonald’s, KFC, or Coca Cola, who allegedly using greedy, false, or artificial practices and producing bad quality food (too fat, too salty, too sugary, etc.).

Moreover, food legends can also appear as illustrative anecdotes about unexpected effects (e.g., endless erections, hideous spots, enormous rashes), uses (e.g., anal or vaginal absorption of alcohol through soaked tampons), or contents of certain products (e.g., antiemetic pills in McDonald’s burgers or worms in their burgers (Fine 1980; Koenig 1985: 14-17; Morgan and Tucker 1984: 70-71; *Newsweek* 1978), needles or hair(s) in industrial *viennoiseries* (pastry), dangerous exotic animals hidden in fruits (spiders, snakes, scorpions, etc.) or vegetables<sup>5</sup> (toads)<sup>6</sup>. A second category of narratives dealing with exotic animals in dishes appears as a kind of in-between. It assumes that foreigners, outsiders, or aliens eat, or make us unwittingly or by vengeance eat, disgusting, unpalatable, inedible, or literally *immundus* (squalid) things: dogs, rat (bones), or street pigeons in Asian/Indian restaurants (Van de Winkel 2017), pet food in Asian and Indian restaurants (Klintberg 1983), human semen in kebab restaurants (De Vos 1996: 241-242; Brunvand 1999: 199-200), sausages made with human flesh (Kalmre 2013a), and even “negro cans” in Belgian Congo, i.e., tin cans allegedly made of African flesh (Le Quellec 1991).

### *Food Legends and Identity Issues*

Food is often linked to contemporary legends in terms of identity. And as is illustrated with the “Church’s Fried Chicken Sterilizes Black Men” legend (Turner 1987), this can also be the case for conspiracy theories. To support their purpose, food legends that deal with identity issues often echo some classic themes and universal concerns of contemporary legends. To see how this works, take two examples: the case of the pizza margherita as an Italian founding myth (Nowak 2014) and the case of white slavery and ice cream (Ellis 2009).

In the case of the legend about the pizza margherita as a symbol of Italian unity, let us begin with a short rendition of the legend itself:

In 1889, King Umberto and Queen Margherita visited *Napoli* (Naples). Fed up with the French cuisine fashionable during the time, the Queen decided to have a typical Italian meal!

In the deep heart of Naples’ popular neighborhoods, she went to Raffaele Esposito’s restaurant, a master pizza chef who offered the Queen three sorts of pizzas. The first one was garnished with lard and basil, the second with tomatoes and anchovies, and the third one with tomatoes, basil, and mozzarella. The Queen found the last one so delicious that she decided to give it her name: Margherita. (Nowak 2014).

If this legend is more “fakelore” (Dorson 1969)<sup>7</sup> than folklore, it nonetheless deserves attention (Stekert 1986). There is little question about the veracity of historical events: Nowak has amply demonstrated how unlikely it was that the queen of the newly born Italian kingdom would risk a visit to a neighborhood of ill repute alone, especially not during a cholera outbreak. The legend persists because it enacts so effectively, symbolically, and politically, the Italian unification process (*Risorgimento*), and thus a basis for an emergent Italian identity.

Chromatically, the pizza margherita is red (tomatoes), white (mozzarella), and green (basil) just like the flag of the recently unified, but still fragile, Italian kingdom and nation it symbolizes. Here, it seems useful to remember that before 1861 Italy was divided in several autonomous and rival kingdoms, principalities, and city-states. The Italian unification process was long and painful, marked by almost fifty years of civil wars, riots, and revolutionary campaigns that reshaped the territorial organization of the peninsula, its political order, and its social relationships. In 1889, when the legend allegedly occurs, the political equilibrium established after the 1866 Third Italian War of Independence was precarious, and Italy was still facing some revolutionary jolts and irredentist movements, mostly in the South, which is often depicted as “corrupted, barbaric, and uncivilized” (Moe 2002: 165). It is politically

significant that the legend takes place in Naples, a major southern city because it means that the rulers through their presence are aware of and address southern difficulties such as poverty. Secondly, in the *risanamento* (urban renovation) context, particularly painful in southern Italy in general and Naples especially (Giampaola and Longobardo 2000; Giardino 2017), it is politically significant to show that rulers share the common folk's behaviors, customs, and culinary habits. Indeed, it was a proletariat dish, disregarded and even scorned by upper social classes. Take the description of pizzas made by Matilde Serao in her famous best-selling novel *Il ventre di Napoli*:

Made from a dense dough that burns but does not cook, and is covered with almost raw tomatoes, with garlic, with oregano, with peppers: these pizzas in many pieces that cost one *soldo* are entrusted to a boy who walks around to sell them on the street, on a movable table, and there he stays the whole day, with these slices of pizza which freeze in the cold, which turn yellow in the sun, eaten by the flies. (1884: 19-20)

By eating a pizza, literally engulfing it, the rulers symbolically endorsed popular habits as well as metaphorically and allegorically integrating southern territories and cities in the fragile political consensus found right after the Third Italian War of Independence.

The second example addresses identity issues focused on Italian immigrants to the United States. In 1910 in Chicago, the rumor spread that young white women from good families had disappeared after they had visited some ice cream parlors owned by suspicious Italian immigrants. Drugged, they were sent to Eastern or Southern Europe to be forced into prostitution. Like other legends, this one had real world effects, contributing to the adoption of the *Mann Act* which made it a felony to engage in interstate or international commerce or transport women for the purposes of prostitution. The legend does not question ice cream parlors as public spaces so much as questioning who owned and operated these parlors. By the end of the nineteenth century, tea parlors had become well established spaces within which the genders could commingle, offering intermediary social spaces where young men and women could interact. The nature of the tea parlor as a "safe space" depended, the legend reveals, on who managed the parlors (usually white Anglo-Saxon Protestants). With appropriate adults seemingly supervising, young women were partly released from the social control and pressure exerted by their families and were free to flirt while also being sufficiently protected and supervised. In a sense, tea parlors symbolized a kind of in-between to two *ultima ratios*: the parental home or the convent (a totally asexual overprotected space) and the brothel (a hypersexual and unsafe place).

However, in the case of ice cream parlors, this balance is symbolically and metaphorically broken by the introduction of a double alterity: a *new* kind of parlors run by scheming Italian immigrants in connection with organized crime, and the consumption of relatively new or barely known products such as *gelato* (ice cream) or exotic fruit, particularly bananas, allegedly full of strange poisoning beasts and erotic charges. By spending time in those places instead of “good-old” tea parlors, young ladies in bloom challenged the social equilibrium by yielding to the temptation of novelty and unknown, even on the level of sexual symbolism. For breaking the social consensus, they are punished and forced into sex work, sent to far away foreign and hostile countries.

Less than ten years later, by the middle of the 1920s with the massification and democratization of ice cream consumption, a symbolical switch happened, and the legend vanished.<sup>8</sup> It thus confirms the functionalist character of the narrative to address a specific risk, anxiety, or fear spread into a determinate social group. And, once the risk was over, the legend disappeared. For our concerns here, from a foreign and suspicious product made and sold by suspect immigrants, ice cream was then established as an all-American product inadvertently invented, in a classic example, an origin legend by Mrs. George Washington herself.

Common media legend asserted that it [ice cream] had been invented by Martha Washington, who left a bowl of cream outside one cold night for a neighborhood kitty and found it frozen solid in the morning. Tasting it, the first lady found that she had accidentally made “a smooth, delicious custard.” (Funderburg 1995: 3)

Put another way, this legend indirectly links ice cream to one of the American Founding Fathers, George Washington, and turns them into a truly American, or Americanized, foodstuff. Here, we face a typical use of contemporary legends as a mythical or quasi mythological means for identity (Kalmre 2013b).

### *Food Legends and Love/Sex Affairs*

Food tales tackle another central theme of contemporary legends: love and sex (Fine 1992). Returning to Italy, we can illustrate this item through “the chocolate egg and the diamond ring” (Siporin 2008). The following passage demonstrates the essential features of the legend:

In 2001, a young man in Perugia offered his girlfriend a chocolate Easter egg without telling her there was a diamond ring hidden inside. A couple of days later, with no news from his girlfriend, he decided to ask her if she had fully appreciated the egg taste. She replied that as she prefers milk chocolate to

dark chocolate, she had exchanged it at the chocolate store. Hearing this, the boy got angry and revealed that the egg contained a very precious ring. They rushed to the chocolate store, but it was too late. The egg had already been sold to an unknown customer. It was the end of their love affair. (Siporin 2008: 172)

Some versions, particularly relevant and symbolically significant, also state that the girl exchanged the egg because she found it too small, and, in others, the ring miraculously turns up (Siporin 2008: 175).

The first thing to note is that the narrative invites both the performer and the audience to take a position: who is responsible for the end of the affair? The selfish girl who did not pay attention to her lover's present and then rejects him? Or the boy who pays such poor attention to his girlfriend that he does not even know her tastes? Whoever is guilty, the mutual misunderstanding leads to dissolution in what is at first presented as a romantic story.

In Western symbolism, rings are usually considered an indicator of fidelity and its (accidental) loss, breaking, or withdrawal signifies the end of engagements, relationships, or even death.<sup>9</sup> In this case, the loss or non-discovery of the ring means they have both failed at a kind of love test. Like in fairy tales, the ring did not find its finger: Cinderella did not put on her glass slipper, and Prince Charming did not marry the princess. There is no hero, no wedding, and no rise to the throne, including the metaphorical throne of the heart. And if one continues the festive analogy, this narrative echoes the lucky charm hidden in Epiphany cakes, but neither the queen nor the king has found each other.

In Italian folklore, eggs traditionally represent a present or a love token (Galanti 1958: 26), and its refusal must be understood as an affront to the aspirant. Moreover, eggs are also known to allegorize feminine fecundity or fertility as well as masculine genitals (Newall 1971: 113-141). This last symbol is particularly obvious in the too-small-egg version of the story. Whatever so, the refusal of the egg, like the loss of the ring, testifies to the sexual or romantic incompatibility between the two young people.

Finally, there is the legend's setting. Perugia is known as the "Italian capital of chocolate." A particular chocolate cake, the Perugia Choco Cake, for which the city is known is the *bacio* (the kiss). The city also hosts the Euro-chocolate festival annually. With its many associations from the romantic to the aphrodisiac to the erotic (Ziegler 2003, 403), chocolate adds an added layer to the legend, indexed for those audience's familiar with the city. Additionally, if Siporin is right to argue that "chocolate symbolizes sex" (2008: 186), the refusal of the chocolate egg conversely indicates the absence of sexual desire. In sum, if the "chocolate egg and the diamond ring" narrative met with success in Perugia, it is because it



was connected to local cultural references and a collective imaginary. At the same time, the legend draws upon widely distributed tropes, like the love quest, and concerns, like sexual adequacy and acceptance.

However, despite their main concerns and contents, contemporary food legends seen from an external analysis point of view can be told through three different narration modes depending on author or “disseminator” intentions, moods, or goals (Fayolle, Barroco and Fayolle 2001). Thus, a functionalist analysis is fruitful.

### Narration Modes and Functions

Regardless of their purpose or potential authenticity, food legends are most of the time told as true or plausible one-time stories or anecdotes, and sometimes as jokes. Sometimes, it happens that the stigma of the narrative, often a xenophobic stigma, is functionally turned upside-down (Goffman 1963). In this case, the story can alternatively be told as a joke or a genuine anecdote. Let me introduce three exemplary and illustrative folktales about Chinese restaurants.

#### *The Anecdote: “The China Chow’s Special Dish”*

The China Chow restaurant in Palm Springs was shut down last Friday after undercover policemen went inside and purchased dog meat, a special dish the restaurant was selling to its VIP customers. It all started after the waiter gave the dog meat to the wrong person. The client was very disgusted by the dog meat. He later reported it to the local police department. They then setup an undercover operation for two months that brought China Chow restaurant to justice, saving the life of many innocent dogs. They were also slaughtering the dogs in the back of the restaurant in a soundproof room. Customers would never hear the dogs barking.

Palm Springs spokesperson advised civilians to report any suspicious Chinese restaurants to law enforcement. (*Snopes* 2016)

#### *The Joke: “A (Sweet and) Sour Laugh”*

Do you know why the waiter is always laughing when he brings you spring rolls?

‘Cause he knows what they are made of!!! (Quoted from memory)

*The Returned Stigma: "The Chinese Strikes Back"*

A Chinese man settles in a little hilltop village where everyone knows each other for decades to open a restaurant. A few days later, he comes to the local grocery and says:

"Good morning sir, would you please give me ten tin cans of dog food?"

Very skeptical the grocer asked if he *really* has dogs and says that he is wary about newcomers, and particularly about Chinese food because he has heard so many horrible stories about disgusting dishes.

"Do not worry sir, I actually have dogs" answers the Chinese man. "I'll be right back!" Then he brings his dogs to the grocery.

"Well, OK. Here are your cans."

A couple of days later, the Chinese man comes back to the store and orders ten cans of cat food.

"Cause you got cats now?" mumbles the grocer.

"Of course," answers the Chinese man. Once again, he brings his pets to the grocer who finally gives him what he asked for.

The very next week, the Chinese man arrives to the grocery with an apparently heavy boiling tureen. He places it on the counter and lifts the lid. The tureen happens to be full of fresh excrements.

"What the fuck is that?!" yells the grocer. "Get out! That's disgusting!"

"Would you please give me ten rolls of toilet paper?" slyly asks the Chinese.<sup>10</sup>

In sum, contemporary food legends appear as anecdotes, accidents or illustrations of three main concerns. First, they blame or warn about the *dangers of industrialization* processes and ready-made dishes. Second, they tackle *identity issues* when they either affirm that foreigners eat, or make others unwittingly eat, disgusting, gross, ugly, suspicious, or inedible things. Or they tackle identity issues by serving as quasi-mythical symbols and allegories for cultural and political foundations or unifications. In this mode, national or local foods habits are praised and presented as righteous and safe. And third, contemporary food legends deal with *love and sex affairs*. All the more so, food legends usually illustrate those themes through a conservative perspective that secure, reaffirm, and strengthen the established social order and dominant values. Told as anecdotes, jokes<sup>11</sup>, or inverted stigma accounts, food legends from a functionalist point of view contain a highly moral dimension and a call for order. Nonetheless, beyond the normative blaming or warning

anecdotes or joke, food legends transcend this mere moral dimension to become a more elaborated narration with a political dimension. Here, the often accidental, isolated, one-time, or sole story gives way to political conspiracy theories that incriminate an almighty secret enemy who rules every aspect of our lives.

Let me therefore return to the *gelato* narrative and, more generally speaking, to white slave trade stories. When for some reason the young ladies are forced into sex work because they transgress a social taboo, we are facing a genuine contemporary legend with its symbolic punishment. But, when the account becomes more elaborated and involves numerous social actors, the contemporary legend turns into a conspiracy theory in which, for instance, the police deliberately refuse to investigate, the media cover up the story, or local government officials organize slavery on purpose. All actors are engaged in a purported unlawful secret plot and pledge together to voluntarily hide the truth from the people.

Another main difference between contemporary legends and conspiracy theories appears in the elaboration and dissemination process. While contemporary legends are spread through a well-known FOAF scheme, conspiracy theories are forged by identified people who, for some of them, are either *professional conspiracy theorists* (Giry 2014; Giry and Tika 2020) or “citizen sleuths” (Olmsted 2011; Giry 2018a). Following Max Weber’s (1919) seminal distinction between “occasional” and “professional” politicians, professional conspiracy theorists on the one hand are political entrepreneurs in conspiracy theories.<sup>12</sup> Either on conviction or opportunism they publish, sometimes indirectly through endorsement and sometimes more directly, conspiracy theories from which they earn their main source of income. There are a number involved in this practice: from Alex Jones, a far-right activist who hosts a web radio show about the American government’s purported secret and evil activities, to David Icke, the leading figure of the shape-shifting-lizard-secret-world-government theory, to Lyndon LaRouche, the former leader of a far-right cult organization whose main claim to fame may be that he has run eight times for president (Giry 2018b). Alongside these more recognizable figures there are also citizen sleuths, common people who progressively organize their entire lives around a specific event such as the Kennedy assassination or the 9/11 attacks to investigate the events through the lens of a conspiracy theory. Some of them gain visibility, nowadays mostly on the internet, and become leading conspiratorial figures.

Another important difference is that contemporary legends constitute a socially acceptable and plausible informal and collective deliberation, whereas conspiracy theories are the product of individual ideologies or political representations of power which affirm that a secret group of powerful people rule every single aspect of our lives for their own benefits.

Amongst the tools of this unlawful worldwide domination, food is a strong means.

### From Contemporary Legends to Conspiracy Theories: Food as a Manifestation and Tool of the Global Cabal

While the well-documented use of food in many genuine poisoning conspiracies in the past led to several local conspiracy theories—wells poisoned by Jews (Delacampagne 2000, 81-89; Larqueur 2006, Poliakov 1955), for instance—it was not until the late seventeenth or early eighteenth centuries that food became the focus of large-scale conspiracy theories. In France, for example, there emerged what Kaplan (1982) has named “famine plots,” vernacular narratives circulating amongst the people that laid responsibility for scarcities at the feet of conspiring Protestant bankers, stingy storekeepers, or shady bakers.<sup>13</sup> Hearsay and speculation about overflowing secret barns or of crops burned or thrown into rivers regularly circulated to explain scandalous prices on bread and basic foodstuffs (Giry 2017a).

Starting from Fenter’s basic but operative definition mentioned above, I argue that modern conspiracism differs from Middle Age conspiracy narratives in offering a global and political vision of world history in which everything is ruled by a secretly organized and omnipotent small group of people. Conversely, with the exception of the “Knights Templar myth” (Giry 2020), Middle Age conspiracy theories concern local events and have a short temporality.<sup>14</sup> Modern conspiracism, in contrast, offers a general scheme in which everything is secretly linked, planned, and determined by an evil enemy or force (Jews, Illuminati, Communists, Free Masons, etc.) long before it happens: tragic events such as terrorist attacks, assassinations, or wars, harmful social phenomenon like unemployment, bankruptcy, drug addiction, or pandemics, and each and every aspect of people’s everyday lives like sports results, movies, medicine, and, of course, food.<sup>15</sup> According to this vision, everything is faked, forged, or a product of subterfuge. Nothing can be trusted other than the hypothesis of an overwhelming conspiracy whose outcome is a necessarily simplistic accusatory and victimizing pseudo-form of criticism (Giry 2017b). All evil things that happen to *us* are due to an evil *them* (Campion-Vincent 2005; Barkun 2013; Giry 2017a).

In contrast to contemporary legends, food appears in conspiracy theories as a tool amongst others for worldwide domination. I would argue that it is one thing to disseminate tales about rats *accidentally* found in a bottle of soda or fried at a KFC and another to assume that a secret ingredient or stimulant is *deliberately* added to sodas or Church’s Fried Chicken sandwiches to sterilize African Americans (Turner, 1987; Fine and Turner 2000) as part of a “Black genocide” (Goldberg 2001)

conducted by a structurally racist American government or big companies covertly owned by supremacist groups, like the Ku Klux Klan (Turner 1992, 1994), through expedients like poisoned food, diseases such as HIV/AIDS (Bird and Bogart 2003, 2005; Goldstein 2004; Klonoff and Landrine 1999), forced sterilizations and birth control (Turner 1992: 260), body mutilations (Goldberg 2001), and deliberate easy access to weapons (Parson, Simmons and al. 1999) and drugs (Waters 1997: 117; Goldberg 2001: 150).<sup>16</sup>

Let us return to the fried chicken examples. While the Kentucky Fried Rat contemporary legend is usually told as an anecdote, an isolated incident, or a one-time story due to careless owners or prankster employees, the Church's Fried Chicken story is conversely told as a structured and large-scale operation by a long-established cabal. Just as in the case of the *gelato* legends examined above, not only is KFC plotting to destroy African Americans, but it is also engaged in a conspiracy of silence as well as a conspiracy to silence its evil activities. To deceive and continue its unlawful project, it is necessary that the plot implicates all in cahoots—e.g., the company owners, racist organizations such as the KKK, food regulation authorities, the police, judicial institutions, government officials, and the media. Such conspiracy theories assume an unofficial but practical state racism, or racism as an on-going policy. It is no surprise then that the Church's Fried Chicken story is widely acknowledged amongst African Americans while mostly ignored by white people (Fine and Turner 2000). Indeed, such conspiracy theories about a purported “Black genocide” through targeting certain foods were particularly strong during the early 1990s ethnic riots in the United States. For instance, *Tropical Fantasy*, a very cheap and popular beverage amongst African Americans, was then nicknamed as “Tropical Fanticide.” The target of many poisoning accusations (*Newsweek* 1991; Remington 2003) that resounded in Black communities, *Tropical Fantasy* saw its sales decrease by 70% (Fletcher 1996).

Another famous example of conspiracy theory dealing with alterations to food are those surrounding the fluoridation of water as a way to control the population. Since 1950, fluoridation is promoted as a public health policy to prevent tooth decay. But, since then, fluoridation has been controversial and the target of many conspiracy theories. Like contemporary anti-vaccine conspiratorial campaigns (Hornsey, Harris and Fielding 2018; Kitta 2019; Offit 2012; Salvadori and Vignaud 2019), “big pharma” conspiracy theories (Blaskiewicz 2013; Lanctôt 1995; Icke 2007, 532-558; Séverac 2011, 2015), or contemporary “health scares” (Stange 2003), fluoridation has been imagined over the last sixty years as part of a plot designed to control an unsuspecting consumer (Reilly 2003). In the 1950s, in the context of McCarthyism, water fluoridation was often portrayed as part of a Soviet plot to destroy the United States by poisoning

the population through Russian secret agents.<sup>17</sup> Throughout the next decade, fluoridation was conversely denounced as mental manipulation technique discovered by the Nazis during the World War II and imported into the United States by far-right elements in the administration to control the people. In the 1970s, the military-industrial complex faced the accusation that civilians had been used as guinea pigs to test fluoride-based weapons.

Since the 1980s, conspiracy theories on fluoridation have focused more on how public health campaigns and policies to prevent obesity and to advocate for fluoridation are really ways to strengthen children's teeth so that businesses can sell more junk food and candy. These conspiracy theories assume that big companies, supermarkets chains, government officials, the World Health Organization (WHO), the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the police, judicial administrations, mainstream media, famous actors, famed sportsmen, and fast-food restaurants have pledged a secret oath to keep people uneducated about food issues. *They* want *us* to be addicted to sugar, salt, fat, junk food, tasteless fake fruits, pesticide-soaked vegetables, steroid boosted meat, or GMOs to control our minds and realize enormous profits. Throughout the supply chain, *they* do not care about people's health and subsequent obesity or cancers, which in addition to their profitability for medical and pharmaceutical industries ("big pharma"), *they* also own. Indeed, according to some conspiracy theorists such as Alex Jones, David Icke, or Ian R. Crane, the whole plot is summarized in a seminal text: the *Codex Alimentarius* (the *Food Code*). If this code, first edited in 1963 by the WHO and the FAO, is supposed to set safety guidelines and handling standards, its "real" purpose is to promote the "New World Order" agenda: global fascism, population control or depopulation, administration of global food trade and domination of public health through evil big companies like Monsanto, Bayer, Eli Lilly, Merck, Proctor and Gamble, Nestlé, or Kellogg's. Over and against this, conspiracy theories offer the possibility of natural medications, alternative medicines, "antivaxx" movements, and marginal feeding regimes, all of which are actions to uphold civic rights and liberties, which are otherwise being insidiously undermined step by step. Very recently, in line with the Great Reset conspiracy theory that flourish in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, and which assumes that evil elites are willing to ban civil liberties, food appeared to be concerned. In sum, to advance their plot, elites are willing to make people change their eating habits against their will by introducing, or replacing meat with, repugnant insects: bugs, worms, or larvae (Berenbaum 2023).

If hitherto food appeared as directly involved in the global conspiracy as a tool for the unlawful domination of evil forces, it can also be indirectly implicated like in the 2016 "Pizzagate" affair, a pedophilia-centered conspiracy theory. According to this conspiracy theory, some leading

Democratic figures, including Hilary Clinton's chief of staff John Podesta, rape children during Satanist rituals in a Washington restaurant. Rapidly spread through conservative media and Twitter by some professional conspiracy theorists like Alex Jones, Mike Cernovich, and Jack Posobiec (who claimed "cheese pizza" meant "child pornography"), the accusations led Edgar M. Welch to travel from North Carolina to Washington to verify if children were really sexually abused at Comet Ping Pong, the restaurant at the center of the conspiracy theory. On December 4, 2016, Welch, armed with an AR-15, entered the kitchens after firing three times. Admitting there were no children in the restaurant and that he mishandled the situation, Welch surrendered to the police but still considers the accusations to be true (Goldman 2016). With the "Pizzagate" affair, all the ingredients exist for a classic conspiracy theory recipe: power, politics, elites, sex, immorality, and, most importantly, food.

## Conclusion

Contemporary legends and conspiracy theories on food share some important patterns. From the content point of view, they both express fears and anxieties as well as the volition to make sense and take control of uncertain social situations through the mobilization of collective affects and symbols that bypass the traditional institutions of socialization and news regulation (gatekeeping). They are mostly told as negative statements to warn, damage, blame, punish, or harm—symbolically at least—a part of the population. They are both quoted as affirmative accounts, and sometimes as jokes, and they are characterized by their ability to mutate, evolve, and adapt through social, geographical, and historical interactions and contexts. Sometimes, those narratives merge into others.

Nonetheless, despite those common aspects, food legends and conspiracy theories, while related, are two distinct social phenomena. In sum, I emphasized three main aspects: the narrative scale (local vs. global), the issue of intentionality of the threat (accidents vs. orchestrated plots), and the social dimension (moral vs. political). Contemporary food legends illustrate through short and located moralistic stories or one-time anecdotes some cultural fears dealing with three main concerns: identity issues, industrialization dangers and, love/sex affairs. Quite the opposite, food in conspiracy theories is a means for the evil elite to exercise a domination plot over the world. In addition, contemporary legends warn, blame, or punish people who challenge the established social order and dominant values. Thus, they constitute moralistic narratives that uphold or reinforce the established social order. The food-centered anecdotes are relevant *per se* whereas in conspiracy theories the moral dimension of food is overshadowed in a single narrative that intends to explain the entire

historical process and social relationships through a political and hegemonic paradigm.

## Notes

1. Translated by the author.
2. Fine says he has collected in the late 1970s 115 more or less elaborated versions of the Kentucky Fried Rats story. He also reports that some variations involve McDonald's allegedly worm-made burgers. Fast-foods ball pools are also the subject of numerous hearsay about vomit, needles, trash, excrements, etc. Nowadays, particularly in Western Europe, the development of kebab restaurants has replaced fast-foods in the crystallization of contemporary legends. See for instance narratives about human or pig semen found in the "white sauce".
3. In French Guadeloupe, Haitian merchants are accused of washing fruits and vegetables with women's urine because it supposedly has an attractive, even addictive, effect on male consumers.
4. When the margarine became a regular consumer good in the middle of the twentieth century for it was cheaper than butter, many legends appears in the United States and Europe about its carcinogenic nature or hairs found in it. Like in many food legends we encounter here a gender dimension: the hairs stories usually happened to mothers who are blamed for they gave to their children the new and cheaper margarine instead of the "good-old" butter.
5. See that fruits, vegetables, and animals involved in the legends are usually from the same "exotic"/ foreign origins or colors (e.g.: toads or bullfrogs in green vegetables). They are often considered as xenophobic allegories.
6. Indirectly based on food, the "*Tract de Villejuif*" (Villejuif Flyer) rumor must be reminded. Since February 1976, a leaflet purportedly edited by the Villejuif hospital circulates in Europe. It contains a list of so-called E-numbers carcinogens food additives that triggered a mass panic in the late 1970's and early 1980's. In 2018, the flyer is still circulating. Indeed, during a television shown broadcasted February 11<sup>th</sup> 2018, a French representative (*député*) showed a copy of the leaflet as a proof of industrialization dangers (*Le Monde* 2018).
7. Richard Dorson defines "faklelore" as "the spurious and synthetic writings under the claim that they are genuine folklore [but] not collected in the field [and] rewritten from earlier literary and journalistic sources in an endless chain of regurgitation, or they may even be made out of whole cloth" (1969, 60).
8. Sometimes, the very same motive reappears with a different form or social context. See for instance in the 1980's numerous legends about nasty clowns driving ice cream trucks to abduct children.
9. Rings often appear in involuntary cannibalism tales. For instance, they can be found in canned food, sometimes with a part of the finger, or in sausages made with human flesh. Otherwise, wedding rings also appear in narratives implying unfaithful bakers. To pretend he is not married and have sex with a younger girl, the baker withdraws his ring but after the deed he cannot find it anymore.



- The very next day, his wife found the ring in bread. During the lovemaking, it fell into the paste.
10. Adapted by the author from Le Quellec 1991: 61-62
  11. Conspiratorial jokes are also possible. See for instance the “8-buns 10-wieners” conspiracy theory which tries to explain through manufacturers’ greediness why buns are packet by 8 while sausages are in packs of 10. Here is reproduced Bjorn’s account to *The Straight Dope* magazine. “Ever since I was a kid, I’ve been annoyed at the fact that hot dogs come ten to a package while buns come in either eight or twelve-packs (usually eight around here). My girlfriend says it’s because kids often eat wieners without buns, and it’s just thoughtful packaging by the meat packers. I think she’s suffering from a sodium nitrite overdose, and that what we have here is a conspiracy between Oscar Mayer and Mrs. Karl to keep us endlessly buying either hot dogs or buns to use up the leftovers. What’s the story?” (Adams 1987).
  12. Weber (1919) characterized two ideal-types of politicians thought their relation to politics: the occasional and the professional politicians. The first one lives *off* politics, it is an avocational activity. Being engaged in politics is part of his social status: political leadership is entwined with social domination and notability. In some way, it is “old-fashion politics”. A prominent local figure or a bourgeois is almost automatically designed as the local representative. The occasional politician has not necessarily a special appeal for politics which does not constitute his main source of incomes. The typical example of occasional politician given by Weber is Tocqueville who was endlessly reelected in Normandy because of its social status and notoriety. The professional politician, on the other hand, lives *of* and *for* politics. It is a vocational activity from which he earns his main source of incomes. He *professionally* leads a political career to access to more and more important political positions and payrolls. Through the triple effect of democratization, complexification and bureaucratization, Weber identified a relative automatization of politics from social domination. Politics progressively turns into a competitive market that requires specific competencies and knowledge. For a detailed synthesis, see Gunlicks 1978.
  13. Since the French Middle Age, Protestants were generally considered as outsiders, enemies within, traitors, or even British agents secretly plotting to wreck the kingdom and Catholicism. Far right and royalist activist Charles Maurras famously considered in the 20<sup>th</sup> century that France was facing since the Revolution an ongoing conspiracy, termed as “Anti-France”, that implicates “four confederate states”: Protestants, Free Masons, Jews and *Météques* (insultant word for outsiders, foreigners, or migrants inspired from historical metics of ancient Greece)
  14. Published by Archbishop William II of Tyre during the 12<sup>th</sup> century, *Historia rerum in partibus transmarinis gestarum* (*A History of Deeds Done beyond the Sea*) constitutes the first formalization of a modern conspiratorial myth. This book develops what I consider (Giry 2020) as the six cumulative key features and characteristics of modern conspiracism: 1°) The designation of scapegoats

- responsible of all evil things; 2°) An overwhelming appetite for power in every fields; 3°) The moral corruption of the society; 4°) An unlawful domination imposed to the society through simulation and dissimulation; 5°) A specific morphology attributed the scapegoats, dehumanization and zoomorphisation; 6°) A hybridization and creolization process, i.e. the malleability of the narrative through social interactions and contexts.
15. Pepsi is sometimes accused to support the so-called Jewish global domination plot for it “really” means *Pay Every Pence to Save Israel*, PEPSI.
  16. It is necessary to remind that forced sterilization, birth control, and abortions are not totally fantasied. Schoen (2005) argues that African Americans were throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century the main victims of eugenic policies sophistically termed “public health and welfare measures” or “social hygiene”. Concretely, they consisted in sterilizing people purportedly incapable to living in society for genetic reasons such as long-time unemployment, incorrigible alcoholism, persistent prostitution, mental or physical disabilities, etc.
  17. This theme is central in Kubrick’s *Doctor Strangelove*.

## References

- Abbot, Gerald D. Jr. 2013. “Both Sides of Our Mouths: Contemporary Legends as a Means of Dissent in a Time of Global Modernism.” PhD. Diss., University of Kentucky, Lexington.
- Adams, Cecil. 1987. “Why Do Hot Dogs Come 10 to a Pack While Buns Are 8 to a Pack?” *The Straight Dope* (March 20). <https://www.straightdope.com/columns/read/560/why-do-hot-dogs-come-10-to-a-pack-while-buns-are-8-to-a-pack/>.
- Barkun, Michael. 2013. *A Culture of Conspiracy: Apocalyptic Vision in Contemporary America*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Bell, L. Michael. 1976. “Cokelore.” *Western Folklore* 35(1): 59–64.
- Berenbaum, Mary R. 2023. “Debugging” insect-related conspiracy theories.” *Annals of the Entomological Society of America*. 10.1093/aesa/saad018/7225912.
- Bird, Sheryl T. and Bogart, Laura M. 2003. “Exploring the Relationship of Conspiracy Beliefs about HIV/AIDS to Sexual Behaviors and Attitudes among African American Adults.” *Journal of the National Medical Association* 95: 1057–1065.
- . 2005. “Conspiracy Beliefs About HIV/AIDS and Birth Control Among African Americans: Implications for the Prevention of HIV, Other STI’s and Unintended Pregnancy.” *Journal of Social Issues* 61(1): 109–126.
- Blaskiewicz, Robert. 2013. “The Big Pharma Conspiracy Theories.” *Medical Writing* 22(4): 259–261.
- Bordia, Parshant and DiFonzo, Nicholas. 2007. “Rumor, Gossip and Urban Legends.” *Diogenes* 54 (1): 19–35.

- Brunvand, Jan Harold. 1999. *Too Good to Be True: The Colossal Book of Urban Legends*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company.
- . 2001. *Encyclopedia of Urban Legends*. Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO.
- Burger, Peter. 2013. "Waarom politici en nieuwsmidia larie verkopen over calamari." *De Gestolen Grootmoeder* (October 18). <http://www.gestolengrootmoeder.nl/wordpress/verhaal-over-calamaris-dat-niet-waar-is/>.
- Campion-Vincent, Véronique. 1994. "La véritable histoire de l'os de rat." In *Manger Magique. Aliments Sorcières, Croyances Comestibles*, edited by Claude Fischler, 85–91. Paris, France: Autrement.
- . 2005. "From Evil Others to Evil Elites: A Dominant Pattern in Conspiracy Theories Today." In *Rumor Mills: The Social Impact of Rumor and Legend*, edited by Gary Alan Fine, Véronique Champion-Vincent and Chip Heath, 103–122. Piscataway: Aldine Transaction.
- Campion-Vincent, Véronique and Jean-Bruno Renard. 1992. *Légendes urbaines: Rumeurs d'aujourd'hui*. Paris, France: Payot.
- . 2014. *100% rumeurs: Codes caches, objets piégés, aliments contaminés... La vérité sur 50 légendes urbaines extravagantes*. Paris, France: Payot.
- Dale, Rodney. 1978. *The Tumour in the Whale*. London, UK: Gerald Duckworth & Co Ltd.
- Delacampagne, Christian. 2000. *Une histoire du Sacisme*. Paris, France: Le livre de poche.
- De Vos, Gail. 1996. *Tales, Rumors and Gossip*. Englewood: Libraries Unlimited.
- Domowitz, Susan. 1979. "Foreign Matter in Food." *Indiana Folklore* 12: 86–95.
- Dorson, Richard. 1969. "Fakelore." *Zeitschrift für Volkskunde* 65: 59–64.
- Ellis, Bill. 2009. "Whispers in an Ice Cream Parlor: Culinary Tourism, Contemporary Legends, and the Urban Interzone." *Journal of American Folklore* 122(483): 53–74.
- Fayolle, Vincent, Michel Barroco, and Michel Fayolle. 2001. "Mondes souterrains, légendes urbaines et méta-destination: vers une dynamique des genres narratifs." *Sociétés* 73(3): 87–98.
- Fenster, Mark. 2008. *Conspiracy Theories: Secrecy and Power in American Culture*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Fine, Gary Alan. 1979. "Cokelore and Coke Law: Urban Beliefs Tales and the Problem of Multiple Origins." *Journal of American Folklore* 17(2–3): 63–84.
- . 1980. "The Kentucky Fried Rats: Legends and Modern Society." *Journal of the Folklore Institute* 17(2–3): 222–243.
- . 1985. "The Goliath Effect: Corporate Dominance and Mercantile Legends." *Journal of American Folklore* 98(387): 63–84

- . 1986. “Redemption Rumors: Mercantile Legends and Corporate Beneficence.” *Journal of American Folklore* 99(392): 208–222.
- . 1992. *Manufacturing Tales: Sex and Money in Contemporary Legends*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press.
- Fine, Gary Alan and Patricia A. Turner. 2000. Contemporary Legends and Claims of Corporate Malfeasance: Race, Fried Chicken, and the Marketplace. *DePaul Law Review* 50(2): 635–646.
- Fletcher, Michael A. 1996. “Conspiracy Theories Can Often Ring True.” *The Washington Post*, October 4. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1996/10/04/conspiracy-theories-can-often-ring-true/3960d4c5-593e-4b4d-b3c9-a2f9f4148c9d/>.
- Funderburg, Anne Cooper. 1995. *Chocolate, Strawberry and Vanilla: A History of American Ice Cream*. Bowling Green: Bowling Green State University Popular Press.
- Giampoala, Daniela and Francesca Longobardo. 2000. *Naples. Greek and Roman*. Naples, Italy: Electa.
- Giardino, Alessandro. 2017. *Corporeality and Performativity in Baroque Naples*. Lanham: Lexington Books Press.
- Giry, Julien. 2014. “Le conspirationnisme dans la culture politique et populaire aux Etats-Unis.” PhD. Diss., University of Rennes 1, Rennes, France.
- . 2017a. “A Specific Social Function of Rumors and Conspiracy Theories: Strengthening Community’s Ties in Trouble Times.” A Multilevel Analysis. *Slovak Ethnology* 65(2): 197–202.
- . 2017b. “Étudier les théories du complot en sciences sociales: enjeux et usages.” *Quaderni* 94: 5–11.
- . 2018a. “Become a Full-Time Conspiracy Theorist. Radicalization and Professionalization Trajectories of Two Citizen Sleuths Groups.” *Critique and Humanism* 49: 4429–4449.
- . 2018b. “Lyndon LaRouche, une étude de cas. Quand la radicalité en vient à questionner la rationalité (en) politique.” In *Un XXIème siècle irrationnel ? Analyses pluridisciplinaires d’une pensée alternative*, François, Stéphane, 105–131. Paris, France, CNRS éditions.
- . 2020. “Conspiracism: Archaeology and morphology of a political myth.” *Diogenes* 62(3–4). 10.1177/0392192120924534.
- Giry, Julien and Tika, Pranvera. 2020. “Conspiracy Theories in Political Science and Political Theory.” In *The Routledge Handbook of Conspiracy Theories*, Peter Knight, Michael Butter, 108–120. London, UK: Routledge.
- Goffman, Erving. 1963. *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*. Upper Saddle River: Prentice-Hall.
- Goldman, Adams. 2016. “The Comet Ping Pong Gunman Answers Our Reporter’s Questions.” *New York Times*, December 7.

- <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/12/07/us/edgar-welch-comet-pizza-fake-news.html>.
- Goldstein, Diane E. 2004. *Once Upon a Virus: AIDS Legends and Vernacular Risk Perception*. Logan: Utah State University Press.
- Gunlicks, Arthur B. 1978. "Max Weber's Typology of Politicians: A Reexamination." *Journal of Politics* 40(2): 498–509.
- Hobbs, Sandy. 1966. "Modern Folk Tale." *Chapbook* 3(4): 9–11.
- Hornsey, Matthew J., Harris, Emily A. and Fielding, Kelly S. 2018. "The Psychological Roots of Anti-Vaccination Attitudes: a 24-Nation Investigation." *Health Psychology* 37(4): 307–315. 10.1037/hea0000586.
- Icke, David. 2007. *The David Icke Guide to the Global Conspiracy (and How to End It)*. Ryde, UK: David Icke Books Ltd.
- Kalmre, Eda. 2013a. *The Human Sausage Factory. A Study of Post-War Rumor in Tartu*. Amsterdam, Netherland: Rodolphi.
- . 2013b. "Rumors and Contemporary Legends as part of the Identity Creation Process." In *Estonia and Poland: Creativity and tradition in cultural communication 2*, edited by Laineste, Liisi, Brzozowska, Dorota and Chlopicki, Wladyslaw, 25–42. Tartu, Estonia: EKM Teaduskirjastus.
- . 2016. "Salad-Rinsing and Baby Carrots. Mercantile Rumors in Contemporary Society." *Contemporary Legend* 3(6): 17–40.
- Kapferer, Jean-Noël. 1987. *La rumeur. Le plus vieux média du monde*. Paris, France: Seuil.
- Kaplan, Steven L. 1982. "The Famine Plot Persuasion in Eighteenth-century France." *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society* 72 (3): 1–79.
- Kitta, Andrea. 2019. *The Kiss of Death: Contagion, Contamination, and Folklore*. Logan: Utah State University Press.
- Klintberg, Bengt. 1983. "Modern Migratory Legends in Oral Tradition and Daily papers." *Scandinavian Yearbook of Folklore* 37: 153–160.
- Klonoff, Elizabeth A. and Landrine Hope. 1999. "Do Blacks Believe that HIV/AIDS is a Government Conspiracy against Them?" *Preventive Medicine* 28: 451–457
- Koenig, Frederick, 1985. *Rumor in the Marketplace: The Social Psychology of Commercial Hearsay*, Dover: Auburn House Publishing Company.
- LaCapria, Kim. 2016. "Was a Chinese Restaurant in Florida Shuttered for Serving Dog Meat?" *Snopes*, December 29. <https://www.snopes.com/fact-check/was-a-chinese-restaurant-in-florida-shuttered-for-serving-dog-meat/>.
- Lancôt, Ghislaine. 1995. *The Medical Mafia*. London, UK: Bridge of Love.

- Larqueur, Walter. 2006. *The Changing Face of Antisemitism: From Ancient Times to the Present Day*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Le Dauphiné Libéré. 2018. "Le patient de l'hôpital trouve un mulot mort dans son assiette." February 24. <http://www.ledauphine.com/france-monde/2018/02/24/le-patient-de-l-hopital-trouve-un-mulot-mort-dans-son-assiette>.
- Le Monde. 2018. "Un député MoDem relaie un document falsifié sur des 'produits dangereux' dans l'alimentation." February 12<sup>th</sup>. [http://www.lemonde.fr/les-decodeurs/article/2018/02/12/un-depute-modem-relaie-un-document-falsifie-sur-des-produits-dangereux-dans-l-alimentation\\_5255758\\_4355770.html](http://www.lemonde.fr/les-decodeurs/article/2018/02/12/un-depute-modem-relaie-un-document-falsifie-sur-des-produits-dangereux-dans-l-alimentation_5255758_4355770.html).
- Le Quellec, Jean-Loïc. 1991. *Alcool de singe et liqueur de vipère: Légendes urbaines*. Arles, France: Éditions de l'errance.
- Meurger, Michel. 1988. *De l'ogre noir au rat blanc. De l'insolite alimentaire dans la rumeur*. Paris, France: Pogonip.
- Mikkelson, David. 2000. "Does KFC Use Mutant Chickens?" *Snopes* (October 9). <https://www.snopes.com/fact-check/kfc-mutant-chickens/>.
- Mikkelson, David. 2001. "Cockroach Eggs." *Snopes* (March 1). <https://www.snopes.com/fact-check/cockroach-eggs/>.
- Moe, Nelson. 2002. *The View from the Vesuvius: Italian Culture and the Southern Question*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Morgan, Hal and Tucker, Kerry. 1984. *Rumor*. New York: Penguin Books.
- Newall, Venetia. 1971. *An Egg at Easter*. Bloomington: Indiana Press University.
- . 1985. "Easter Eggs: Symbols of Life and Renewal." *Folklore* 95(1): 21–29.
- Nowak, Zachary. 2014. "Folklore, Fakelore, History. Invented Tradition and the Origins of the Pizza Margherita." *Food, Culture & Society* 17(1): 103–124.
- Newsweek. 1978. "A Wormburger Scare." November 27.
- . 1991. "A Storm over Tropical Fantasy." April 21. <http://www.newsweek.com/storm-over-tropical-fantasy-202142>.
- Ofit, Paul A. 2012. *Deadly Choices: How the Anti-Vaccine Movement Threatens Us All*. London, UK: Basic Books.
- Olmsted, Kathryn S. 2011. "The Truth is Out There: Citizen Sleuths from the Kennedy Assassination to The 9/11 Truth Movement." *Diplomatic History* 35(4): 671–693.
- Parsons, Sharon., Simmons, William., and al. 1999. "A test of Grapevine: An Empirical Examination of Conspiracy Theories among African Americans." *Sociological Spectrum* 19: 201–222.
- Poliakov, Leon. 1955. *The History of Anti-Semitism: From the Time of Christ to the Court Jews*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

- Reilly, Gretchen Ann. 2003. "Fluoridation." In *Conspiracy Theories in American History: An Encyclopedia*, edited by Peter Knight, 263–265. Santa Barbara: ABC-Clío.
- Remington, Ted. 2003. "African Americans." In *Conspiracy Theories in American History: An Encyclopedia*, edited by Peter Knight, 35–40. Santa Barbara: ABC-Clío.
- Renard, Jean-Bruno. 2013. *Rumeurs et légendes urbaines*. Paris, France: PUF.
- Roberge, Martine. 2010. *De la rumeur à la légende urbaine: du oui-dire au message numérique*. Laval, Quebec, Canada: Presses universitaires de Laval.
- Salvadori, Françoise and Vignaud, Laurent-Henri. 2019. *Antivax. La résistance aux vaccins du XVIIIe siècle à nos jours*. Paris, France: Vandémiaire.
- Schoen, Johanna. 2005. *Choice and Coercion: Birth Control, Sterilization, and Abortion in Public Health and Welfare*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press.
- Serao, Matilde. 1884 [1993]. *Il ventre di Napoli*, Rome, Italy: L'Unita.
- Séverac, Claire. 2011. *Complot mondial contre la santé*. Paris, France: Kontre Kulture.
- . 2015. *La guerre secrète contre les peuples*. Paris, France: Kontre Kulture.
- Shorrocks, Graham. 1975. "Notes and Queries. Chinese Restaurants Stories." *Lore and Languish* 2: 30.
- . 1980. "Further Aspects of Restaurants Stories." *Lore and Languish* 3: 71–74.
- Siporin, Steve. 2008. "A Contemporary Legend from Italy." *The Journal of Folklore Research* 45(2): 171–192.
- Smith, Paul and Smith, Georgina. 1974. "Notes." *Lore and Language* 1:7, 25.
- Stange, Margit. 2013. "Health Scares." In *Conspiracy Theories in American History: An Encyclopedia*, edited by Peter Knight, 306–310. Santa Barbara: ABC-Clío.
- Stekert, Ellen J. 1986. "The False Issue of Folklore vs. 'Fakelore': Was Paul Bunyan a Hoax?" *Forrest and Conservation History* 30(4): 180–181.
- Tucker, Elizabeth. 1978. "The Seven-Day Magic Diet: Magic and Ritual in Diet Folklore." *Indiana Folklore* 11: 141–150.
- Turner, Patricia Ann. 1987. "Church Fried Chicken and the Klan: A Rhetorical Analysis of Rumor in the Black Community." *Western Folklore* 46: 294–306.
- . 1992. "Ambivalent Patrons: The Role of Rumor and Contemporary Legends in African-American Consumer Decisions." *Journal of American Folklore* 105(418): 424–441.

- . 1994. *I Heard it Through the Grapevine: Rumors in African American Culture*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Van de Winkel, Aurore. 2017. *Les légendes urbaines de Belgique*. Brussels, Belgium: Avant-Propos.
- Villeneuve, Rolland. 2016. *Histoire du cannibalisme*. Paris, France: Camion BNoir.
- Waters, Anita M. 1997. "Conspiracy Theories as Ethnosociologies. Explanation and Intention in African American Political Culture." *Journal of Black Studies* 28(1): 112–125.
- Webb, Tony and Lang, Tim. 1987. *Food Irradiation: the Myth and the Reality*. Wellingborough, UK: Thorsons.
- Weber, Max. 1919. *Politik als Beruf*. Trans. by Hans. H. Gerth, and Charles. Wright Mills. 1946. *Politics as a Vocation*. New York: Free press.
- Ziegler, Gregory R. 2003. "Chocolate." In *Encyclopedia of Food and Culture Vol. 1*, edited by Solomon H. Katz, 400–403. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons.