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Araştırma makalesi/Research article

Conspiracy Theories as Urban Legends with a Paranoid Matrix[1]

Paranoyak Bir Matrix ile Şehir Efsanelerine Dönüşen Komplo Teorileri

Suzana Marjanić*

Abstract

In this paper I seek to interpret, categorise conspiracy theories in relation to urban legends with a paranoid matrix, with the starting point being mainly the interpretation of the paranoid nature of conspiracy theories systematised by Jack Z. Bratich. As one of the examples, I specify the conspiracy theory/ies on the disappearance of flight MH370, which has been declared one of the greatest airplane mysteries of all time. Specifically, Boeing 777 (Malaysia Airlines Flight 370) with 227 passengers and 12 crew members disappeared on March 8, 2014 during a flight from Kuala Lumpur to Beijing. According to the official story, it is believed that the airplane fell into the Indian Ocean, off the west coast of Australia. However, the conspiracy theories indicate their own interpretative truths.

Keywords: *conspiracy theories, urban legends, paranoid matrix, disappearance of the Malaysian airplane in 2014 – Boeing 777*

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Öz

Bu yazıda Jack Z. Bratich tarafından sistematize edilen komplo teorilerinin paranoyak doğasının yorumlanmasından yola çıkarak, şehir efsaneleriyle ilgili komplo teorilerini paranoid bir matrisle yorumlamaya, kategorize etmeye çalışıyorum. Örneklerden biri olarak, tüm zamanların en büyük uçak gizemlerinden biri ilan edilen MH370 sefer sayılı uçağın ortadan kaybolmasıyla ilgili komplo teori/lerini ele alıyorum. Spesifik olarak, 227 yolcu ve 12 mürettebat ile Boeing 777 (Malezya Havayolları Uçuş 370), 8 Mart 2014'te Kuala Lumpur'dan Pekin'e bir uçuş sırasında kayboldu. Resmi açıklamaya göre uçağın Avustralya'nın batı kıyısı açıklarında Hint Okyanusu'na düştüğüne inanılıyor. Bununla birlikte, komplo teorileri kendi yorumlayıcı gerçeklerini gösterir.

Anahtar sözcükler: *komplo teorileri, şehir efsaneleri, paranoyak matris, 2014'te Malezya uçağının ortadan kaybolması - Boeing 777*

We are developing spirally in terms of technology, but we are on the same sociological point on the opposite curve of the spiral.

This is what Habermas termed refeudalisation.[2]

Boris Demur

Conspiracy theories on the other side of truth and lie

I open (in the next unit) the paper on conspiracy theories as urban legends with a paranoid matrix, with the starting point being mainly the interpretation of the paranoid nature of conspiracy theories systematised by Jack Z. Bratich – as I have defined the research subject by the title itself – with the conspiracy theory/ies on the disappearance of flight MH370, which has been declared one of the greatest airplane mysteries of all time. Specifically, it seems that conspiracy theories, if all conspiracy theories related to the disappearance of the Malaysian flight MH370 are considered – as the latter has not been found until today (I completed this text in 2019) despite all monitor and control systems available[3] – represents to part of the audience that which was once *mythological (demonological) belief legend* (a category of authenticity of that which is narrated) – and is today also a *rumour*, while to the other part of the audience (oriented towards conspiracy theories) it represents a *belief* or, even more appropriately – a *conviction*.[4] In that sense, I also relate conspiracy theories to rumours, i.e. as stressed by Milivoj Solar – who, among other things, is also engaged in the theory of gossip – "an individual piece of gossip is always […] recognisable only in a body of gossip or, more precisely, that which is generally called 'rumours'" (Solar 2008: 292). However, while gossip belongs to an individual sphere of rumours (related to a specific person), conspiracy theories belong to rumours related to the paranoid matrix, which was constructed by historian Richard J. Hofstadter in 1967 with his book *The Paranoid Style in American Politics, and Other Essays* (New York: Knopf, 1965) (the eponymous essay had

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been initially published in *Harper'*s magazine) and, thirty years later, by Robert S. Robins and Jerrold M. Post in their book *Political Paranoia*: *The Psychopolitics of Hatred* (1997) (Bratich 2008: 4).

Jack Z. Bratich, professor of journalism and media studies, points out that conspiracy theories are not merely incorrect, fallacious; they are that which Christopher Hitchens calls "not even wrong." "If the mind is that sphere that can distinguish between truth and falsity, then conspiracy theories are beyond that sphere. They are *para* (beyond or beside) the *nous* (mind). They are *paranoid*" (Bratich 2008: 3).

The term *conspiracy theories* thus connects the subordinate conceptual strategies (paranoid style, political paranoia, conspiracism) in relation to the narratives studying conspiracy (conspiratology, conspiracy research, conspiracy account/narrative) (Bratich 2008: 6). Bratich thereby differs between conspiracy theories and conspiracies; it was not before 1997 that the term *conspiracy theory* was included in the appendix of the *Oxford English Dictionary* (ibid.: 2). Hence, as we differ between a conspiracist, conspiracy theorist and conspiracy, we also position the conspiratologist (conspiracy theory theorist) as the researcher of the aforementioned actants and acts.

Michel Chossudovsky, a Canadian economist and founder of the website GlobalResearch.ca (Centre for Research on Globalisation), specifies a powerful and simple definition of a conspiracy theorist: "Conspiracy theorist is someone who questions the statements of known liars" (Chossudovsky, 2015, http).

Flight MH370 – one of aviation's greatest mysteries

I shall return to the contextualisation of the conspiracy theory/ies on the disappearance of flight MH370, which has been declared one of the greatest airplane mysteries of all time. Specifically, Boeing 777 (Malaysia Airlines Flight 370) with 227 passengers and 12 crew members disappeared on March 8, 2014 during a flight from Kuala Lumpur to Beijing. According to the official story, it is believed that the airplane fell into the Indian Ocean, off the west coast of Australia. The airplane last contacted air traffic control 120 nautical miles off the east coast of the Malaysian town of Kota Bharu. The conspiracy theories – i.e. one of the few dozen interpretations related to the missing airplane – connect the fate of flight MH370, Malaysia's missing airplane, with flight MH17 (Malaysia Airlines Flight 17) that was shot down over Ukraine. Considering the aforementioned *paranoid* connection of fates of the two airplanes, according to the scenario of which MH370 and MH17 are actually the same airplane, in this segment I shall address in more detail only the aforementioned conspiracy theory, which I personally find the most radical of all. Hence, according to this theory, the airplane that was shot down in Ukraine is actually the lost, missing MH370, and not the MH17 that was flying from Amsterdam to Kuala Lumpur.

Furthermore, this conspiracy theory claims that MH370 had been hijacked and was forced to land on the American military base on Diego Garcia atoll (in the central part of the Indian Ocean) so as to be intentionally brought down in Donetsk. According to

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the aforementioned theory, everything was carried out by American agents. Specifically, Great Britain had conducted ethnic cleansing on this territory in the early 1950s in order to lease the aforementioned Diego Garcia atoll to the US for military purposes (cf. "MH370 conspiracy theories," http). Furthermore, this conspiracy theory claims that the US ascribed this operation to Russia (a false flag operation) in order to politically discredit the Russian government.[5] Evidentiary matrices for the aforementioned speculations were the following: "the wreckage found in Ukraine seems to have different configurations of windows from the ones on the MH17, and the Malaysian flag on the side of the airplane is not in the right place. Others claim that the photographs are fake" ("MH370 conspiracy theories,", http).

However, as further claimed by the conspiracy theorists who support the aforementioned theory – the American military base is situated near the island of Réunion (a French island in the Indian Ocean), where a part of the missing Malaysian airplane was found. Sceptics thereby add a very clear formulation that there is still (late autumn of 2016) no confirmation that this is indeed the missing MH370. Personally, I see an exceptional value in conspiracy theories – such as all of those questioning the disappearance of the aforementioned Malaysian airplane – due to their subversive potential as they question the strategies of the governing powers (in this case, of several governments).

Conspiracy theory theorist i.e. *conspirologist* Matthew R. X. Dentith[6] (2014) demonstrated that the *belief* in certain conspiracy theories can be rational, and therefore he entitled the concluding chapter of his book "In Defence of Conspiracy Theories." According to his research, conspiracy theories – which are far more popular today than in any previous period – belong to the *epistemological field of belief* (Dentith 2014: 174, 176). Thereby he stresses that Lance deHaven-Smith, professor emeritus at Florida State University, also equally defended the *belief* in conspiracy theories and, in his book *Conspiracy Theory in America* (2013), ascertained that Popper's negative attitude towards conspiracy theories, as well as the political analysis by Leo Strauss, influenced the lack of serious consideration of conspiracy theories in contemporary interpretations (qtd. in Dentith 2014: 177). The aforementioned dramatic nature of the belief in conspiracy theories is also etymologically explained by David Brion Davis in the foreword to the encyclopaedia *Conspiracy Theories in American History* (2003), edited by Peter Knight, who also asserts that conspiracy theories should be taken seriously (Knight 2003: 24) and points out the Latin verb *conspirare* (*to breathe in unison*) which suggests something that is dramatic and rooted in the past (Brion Davis, qtd. in Knight 2003: 1).

Photo: With the pictured work, sand artist Sudarsan Pattnaik poses the question "Where is the Malaysian airplane MH370?" a year after the mysterious disappearance of the aforementioned airplane (Puri, India, March 8, 2015).[7]

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Conspiracy theories: Popular and political matrix

As regards the Malaysian airplane – which has still not been found despite all control systems[8] – I believe that the best answer in our cultural circle has been provided by television journalist Krešimir Mišak who, during the interview on the occasion of the publication of his book *Dečki, odjebite u skokovima: Sve piše u novinama (… samo najvažnije ne)* (*Guys, Fuck Off: It's All in the Papers […Except for the Most Important Bits]*; Zagreb, 2013),[9] stated that Croatian newspapers still feature news on the Bilderberg Club meetings every now and then, but the information on the aforementioned group is no longer available in America as the media company executives are its active members. Or, as he also excellently formulated conspiracy theories by using a counter-question on the same occasion: "Okay, conspiracy theories, whatever, but tell me – where did the airplane go?" (Mišak, 2014, http). Specifically, he posed the aforementioned counter-question i.e. performative in relation to the "disappearance" of Boeing 757 that (allegedly) crashed into the Pentagon, penetrated a hole measuring 5 meters in diameter, and disappeared – it was never found.

Krešimir Mišak[10] is credited for bringing many researchers, scientists to Croatian national television, e.g. he was the first to host the American researcher and author Daniel Estulin on the subject of the Bilderberg Club, who also spoke of the aforementioned problem in the European Parliament on June 1, 2010. Unfortunately, the aforementioned interview in Mišak's programme was neither commented nor covered by the media, clearly in the spirit of unacceptance of new ideas or, as commented by director Shaun Monson in the film *Earthlings* (2005), the unacceptance of new social movements – in this particular case, of animal rights movements. Specifically, the un/acceptance of new social movements, as well as interpretations (in this case, of the so-called conspiracy theories), usually proceeds through three phases – ridicule, fierce opposition, and acceptance. When citing the official statements of generals, pilots and government officials related to NLOs, Leslie Kean also states Schopenhauer's aforementioned triad (cf. Kean 2011: 23).

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As regards the Croatian scientific paradigm, Nebojša Blanuša – full professor at the Faculty of Political Science of the University of Zagreb – is systematically engaged in conspiracy theories as interpretative framework and narrative pattern that interprets political events and processes as a consequence of premeditated and seemingly unrelated activities in his book *Teorije zavjera i hrvatska politička zbilja 1980-2007* (*Conspiracy Theories and Croatian Political Reality 1980-2007*; 2011). He proved that conspiracy theories are not inherent – as is frequently stressed – only to eccentrics (cf. Blanuša 2011: 34),[11] thereby noting that the academic discourse has, unsurprisingly, considered conspiracy theories to be primarily frivolous statements, and "placed them in its analyses in the space between poor imitation of scientific theories and expressions of political paranoia" (ibid.: 12). However, Blanuša is actually interested "whether conspiracy theories can be discussed in a different manner, i.e. in what sense they can become a subject of research" (ibid.). Nebojša Blanuša, in accordance with Sloterdijk's concept that defines cynicism as the sole strategy with which all spectacles of cynical power can be defeated, introduces the distinction between *cynical* and *kynical* conspiracy theories, i.e. differentiates between conspiracy theories 'from above' (conspiracy theories produced by the governing power in order to preserve itself) and kynical conspiracy theories – conspiracy theories ensuing 'from underneath' as a subversion of the cynical governing power. Or, as further formulated by Nebojša Blanuša, who applies Sloterdijk's distinction: "If the formula of cynicism is 'they know what they are doing, but still, they are doing it', the formula of kynicism is 'they know what 'those above' are doing and they denounce it and deride it (in a more or less loud manner)'" (Blanuša 2011: 71-72). Succinctly put, unlike kynical conspiracy theories which undermine the system, cynical conspiracy theories contribute to what some have called a *post-truth* matrix (cf. Barkun 2018: IX). Although both types of conspiracy theories could appear at any point of the political spectrum, cynical conspiracy theories are more often related to fascism, Nazism, aggressive nationalism, and authoritarian populist movements (cf. Blanuša 2011: 46).

As regards the context of research of conspiracy theories in Croatia, it is exactly the two aforementioned studies – the publicist one by Krešimir Mišak and the scientific-political one by Nebojša Blanuša, whereby the two of them are peers, with Mišak having graduated from the Faculty of Political Science, and Blanuša being assistant frofessor at the same Faculty at the time the aforementioned book was published – which confirm Arnold's view that conspiracy theories, being metaphoric deliberations, are related to popular and political culture (cf. Arnold 2008: 172).

From his years-long journalist position, Krešimir Mišak thereby detects the modes of functioning of journalism in the West: agency news was established solely so that journalists would not visit the location themselves and see, comment the events. Furthermore, the journalist also expressed his opinion as to how it is possible that the programme *Na rubu znanosti* (*On the Margins of Science*) continues to be broadcast on Croatian National Television (HTV); specifically, a programme of this type would not be possible on RTL or Nova TV, as both are commercial television channels governed by corporative discipline

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(Mišak, 2014, http). In that sense, Krešimir Mišak points out that there is information warfare in progress, with main media on one side (in which he, naturally, also includes his own work field) as voices of the Control System, and *oral lore*, own experience and common sense on the other side (Mišak 2013: X). Furthermore, both Jonathan Vankin and John Whalen also stress the dichotomy within the framework of the aforementioned *information cynicism* (cf. Sloterdijk 1992), and open their book on conspiracies with Jim Hougan's detection that there are two kinds of history: the Disney version that is, of course, safe, sanitised, "so widely available as to be unavoidable," and the other kind of history – secret, obscure, and unnamed (Vankin, Whalen 2002: 11).[12] Along the lines of the aforementioned, I also note *Conspiracy Encyclopaedia* (ed. by Thom Burnett) which states that investigative journalism and conspiracy theories have become the Fifth Estate, the estate of protectors of freedom of thought and speech. Specifically, Thom Burnett highlights that real criminal conspiracies sometimes crystallise out of such theories, and that the investigative methods of conspiracy theorists become a tool of contemporary investigative journalism. He states, among other things, that the term *conspiracy theory* is problematic, and instead suggests the German term *Verschwirungsmythos* – meaning *conspiracy myth* – as more appropriate (*Conspiracy Encyclopaedia* 2010: 20).

From urban legends to conspiracy theories: The global paranoia

Gordon B. Arnold, professor of liberal arts at Montserrat College of Art in Beverly, Massachusetts, notes that conspiracy theories are a global phenomenon that became especially widespread after the Second World War (Arnold 2008: X) which, naturally, relates conspiracy theories to the context of the Cold War which, considering further conflicts between the East and the West, has never actually ended regardless of the collapse of the Berlin Wall in 1989.[13]

Folklorist Jan Harold Brunvand, one of the most renowned theorists of urban legends, emphasises that urban legend belongs to the subgenre of folk stories/legends which, unlike fairy tales, are believable or probable and, unlike myths, are set in recent history and include human beings rather than gods and demigods.[14] In his first book on urban legends *The Vanishing Hitchhiker: American Urban Legends and Their Meanings* (1981), with which he introduced the genre research of urban legends into folklore studies, the aforementioned theorist does not include conspiracy theories.[15] It is exactly in this segment, in the aforementioned definition, that Barkun affirms that the nature of conspiracy theories can also be illustrated with urban legends (Barkun 2003: 10-11).[16] I would like to refer to the critical review by Linda Dégh to Brunvand's definition of urban legends. Specifically, Linda Dégh points out that legends are always contemporary given the period in which they have been told (Dégh 2001: 90, 92). Furthermore, she stresses that contemporary legends are manifested as traditional legends (ibid.: 91), which is close to Milivoj Solar's interpretation of legends, i.e. "the flying saucer myth" (Solar's syntagma).

Admittedly, Linda Dégh thereby does not mention conspiracy theories, but nevertheless indicates legends whose content bears the conspiracy matrix; therefore she notes

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certain content close to conspiracy theories such as extra-terrestrial invasion, or threatening conspiracies against ordinary citizens implemented by a powerful interest group or government (ibid.: 126, 131), relating the aforementioned content to rumours/gossip/hearsay (ibid.:127-128).

In that sense, we can follow conspiracy theories as a temporal continuation of demonological/mythological belief legends i.e. urban legends; that is, the segment of urban legends termed in Brunvand's books as the motif of the *unidentified flying objects* (defined by Milivoj Solar as the *flying saucer myth*),[17] upon which the matrix of kidnappings is built, as well as the conspiracy theory matrix of the American government (Chris Carter, *The X-Files*, 1993-…) initiating the aforementioned kidnappings.[18] Specifically, we can consider the ufology i.e. the flying saucer sightings as a transition from urban stories/lore/legends to conspiracy theories. It is evident that Brunvald stops at flying saucer sightings i.e. aeronautical incidents and does not go further into the research of conspiracy theories, the determinant of which being the context of paranoia, whereby paranoia can be interpreted – by referring to Freud, of course – as the state of illusion.

In his book on conspiracy theories in film, television and politics, Gordon B. Arnold ascertains that, from the Second World War onwards, as regards American popular and political culture, conspiracy theories have gone through three stages.

In the first stage, the aforementioned subject ensued from paranoia, fear, and anxiety; this is the external threat by the Soviet Union as well as the possibility of nuclear destruction, and Arnold recognises cinematic representations in the following films: *Big Jim McLean* (Edward Ludwig, 1952)*, Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (Don Siegel, 1956), *The Manchurian Candidate* (John Frankenheimer, 1962).

The second phase/stage demonstrates that conspiracy theories transformed from an expression of fear and paranoia to cynicism. The aforementioned occurred with the shift from an external enemy to internal threats, which is confirmed by the following films: *Seven Days in May* (John Frankenheimer, 1964)*, All the President's Men* (Alan J. Pakula, 1978)*, Capricorn One* (Peter Hyams, 1977)*, Rambo* (film series)*, Silkwood* (Mike Nichols, 1983)*, Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (Steven Spielberg, 1977).

In the third phase, from the 1990s onwards, there is no cynicism, but rather a feeling of dissatisfaction with one part of the American society and its politics, which is confirmed by the following cinematic representations: *JFK* (Oliver Stone, 1991)*, The X-Files* (Chris Carter, 1993-…)*, The Truman Show* (Peter Weir, 1998)*, The Matrix* (Lana and Lilly Wachowski, 1999) (Arnold 2008: 170-171). We can also add to this Oliver Stone's most recent film *Snowden* (2016), which demonstrates that there are no conspiracy theories, as Edward Snowden openly demonstrates that the war on terror is not about war on terror, but rather the American economic superiority over the rest of the world (Stone 2016: 57). In his interpretation of the critical paranoia in the TV series *The X-Files*,[19] Douglas Kellner points out that the 1960s and 1970s saw the flourishing of the public discourse related to conspiracy theories in American society and politics, while the films on conspiracy theo-

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ries have made a strong comeback in the 1990s, "and nurtured the paranoid sense that political power was out of the reach of ordinary citizens and democratic political processes" (Kellner 2009: 322).[20]

Hence, I interpret the field of permeation of conspiracy theories and urban legends in stories of unidentified flying objects or, as stated by Gordon B. Arnold, the new disguise of conspiracies became flying saucers, as well as science fiction films on the aforementioned subject in the 1950s. Specifically, he notes that in the late 1940s, in the context of the Cold War conflict, several sensationalist reports appeared which pronouncedly influenced the American culture. They were stories, rumours of flying saucers, which were initially not related to so-called communist threats; it was not until later that it was determined that these reports had been deeply connected to the climate of fear and anxiety regarding possible nuclear warfare (Arnold 2008: 28). Michael Barkun thus interprets the initiation of conspiracy theories in ufology (Barkun 2003: 80).

As regards the connection between conspiracy theories and urban legends, but also the demonological/mythological belief legends, conspiracy theories can be interpreted as the contemporary variant of ancient myths in which the monsters and deities from Olympus or Valhalla have been replaced by extra-terrestrials and the Illuminati from Washington D.C. and Buckingham Palace (*Conspiracy Encyclopaedia* 2010: 20). Specifically, in that sense, conspiracy theories (as urban legends/ belief legends with a paranoid matrix), which are also urban legends, continue the segment of mythical/demonological belief legends, albeit in the contemporary context of new *fields* (in Bourdieu's definition of *fields*).

On the other hand, as regards the determinant of belief, it is evident that these are actual beliefs of individuals (cf. Mauss 1982: 179, Šešo 2016: 14-15) who control their actions primarily due to the belief itself in the aforementioned stories. We can exemplify this with numerous websites on conspiracy theories related to the aforementioned missing airplane.

As the final contribution, I provide two reports on aeronautical incidents from the website www.misterije.org,[21] i.e. from the local (Croatian) context (since ufology, as noted by Gordon B. Arnold, is usually considered the beginning of conspiracy theories in terms of popular culture),[22] whereby the author of the first report on the aeronautical incident (in form of a memorate) expects from other users of the aforementioned website to detect what he had seen.

> **UFO,** Miroslav Hundak, December 4, 2000, http://www.misterije.org/iskustvo.asp?id=1
>
> Sighting of a red dot in the sky, which "moved damned fast from south to north […] Personally, I do not believe that aliens are flying around performing aerial acrobatics, or that the Americans test machinery in this area. I do not believe in conspiracy theories and other conspiracies, and even though I am posting this on the internet, I expect coherent suggestions as to what exactly I saw."

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UFO above Kozjak mountain, Mirko Petričević, September 29, 2003,

http://www.misterije.org/iskustvo.asp?id=24

On the aforementioned website, Mirko Petričević shared his experience (also in form of a memorate) of sighting the UFO on September 21, 2002. "It resembled a triangle, with one of its edges facing the ground. It was at approximately ten of its heights above ground, and was slowly moving from east to west even though the wind was blowing in the opposite direction."

Endnotes

1 This work has been fully supported by the Croatian Science Foundation under the project *Narrating Fear* [IP-2016-06-2463]. This is a revised and abbreviated version of the paper published in the journal *Narodna umjetnost*, Vol. 53, No. 2, 2016, pp. 111–131.

2 From the interview with multimedia artist Boris Demur, who was particularly interested in artists-members of the Fabian Society, with the logo depicting a wolf in sheep's clothing, within the framework of which he often emphasised the role of George Orwell and Aldous Huxley, who had taken data for their books from the aforementioned source – Orwell for *1984* (1949), and Huxley for *Brave New World* (1932) (cf. Icke 2011: 449-551).

3 In May 2018, Malaysia cancelled the four-year search for the missing airplane; this accident became one of the world's greatest mysteries in the history of aviation.

4 Under the category of *belief*, I classify the *phenomenon* with which Rudolf Otto denoted the numinous in his book *The Idea of the Holy* (1917) within the framework of phenomenology of religion. Hence, in this paper, the category of belief does not indicate the genre determinant with which *belief legend* and *belief* are equalised in folklore research and ethnology, since belief legend is based on authenticity, belief in their credibility (of course, if we belong to its audience, as it is otherwise also the case with conspiracy theories).

Briefly put, in this text I follow Marcel Mauss' determinant of the *phenomenon* of belief. "'Belief' implies the adherence of all men to an idea, and consequently to a state of feeling, an act of will, and at the same time a phenomenon of ideation" (Mauss 1982: 179). Thereby I find exceptionally important the research of cognitive psychologist Bruce M. Hood, who affirmed that our mind has been structured from the very beginning so as to suppose that there are invisible rules, forces and beings in this world, and stresses – within the framework of *biology of belief* – that something in our biological structure prompts us to *believe* (Hood 2010: 241).

5 Croatian journalist Tomislav Krasnec has noted that the Russian media, on the other hand, were spreading the thesis that the Malaysian airplane MH17 had been brought down by the Ukrainian military. "One of the theses is that the Ukrainians thought that MH17 was in fact the Russian presidential airplane in which Vladimir Putin was flying that same day. In November 2014, Russian national television released an alleged satellite image that shows how the Ukrainian military airplane Su-25 is firing a missile towards MH17; it was soon found, however, that part of this footage was in fact a frame copied from Google Earth program from 2012" (Krasnec 2015: 13).

6 Matthew R. X. Dentith authored the book *The Philosophy of Conspiracy Theories* (2014), in which he differs between warranted claims of conspiracy and false conspiracy theories; in 2012, he defended the doctoral thesis on the subject of the epistemology of conspiracy theories.

7 Source: http://www.microfinancemonitor.com/remembering-missing-mh370-one-year-after-search-continues/29448

8 In May 2016, a part of the wing of the missing airplane was found in Mauritius; however, it remains unknown as to when, where and why the airplane had disappeared. Cf. http://europe.newsweek.com/malaysia-airlines-flight-mh370-wing-debris-found-mauritius-confirmed-be-part-507265?rm=eu "Pieces of debris from the flight have washed up in the Indian Ocean, in places such as the French island of Reunion, but none of the

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pieces have offered any clues to investigators about a precise location of the crash site" (Moore, http).

On the fate of the two aforementioned airplanes – Malaysia Airlines Flight 370 and Malaysia Airlines Flight 17, cf. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Malaysia_Airlines_Flight_370 and https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Malaysia_Airlines_Flight_17

9 This is a kind of sequel to the book *Sve piše u novinama (… a ponešto i ne)* (*It's All in the Papers […and Some Things Aren't]*; Zagreb, 2010).

10 On the author himself, cf. https://hr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kre%C5%A1imir_Mi%C5%A1ak

11 As regards scepticism, for example, Dentith also states that the academic research on conspiracy theories mostly ensues from the scepticism niche (Dentith 2014: 172).

12 This is a dichotomy between subordinate and official knowledge that is also addressed by Foucault, whereby he defined subordinate knowledge as historical knowledge disqualified as inadequate, naïve knowledge (Bratich 2008: 7).

13 In his book *Debunked!: Conspiracy Theories, Urban Legends, and Evil Plots of the 21st Century* (2008), columnist and film critic Richard Roeper sets in parallel urban legends and conspiracy theories, but (also) differentiates between them in terms of genre.

14 While studying so-called urban legends, Linda Dégh asserts that folklorists have been taught contextualisation, but have thereby lost the folkloristic niche and entered the field of sociology and social psychology, with which they shifted their research interest from *text* to context – *rumours*. Hence, same as sociologists and social psychologists, they are interested in rumours on the attack on government, conspiracies against the government and, vice versa, the government's conspiracy theories against ordinary citizens. Furthermore, she adds that sociologists are in that sense not interested in studying the ways in which this *lore* and conspiracy theories are generated, as well as in the work of fantasy and the worldview that are manifested in rumours and legends (ibid.: 32). I personally believe that an inter-, multi-, transdisciplinary unification of the sociologic, psychologic and folkloristic approach in the research of conspiracy theories is indeed welcome, considering their rootedness in the political sphere. As regards rumours, Patricia A. Turner also relates urban belief legends to rumours (Barkun 2003: 11).

15 I do not mention here the long history of the genre of urban legends, conceived in collections by Paul Sébillot, Arnold van Gennep and Wilhelm Mannhardt (cf. Dégh 2001: 90).

16 Michael Barkun, professor emeritus in political science, studies conspiracy beliefs, thereby placing them – within the framework of own negative attitude towards conspiracy theories – in the context of millenarianism (Barkun 2003: 1-2).

17 It is notable that the aforementioned legend is close to the matrix of e.g. fairy kidnappings in demonological/mythical belief legends (cf. Ellis 1997: 496).

In the aforementioned interpretations, Milivoj Solar addresses in more detail the matrix of the "encounters of the third kind" and does not interpretatively address the so-called conspiracy theories of the Cold War (cf. Solar 2008: 339-352); specifically, he does not open up the question as to why the first NLO encounter occurred in the exact year of 1947.

18 As regards American folkloristics, Richard M. Dorson initially termed these stories *city legends*, and later used other terms – *urban belief tales*, *modern legends* and, from 1968 onwards, *urban legends* (Ellis 1997: 496).

19 Chris Carter, creator of the aforementioned series, pointed out that most Americans believe "that Government does not operate in the best interests of the U.S. public" and noted that the freedom of *The X-Files* in criticising the FBI is not as much related to opposing the involvement of the state in personal and social matters as it is to the death of J. Edgar Hoover – or, to quote Carter himself: "In his day, if you criticised the FBI, you used to do it at your own risk. You would be declared Public Enemy Number One" (Chris Carter, qtd. in Kellner 2009: 344).

20 We can refer to the case of Simon Jenkins, English writer, journalist and editor (e.g. he was Editor of *The Times* from 1990 to 1992), who stated in the documentary series *Conspiracy* (2015) that the British government, amidst the ongoing American war against so-called terrorism, propagated the politics and culture of fear so as to spread pro-war psychosis in Britain and win over, recruit the public in the war against Iraq and Saddam Hussein, i.e. in the American war for oil in Iraq (the US and Great Britain initiated the war or, euphemistically, the *military action* against Iraq, sans approval by the UN).

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21 Unfortunately, the aforementioned website no longer exists. I read both reports on April 25, 2005.

22 Of course, the beginning of conspiracy theories is far deeper; it is related to the beginnings of history of mankind and its paranoia or, as stated by multimedia artist Boris Demur, all of these secret organisations originated in antiquity i.e. ancient Greece and Rome. "In the secret cults of ancient Greece and Rome, only the initiated ones i.e. aristocracy were allowed to share secrets with the high priests" (Demur, qtd. in Marjanić 2014: 410).

Research and Publication Ethics Statement:

This is a research article, containing original data, and it has not been previously published or submitted to any other outlet for publication. The author followed ethical principles and rules during the research process. In the study, informed consent was obtained from the volunteer participants and the privacy of the participants was protected.

Araştırma ve yayın etiği beyanı: Bu makale tamamıyla özgün bir araştırma olarak planlanmış, yürütülmüş ve sonuçları ile raporlaştırıldıktan sonra ilgili dergiye gönderilmiştir. Araştırma herhangi bir sempozyum, kongre vb. sunulmamış ya da başka bir dergiye değerlendirilmek üzere gönderilmemiştir.

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