

**The evolution of disease narratives in Italy and Western world:  
How people keeps on reacting to danger with stories**

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This poster presentation will cover narratives sometimes used and spread orally in cases of urgency and danger, real or perceived, about widespread and/or epidemic diseases. I will focus mainly on some historical cases in which forms of narrative beliefs, legends, tall stories and hoaxes are often told and used with the purpose of public prevention (despite the scientific inaccuracy of these kind of narratives). The country I will mostly focus on will be Italy, due to its long historical and even literary tradition about the topic (let's just think about *Storia della colonna infame*, 1840, by Alessandro Manzoni or the widespread belief about Jews poisoning wells) and my own knowledge of the sources in that context.

Moreover, this poster presentation will show how these different narratives evolved in the Modern and Contemporary Age, passing from brief and explosive forms of mass hysteria to complex and long term tales and beliefs in recent times, helped also by change in communication and in issues publicly perceived as urgent: above all, the internet has had a dramatic impact on people's narratives

about illness in Western countries, bringing them for instance to spread fake news and statistics about ebola virus possibly brought by African immigrants, or to enforce on the web some forms of non-conventional medicine (anti-vaccination, simple and scientifically rejected therapies against cancer and so on); I will hence briefly analyse these cases.

Many examples like these show how technology changed the way of creating and sharing these narratives, and this presentation is aimed to underline this point. This change is intended obviously as a problematic form of cultural evolution in folk narratives, requiring new political strategies and solutions.

## References

Walter Laqueur (2006) *The Changing Face of Antisemitism: From Ancient Times to the Present Day*, Oxford University Press.

Alessandro Manzoni (1993, original edition in 1840), *Storia della colonna infame*, Newton Compton, Milan.

<http://www.ilgiornale.it/news/interni/ebola-e-tbc-sbarcano-immigrati-1011595.html> (article from an Italian newspaper about the supposed threat of immigrants bringing ebola; read in 27/4/2018).

<https://www.historyofvaccines.org/content/articles/history-anti-vaccination-movements> (article about the history of antivaccination movements; read in 27/4/2018). out the history of anti-vaccination movements; read in 27/4/2018).