

Introduction

Folk Devils Past and Present

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Introduction

In his 1972 book *Folk Devils and Moral Panics*, Stanley Cohen (2002) convincingly shows how negative media coverage can generate what he terms ‘folk devils’ – individuals whose mere presence or actions feed a population’s fear of a general degradation of society. Folk devils are sometimes seen as penetrating society from the outside; at other times they have developed from within the very society they are now seen as posing a threat to. Sometimes they are a visible group; other times they become epitomized by a single individual or phenomenon, or they exist only as a potential threat. As such, the folk devil for Cohen was not necessarily a biblical phenomenon or a figure related to actual devils. Rather, the folk devil term was coined to signify a perceived disturbance of social order that manifests itself through accusations of wrongdoing or evil.

This volume examines current fears and perceived threats from an anthropological perspective as these unfold in different contexts around the world, and through this it investigates and analyses how contemporary folk devils emerge or develop. It shows how the devilish may take on many different forms – refugees,

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technocrats, Roma, hipsters, LGBT groups, right-wing politicians, sorcerers, economic migrants, tourists, mobile criminals and sugary foods – and contributions start with cases from across the globe: Germany, the Czech Republic, Sri Lanka, Denmark, the Republic of Georgia, the UK, Italy, Melanesia, France and the US.

Closely intertwined with the folk devil is the moral panic that subsequently arises with public fear. For Cohen, a moral panic typically takes its starting point in big newspaper headlines where the folk devil is pointed out, yet, as this volume demonstrates, today it may as well arise from a grass-root level, in social media, through political discourses or from already-existing local myths or social structures. In Cohen's original study, it was gangs of 'aimless youth' in the UK that caused a moral panic to erupt: the mods and rockers. Subjected to long and negative media coverage, the panic escalates, demanding political action and changes to the law. By labelling this spiral of actions a moral panic, Cohen does not indicate that the issue does not exist or that it is based on hysteria or illusion. Rather, he points out that the extent of the problem has been exaggerated, that facts are distorted and the problem acutely angled. Some moral panics rise and then subside quickly as the media turns to other issues, whereas other moral panics soon become permanent and institutionalized.

To illustrate this process, Cohen invites us to consider the difference between two scenarios, both of which take place in a quaint seaside resort town on the east coast of England during a Bank Holiday. In the first scenario, the holiday spirit is severely disturbed by the eruption of violent clashes between youth groups. Windows are broken, guns are fired, and beach huts and dance halls are wrecked. Newspapers report of gangs 'hell-bent for destruction', screaming mobs, attacks, siege, and innocent holiday makers desperately fleeing town. Later, articles report on the cost of damages, both in terms of vandalism during the event itself and in terms of lost revenues caused by tourists fearing to come back. In the second scenario, business in the seaside town is slow owing to the weather. Easter Sunday is the coldest it has been for 80 years; few tourists have arrived and local youth walk around in boredom. Some of them start small-scale fights and throw rocks at each other, and in the evening the only dancehall in town is damaged. Later, a calculation shows that during this particular season the number of hired deckchairs has dropped dramatically, but this is not because tourists stay away after the few days of minor street-fights among youth. The weather simply meant that they did not go to the beach. Instead, the number of people using the miniature railway and the putting green increased dramatically (Cohen 2002 [1972], 21ff.).

As is probably obvious, the two scenarios depicted by Cohen are one and the same event. Cohen uses what we today would term the 'fake news' reporting of the first event to show how the media exaggerated events taking place in 1964 in the seaside town of Clacton. While some reports were simply factually wrong, others had presented a distorted image of what had taken place. It was true, for

instance, that all dancehalls in town had been trashed, but less dramatic when it is also clarified that there was only one dancehall in Clacton. And it was true that people stopped going to the beach, but this was due to the weather and not due to the infighting youths. Yet, although the second scenario was much closer to the truth, the first scenario remained dominant. And, ironically, although there had not really been groups of mods and rockers in Clacton, they began to appear after their reported presence. Tourism even increased because people were curious to see them, and they remained a fixture in mainstream media and public debate for years to come. Despite curiosity among parts of the public surrounding the descriptions of the youth groups, it was largely fear and panic rather than fascination that remained centre stage, and, as perceived folk devils, the mods and rockers came to represent a moral threat to society regardless of their actual presence.

Cohen's book became a landmark in studies of deviance, subcultures and processes of othering, and provided a framework for examining how (mis) representations of particular groups may both generate heightened senses of fear among local populations and in fact take part in solidifying the groups represented. While originally it mainly impacted on the field of criminology in terms of highlighting the social construction of deviance, today it has become a widely used work within the social sciences at large. At the time of writing this introduction, Cohen's book has been quoted or referenced over 11,000 times in academic books and journal articles, and more than 7,000 of these mentions have appeared within the last decade, five decades after the book was first published.

Engaging critically with Cohen's work in order to both highlight its continued relevance and add new perspectives, this introduction falls into two main parts. In the first part, we go into detail with the central themes themselves, something Cohen was criticized for not doing. For instance, while Cohen succinctly depicts the folk devils of 1950s and 1960s UK, he spends relatively little time describing the notion of the 'folk devil' itself. In other words, aside from a few brief mentions of folklore, the folk-ness and the devilish-ness of the folk devil remain more or less untouched. As pointed out by Steven Hayle in relation to studies that have taken up Cohen's framework, 'the social processes leading to the creation of folk devils have largely been undertheorized compared to the social processes underlying moral panics' (2013, 1125; see also le Grand, Chapter 1). Hence, we will begin this introduction by following a simple procedure of deconstructing and reassembling Cohen's main terms: *folk*, *devil*, *moral* and *panic*.

In the second part, we engage with more recent anthropological studies of devilry and otherness, along with the chapters of the current volume, in order to examine how contemporary case studies of accusation and othering can be used to further some of Cohen's original insights. More specifically, we focus on the differences between what unfolds when perceived folk devilry and moral

panic either emerge a) from within a given society when already-existing groups or phenomena suddenly come to stand forth as problematic or b) when state- or media-related processes or events are the main generators of fear. And, added to this, we consider what transpires when attention is not focused only on politics or media but also on the perspectives of the perceived folk devils themselves. Zooming in on these three aspects, which are also the basis of how this volume as a whole is structured, we argue both that the existence or emergence of contemporary folk devils takes place in situations where an 'Other' is attempted exorcised in order to retain an imagined pre-existing order, as was the case in Cohen's original study, and that folk devils and moral panics also take part in creating new forms of order and societal divisions. What this points towards, we argue, is the importance of considering socio-economic and cultural aspects of particular contexts and their role in shaping particular kinds of devil figures.

But devilry itself is where we will start.

Roots of Evil: Dealing with the Devil

Although the Devil is a biblical figure, it is not, if taken as a *symbol* of evil, necessarily confined to Christian thought. As such, use of devil imagery does not necessarily entail a belief in God. And conversely, as noted by Charles Stewart (2008), belief in God does not necessarily correspond to belief in the Devil. This is reflected empirically in this volume in that, while some chapters relate directly to belief, in others the Devil stands forth as a colloquial term.

Even though the Devil is most often associated with Christianity, specific depictions of it is relatively limited, particular in the Old Testament. Rather than being a specific entity or figure, the Devil is a manifestation of evil that takes many forms: the serpent in the Garden of Eden (as a temptation), the fallen angel Lucifer, the Hebrew sea monster Leviathan, the accuser of Job, the dragon in the Book of Revelations, the author of lies, the promoter of evil. And, given that, as an image, the Devil is central as a counterpoint to God, it is noteworthy that the physical appearance of the Devil is not mentioned in the Bible or other biblical materials. The image of the horned Devil, often with the hindquarters of a goat and with a pitchfork, did not appear until the Middle Ages. And, rather than being features mentioned in scripture, these seem to have been lifted from various pagan gods and religions. But, even though the Devil became personified as a particular image, it took other forms as well. Some were figural, while others were metaphorical, such as the number zero, which at one point in time was seen as the Devil's magic in Western Europe (Frederiksen 2018; Seife 2000). Yet, as noted by Burton Russel, 'Whether one perceives the Devil as a supernatural being, or as an uncontrollable force arising in the unconscious, or as an absolute aspect of human nature is less important than the essence of the perception, which is that we are threatened by alien and hostile powers' (Russel 1987, 32).

The question of demonization was in the medieval period mainly a theological question related to the nature of evil, but it was also during this period that it became a political question in terms of the politics of witch-hunts. This entailed that the devilish was not merely an external threat (as, for instance, another religion), but just as much an internal threat (Pagels 1996). An obvious example of this is the witch-hunts in Europe, which, as pointed out by Erich Goode and Nachman Ben-Yehuda (2010), can be seen as an early example of moral panic and mass hysteria. In 1487, the German clergyman Heinrich Kramer published *Malleus Maleficarum*, a treatise on witchcraft that endorsed their persecution and execution. Although witchcraft had already been condemned by the Church, *Malleus Maleficarum* is significant for several reasons. First of all, it differed from earlier conceptualizations of witches in that not only did it focus more explicitly on women; it also deemed witchcraft as distinctly evil and saw witches as puppets of the Devil. Until the 15th century, ‘witches were classified as good or bad, depending on the objective of their magic’ (Ben-Yehuda 1992, 233). With publications such as *Malleus Maleficarum*, this changed dramatically. Moreover, despite later popular belief, the Inquisition did not use it as a manual in their witch-hunts. Rather, it was primarily used in secular courts throughout Europe. And a central aspect that made possible the spread of *Malleus Maleficarum* was the historically concurrent invention of the printing press, which in this sense took part in a widespread ‘witch hysteria’ (Russel 1972, 234).

Even long after the actual witch-hunts had died out, they remained a figure in public imagination. Gabriele Schwab, in reading Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter*, which was based on the Salem witch-hunts, notes how:

the phantasmatic space that organizes the cultural perceptions of women still relied on what I call a witchcraft pattern ... despite the fact that the actual image of the witch has been replaced by other images such as that of the adulteress, the phantasm of the witch continues to exert its powerful grip on the public imagination of nineteenth-century Puritan New England. (Schwab 1996, xiii)

In this sense, even though belief in witches may have subsided, the principle of witch-hunts and the moral panics surrounding them has remained somewhat intact, which may be related to how perceptions of evil and the Devil have changed. In his exploration of demonology, Eugene Thacker traces the various phases that ‘the demon’ has historically passed through:

there is the classical demon, which is elemental, and at once a help and a hindrance (*‘the demon beside me...’*); there is the Medieval demon, a supernatural and intermediary being that is a tempter (*‘demons surround me...’*); a modern demon, rendered both natural and scientific

through psychoanalysis, and internalized within the machinations of the unconscious (*'I am a demon to myself...'*); and finally a contemporary demon, in which the social and political aspects of antagonism are variously attributed to the Other in relationships of enmity (*'demons are other people'*). (Thacker 2011, 25, emphasis in original)

In the present volume, as in Cohen's work, it is primarily the latter that is of interest to us. That is, the demonic or the devilish 'in its cultural function as a way of thinking about the various relationships between human individuals and groups' (Thacker 2011, 23).

The Evil and the Strange: Devils and Folklore

In his study of devils and demons in Greece, Charles Stewart (1991) shows how an array of both benevolent and malevolent beings known as *exotikà* have been around in both the past and present. These may be fairies, spirits, mermaids or demons. Some such creatures, he notes, tend to 'cluster around marginal areas of the physical environment – the mountains, springs, and caves that lie beyond the safe confines of the village' (Stewart 1991, xv). Yet, Stewart continues, 'this spatial exteriority comprises only one of their aspects'. *Exotikà* is also 'a set of figures that enables individuals to map and encompass the traumas and ambiguities of life (and) may be seen to offer a means of navigation within a morally structured cosmos' (ibid.). Moreover, *exotikà* may be seen as images 'that [enable] the expression and negotiation of sensitive issues ... it is a medium for the community's dialogue with itself' (ibid., 108).

In approaching *exotikà*, Stewart departs from a conceptual division between demons and the devil. Whereas the former exists at the local level, the latter 'expresses a developed doctrinal Orthodox conception of Evil' (ibid., xvi). Yet, importantly, in ordinary speech the two were often conflated among his informants. *Exotikà* remains exterior creatures, which renders them different from the figure of the witch, another central image in the exploration of evil and otherness. Unlike the spatial exteriority of demons, witches tend to be 'both a member and an enemy of a given community' (ibid., 15), but equally tied to moral concepts.

What a principle such as *exotikà* reveals is a conflation of religious and colloquial evils, of morality and internal communal dialogue. It becomes a way society can talk to itself about itself, a principle also found in the classical folktales. In a study of the common roots of folktales, Sara Graca da Silva and Jamshid Tehrani (2016) found that one particular tale, 'The Smith and the Devil', had potentially been told in Indo-European societies for as long as 6,000 years. Although some have questioned the probability of this, what is commonly seen as the central outcome of this study is that the presence of a smith suggests that metallurgy may be older than expected (Pagel 2016). For our purpose here, however, it is the presence of the devil that is interesting. For, while the central structure of the

tale has remained relatively stable, and the smith always has been a smith, the devil has not always been a devil; it has also been a djinn and a general figure of death. It only became a devil in medieval times, as the then-prevalent figure of evil. Hence, what we are dealing with here is a form of malevolent otherness rather than a *specific* evil. And indeed, as Lancaster shows, ‘imagination plays a prominent role panic mongering. The object of panic might be an imaginary threat (the devil, witches) or a real person or group portrayed in an imaginary manner’ (Lancaster 2011, 24). As such, the real and the imagined often conflate when perceived folk devils emerge; they share a trait with both folklore and horror stories. The ghost stories of M. R. James serve as a case in point. His early stories were, in the words of Adam Scovell, ‘essentially showcasing the relation between ... enlightenment thinking and primitivism’ (2017, 41–2). The demonic creatures or objects in these stories often haunted the ‘definite sense of progress’ within modernity in a ‘violent rejoining with tradition’ (ibid., 38). On the level of symbolism, the archaic rural landscapes of East Anglia played a vital role as a topography in these stories, along with protagonists that were often figures of science (such as an archaeologist or a psychologist). Some of James’s later stories, however, were influenced by:

the waves of large-scale tragedy that the writer bore witness to during the period of the First World War. ... James’ ghosts from this point no longer simply scare or warn off those foolish enough to meddle in pre-Enlightenment affairs but become totally unforgiving and murderous; after all, the post-Enlightenment thinking was coming full circle with the industrialized chaos of the twentieth century about to unleash its untold, real-life horrors. (ibid., 44)

Scovell finds a similar parallel with the contemporary situation in his own writing. As he reflects, while writing his book on folk horror, the UK opted to leave the European Union through the process that came to known as Brexit, a period in which national sentiments played a key role, and ‘hours dreadful and things strange’ is as apt a description of the post-Brexit climate as folk horror itself, with its normalization and spiked increase in xenophobic attacks, a gestalt mentality, any questioning of the result labelled as heresy by the pro-Brexit tabloids, and a widescale embracing of political fantasy and inwardness (ibid., 184). The irony of this, he continues, is that, while the far right embraced folklore and appropriated images of the past, folk horror actually works against these in that it ‘blasts apart the romantic visions of an England gone by’ and ‘often portrays villains who harness similar techniques of indoctrination that contemporary far-right groups and figures use with a pathos that unveils how such power really functions’ (ibid.).

Seen from this perspective, condensations of figures of fear and otherness via the imagination pertains as much to medieval folklore and early 19th-century ghost stories as it does to contemporary situations (see Khalvashi and Manning, Chapter 3). Jeffrey Tolbert (2013) illustrates this in his examination of the

internet phenomenon ‘Slender Man’, which combines the horror genre and traditional folklore to create a figure whose backstory is continuously built up online, and in a communal way in lieu of being created within an online forum. As such, ‘Slender Man’ is comparable to the *exotikà* described by Stewart in being a medium for the community’s dialogue with itself, as well as a conflation between the real and the imagined in the sense that, although people within the online community are well aware that the figure is a creation, it is still a figure that causes real fear.

Morality and Panic

As argued by Rasmus Dyring, Cheryl Mattingly and Maria Louw, there has been ‘a virtual explosion of anthropological literature arguing that ethics or morality ... should be considered a central dimension of human practice’ (Dyring, Mattingly and Louw 2017, 9; e.g. Heintz 2009; Howell 1997; Sykes 2009; Zigon 2008). A central aspect of many (but not all) recent anthropological engagements with the notion of morality has been to reorient it from a Durkheimian focus on rules and regulation to a focus on action and practical judgement (ibid., 21; see also Lambek 2010, 28). This has coincided with (or perhaps occurred because of) what Peter Hervik calls a recent ‘omnipresence and dominance of discourses of morality and moralization of society’, not least, he continues, as ‘the issue of something being good or bad, acceptable or not, right or wrong, has become a dominant feature of modern news coverage and political communication’ (Hervik 2018, 85). In a recent theme section of *Conflict and Society*, Mette-Louise Johansen, Therese Sandrup and Nerina Weiss also take up Cohen’s notion of moral panic in relation to moral outrage. What risks go missing in Cohen’s original conceptualization of moral panic, they argue, is that it is not always a question of linear causality. That is, ‘the link between the outrageous act, the outrageous actor, the outraged, and the spectator is far from clear-cut’ (2018, 8). As such, a moral outrage ‘is not only a reaction but also an intensified dimension’ of existing crises (ibid., 1).

The question of morality was one of the central aspects in Mary Douglas’s (2002 [1966]) classical work *Purity and Danger*. Rules of pollution, Douglas writes, afford a means to support existing systems of morality, but they may also assist in determining right and wrong, good and bad, in situations where morality is ill-defined or where moral principles come in conflict. This is not unlike the boundary-making principles that Ben-Yehuda traces in the European witch-hunts (1992, 235). As such, accusations of wrongdoing appear not only in contexts where there is clarity around what is perceived as right and wrong but just as much in situations marked by ambiguity or what we in a previous volume have termed ‘grey zones’ (Harboe Knudsen and Frederiksen 2015).

Stories or news of folk devils may well be seen as forms of contemporary moral tales in that they can serve as forms of boundary-making, although not

in a geographical but rather a in a hierarchical sense. Cohen himself suggests seven ‘familiar clusters of social identity’ that often become the objects of moral panic (Cohen 2002 [1972], viii). These include violent, young, working-class males, school violence (bullying and shootouts), drugs (used by the wrong people at wrong places), child abusers, exposure to popular media, welfare cheats, and refugees and asylum seekers (*ibid.*, viii–xxii). Young men in particular, notes Gary T. Barker, have been positioned within such moral hierarchies and ‘in many parts of the world, it has become something of a national sport to demonize young men, particularly low-income young men’ (Barker 2005, 4; see also Amit and Dyck 2012).

During Frederiksen’s fieldwork among young unemployed men in the autonomous Republic of Ajara in Georgia, it was often noted that this was an area in which ‘devils wandered’. Interestingly, while this was a commonly held belief, opinions varied in terms of who these devils actually were. While some held that they were the members of organized criminal networks, and materialized as either young men roaming the streets at night or old bosses directing the former’s movements, others (particular those who were in fact members of criminal networks) held that these devils materialized as politicians or corrupt businessmen who lacked the moral codex that in fact existed within the mafia (Frederiksen 2013, 2015).

Zygmunt Bauman, in his classical work on consumerism and poverty, noted that ‘what Americans hold against the underclass in their midst is that its dreams and the model of life it desires are so uncannily similar to their own’ (Bauman 1998, 73). This has, he argues, entailed a reconfiguration of moral responsibility in that ‘there is no more a moral question of defending the poor against the cruelty of their fate; instead, there is the ethical question of defending the right and proper lives of decent people against the assaults likely to be plotted in means streets, ghettos and no-go areas’ (*ibid.*, 77). Needless to say, this carries similarities with more recent events such as the European refugee crises, where antagonism against refugees and migrants in many European countries was exactly framed in a perspective where people in need, or people seeking out the same opportunities as residents of potential host countries, were framed as parasites and dangerous. Consequently, the moral obligation to help people in need was overruled by a perceived moral obligation to protect one’s own from danger.

Socio-historical Backgrounds, or the Anthropology of Devilry

None of the terms depicted here – devil/folk/moral/panic – erupts or appears out of the blue. Whether individually or in combination, they are rooted in particular socio-economic and cultural histories. Examining the historical and cultural aspects that shape something such as the devilish allows us to grasp aspects of particular contexts through their form and content, as shown by a series of anthropologists.

Writing from a South American context, Mary Weismantel recounts the story of the *pishtaco*, ‘a terrifying white stranger who attacks unsuspecting Indians with a knife, dragging them off to caves and hanging them upside down to carve up their bodies’ (Weismantel 2005, 47). A significant aspect of the *pishtaco* figure is how, like devil figures mentioned earlier, it has continuously developed its appearance to mirror the contemporary context. Hence, while in the 1960s it rode on horseback, in a later version it drives a SUV. Second, its motivations are significant.

‘The pishtaco sometimes has sex with his victims,’ Weismantel writes, ‘robs them of their money, or uses parts of their bodies for his own nefarious purposes, but his primary motivation is not a vampire’s lust or a cannibal’s hunger. What he wants most of all is to make a profit; he extracts fat in order to sell it’ (ibid., 48).

Moreover, the *pishtaco* is white and shows ‘the signs of physical inactivity, an indoor life, and a rich and abundant diet’ (ibid., 57) and has become an image of a world economy run amok to a degree where starving Indians are robbed of what they have the least of: fat. Indeed, the horror here ‘is not the scene of torture or lingering death; it is the moment of profit taking’ (ibid., 62).

In Michael Taussig’s (1980) work from Columbia, the devil is a symbol of the alienation of labour by capitalism and the estrangement produced by their immersion into a regime of repression and terror. The Columbian peasants use the devil as a means of representing capital, an unseen and hostile force that cannot be controlled at a local level. Gaston Gordillo, writing on Argentina, notes that in the context he studies ‘The power of the diablos ... was a historically and spatially specific type of power: one produced by capitalist conditions of exploitation’ (Gordillo 2004, 34). Hence, although similarly related to capitalism, the terror experienced by Gordillo’s informants differ from that describe by Taussig as it is ‘not associated with systemic torture and mass murder. Rather, it is a fear of death embedded in appalling working conditions, high mortality rates linked to rampant disease, and political repression’ (Taussig 2002, 34).

Accusations of devilry in relation to politics is of course not a one-way street aimed only at capitalism. One needs only to think of the events surrounding Joseph McCarthy’s hunt for communists in the mid-20th century (Lancaster 2011, 23; Myers 2018, 65) or the devil accusations that went back and forth in the 2016 US presidential campaign. Right-wing blogs and news sites flourished with images and accusations of former US senator and Democratic presidential candidate in 2016 Hillary Clinton as either related to or directly being the devil, but, as shown by Katharina Gallant (Chapter 6), those same accusations have been levelled against the Republican candidate Donald Trump, who went on to win the election. And such accusations may be highly strategic and carry very real outcomes. As an illustration of this, Peter Hervik recounts the case of when, in 1990 during the Gulf War, a story broke out about Iraqi soldiers invading a Kuwait hospital taking newborn babies from incubators and leaving them to die on the floor. Subsequently, a young Arab girl testified to the

US Congress. This eventually took part in American support for an invasion of Iraq, yet:

the incubator story was part of a campaign launched by a US-based public relations firm, Hill+Knowlton Strategies, which had been paid \$10.8 million for improving Kuwait's nation branding, demonizing Hussein, and allegedly helping swing popular support for the US invasion. (Hervik 2018, 88)

Elizabeth Dunn recounts how the diabolic became a recurring motif in the refugee camps in Georgia, where she conducted fieldwork. The figure of the devil, she argues, became a 'framing device or a model that takes fragmentary information about half-sensed political forces and makes sense of them' (Dunn 2018, 142). 'The figure of the devil expresses terror, labels it as evil, and points the finger at *somebody* acting behind the scenes to cause it' (ibid., 146, emphasis in original). It is noteworthy that the IDPs did not suspect people around them of being actual demons or being literally demonically possessed. Rather than being a sign of sin, devilry was a pervasive suspicion (ibid., 146). This, for instance, made itself clear through competitions for bids or tenders afforded by Western humanitarian donor agencies. While the latter promoted these as being just and fair means of awarding something such as microcredit loans, the competitions were surrounded by suspicion and accusations of devilry as the winners of such grants were accused of unfairly having used private connections (ibid., 149). As such, the devil 'became a symbol of not only one's neighbors' strategies but also of the morally repugnant behavior that each of the IDPs was forced to engage in to survive' (ibid., 151).

What is clear in all these studies is that not only is the devil a potent symbol; it is also an extremely malleable figure in terms of what or who it connects to. Invoking the devil brings together perceptions of good and evil, right and wrong, self and other, and it reveals historically embedded or newly emerging antagonisms and stereotypes. Indeed, as Roger Lancaster has noted, the logics of moral panics relates to items 'from the anthropological curio cabinet' such as taboo and scapegoating, but the manner in which it operates relates to both 'archaic and postmodern forms' (Lancaster 2011, 23).

Writing on the recent surge in studies of morality within anthropology, Thomas Csordas has recently argued that what may not yet have been taken fully into account in such studies is the problem of evil, 'since if it were not for evil morality would be moot' (Csordas 2013, 525). And, while many contemporary scholars working on morality recognize the work of Emile Durkheim as a central vantage point for studying morality, Csordas argues that the existing anthropological literature on witchcraft may be just as fruitful a vantage point for taking evil into account. Classical studies such as Evans-Pritchard's study on Azande witchcraft (1937), Bruce Kapferer's study of Sinhalese demons (1983), Clyde Kluckhohn's on Navajo witches (1944), and Michael Taussig's

aforementioned study on Columbian devils (1980) allow us, Csordas continues, to see how evil, and accusations of evil, operate in different societies as a human phenomenon.

What these previous studies have shown is, first, that evil may both operate as an internal and an external dimension, and second that looking into opposition between good and evil provides a framework for cross-cultural analysis that is not necessarily based on studies of religious evil (Csordas 2013, 536). Part of this position may be read as similar to Stanley Cohen's use of the notion of the folk devil. Although he, as already noted, did not himself look into previous studies of devilry, his turning of folk devilry into an analytical tool allows him to look into how evil and accusation operates in more secular contexts. Where Csordas, via studies of witchcraft, moves us further than Cohen is by adding the focus on the internal/external along with the possibility of a comparative angle on accusations of evil that go beyond the sphere of religion. Similar moves have been made by Michael Herzfeld in his study of buck-passing in Greek bureaucracy (1992) and by Steven Caton in his writing about the events surrounding the Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq (2010), and it is also seen in this volume where some forms of fear and accusation are rooted in religion (Bratrud, Chapter 2) or superstition (Khalvashi and Manning, Chapter 3), whereas others have roots in political processes.

Grey, White, Black

In a previous volume we grappled with the concept of 'grey zones' in anthropology, inspired by the writings of Primo Levi (Harboe Knudsen and Frederiksen 2015). Levi (1988) reflected on the murky zones that had emerged in concentration camps during the Second World War, as prisoners had supported SS officers in brutal ways to secure their own survival, obscuring concepts of 'we' and 'them'. In his writings, ambiguity and uncertainty became the key concepts in everyday life, as borders between right and wrong were merged, where 'we' became 'they' and good and evil only existed as obscure categories. At that time, we were preoccupied with the development in Eastern Europe following the Soviet breakdown, and how the various developments of the manifold societies soon appeared to be a far cry from the promised 'transition' to a brighter future with capitalism and democracy. Rather than being defined by clear concepts such as friend/enemy, socialism/capitalism, good/evil and then/now, things melted together and became a grey mixture in an everyday life, where many simply struggled to get by. The everyday was, as we emphasized, marked by ambiguities and often contradicting ambiguities.

There is an uncanny angle to the current project of analysing folk devils, compared with the last project of depicting grey zones. While we previously emphasized the murky, grey areas where good/bad and right/wrong categories had long ceased to exist, we have now moved along to an analysis of situations

where people are craving such simple categories, and where labels and ‘us’ vs ‘them’ and ‘good’ vs ‘bad’ are plentiful and in high demand. Without making too strict a comparison, as the previous volume was based on a different geographical area, it is still interesting to observe that many situations of confusion and obscurity and lack of clarity might transform into the very need of introducing black and white into the picture, of reinstalling categories of who is with us and who is against us. In other words, an ambivalent world of grey zones, which exist far beyond the borders of Eastern Europe, could itself be stipulating the need to reintroduce clean categories, clear operational lines between people contributing to maintaining society and people threatening to ruin it from within. The need to point out a *devil* who threatens to ruin the ‘normal order’ in society in turn helps to define that very same society. When it is pointed out what society is *not*, it correspondingly tells us what society should be. When the normal order is perceived as under threat, it defines and clarifies that very normality, by showing what is deviant and different. The idea of ‘us’ does not have the same strength if there is no ‘them’. By maintaining and developing categories of ‘the other’ as a symbol of evil, ideas of the devil also serve the very purpose to create and maintain that very society, the boundaries of society and the perception of order.

In 1983, Benedict Anderson published his highly influential book *Imagined Communities*, where he theorizes the development and spread of the nation state. Anderson argues that the nation state is a social construct upheld by a belief in the existence of a nationwide community (1991 [1983]). In his work, Anderson outlines a number of preconditions that made it possible for the modern nation state to emerge: the dusk of religious faith as a dominating doctrine, the emergence of a competing secular view, the standardization of national languages and the emergence of print capitalism. As mass printing of books and newspapers became possible, the same information was made available to large numbers of people. Indeed, the moment when people became capable of reading the same stories in the same newspapers and refer to the same events and stories in the same standardized language, a language that developed on the basis of the decline of dialects, people were also able to imagine a communion with members of the same nation. And this even though they never had met most of them, let alone heard of them. Feelings and understandings of communion and belonging emerged with, and partly because of, print capitalism.

Today, this is even more the case as news travels with unprecedented speed via online newspapers, online forums and social media. We are today capable of communicating directly with members of the same nation through different threads, yet still without knowing them or meeting them. While these developments were key in defining the nation and fostering people to believe in it, they also efficiently defined the non-belonging and the very boundaries of this community. Moral panics are carried by the speed of media and further stipulate a feeling of belonging among the large majority, by pointing out a deviant and even dangerous minority. In our examples, the threatening devils come

in shape of LGBT persons, working migrants, refugees, criminals, Roma and adulteresses, to mention but a few. Matters of belonging are thus both the devil from outside and the devil within. When the media targets a particular group as being deviant and inflates concern or even fear in the population, it becomes a political project to catch the ball and make changes. And devils are excellent political projects that give rich opportunity to emphasize a particular political line that leads back to the normalization of society. By defining the threat to society, society in return is defined by this very threat. This may be seen as society having a conversation with itself, but also of society, or groups within society, being brought into existence through the process of othering. While this may result in new forms, it may also result in severe divisions. Hence, society is not necessarily (re)constituting itself but also broken apart.

The volume comes at a time where we see multiple examples of politicians and common people alike finding new devils in society, or reinforcing their energy in pointing to old and long-existing devils inside their societies. As one example, Brexit cast shockwaves in modern Europe with the British demand to leave the union. The UK vote on the European Union membership referendum was followed by an increase in conflicts within British society, where verbal and physical attacks on minorities were on the rise, just as after the Brexit vote it became more legitimate to voice racist opinions. Europe's refugee crisis serves as another example: Germany's initial strategy to open up for more refugees led to chancellor Angela Merkel's decrease in popularity. There has been an overall tendency of changing rhetoric towards refugees, as they are increasingly highlighted as dangerous others and a threat to society, while their reasons for fleeing in the first place are downplayed. These arguments are supported by Amadu Khan (Chapter 10), who argues that media and politicians alike tend to create a negative image of asylum seekers. Thereby we see how refugees are referred to as migrants, which in itself is a way of questioning the legality of them escaping war and poverty.

Another issue has been the Covid pandemic, which since the outbreak in early 2020 has generated fear and, along with fear, a search for scapegoats. An example from Denmark was when the prime minister, Mette Frederiksen, pointed out that the infection rate was higher among Somali communities in Denmark than among ethnic Danes (Karkov 2020). This did not differ much from the tendencies during the Spanish Flu pandemic in 1918–1920, when poorer working families were blamed for spreading the virus and causing death. In this way, certain groups are pointed out as infectious and dirty and thus a danger for the rest. When the situation with the Somalis is examined closer, it turned out that the reason for the Somalis' comparatively higher infection rate was the fact that the majority worked jobs where they were more prone to getting infected, e.g. as bus drivers and caretakers. Thus, the explanation behind the numbers was not, as some assumed, that they were badly integrated but the nature of the jobs they held.

While finalizing this introduction, the hashtag 'Hang Mike Pence' spread rapidly on the social media platform Twitter during the insurrection in Washington on 6 January 2021, as the then US vice president had acknowledged

the election of President Joe Biden. This shows both how the current media landscape allows accusations to spread ever swifter and also how the direction of accusation can quickly change – from Mike Pence being in Trump’s inner circle to his being perceived by Trump supporters as a threat. And, when speaking of the actuality of the current volume, it becomes incumbent to mention the presidency of Trump, as his way to power – and way during his power – was characterized by naming devils and listing threats to the US. In this way, we have seen how words like ‘invasion’, ‘killer’, ‘predator’ and ‘animal’ have been used many times when discussing migration and migrants. As analysts have argued, the words of a president do matter: it legitimizes a negative rhetoric towards migrants – or, even worse, it justifies violence against them.¹ While Trump, on the one hand, characterized his presidency by naming devils and threats, he has, on the other hand, himself become a personification of a devil for the left wing, as argued by Gallant (Chapter 6).

Another interesting angle to the persistence of devilry in the Trump presidency is that Trump himself has named investigations into ‘Russia-gate’ and the impeachment trial as witch-hunts.² Thus, there was no lack of naming devils or escalating panics during Trump’s presidency, where he both pointed to existing ‘devils’ in society and became the personification of the devil for some, while using the rhetoric of witch-hunts when opponents investigated possible abuses of power. Thus, what and when something is developing signs of a moral panic is closely associated with one’s political beliefs and one’s sense of right and wrong. This was also evident when the social movement against racially motivated violence Black Lives Matter arranged protests in cities across the US following the murder of George Floyd in May 2020. Soon after, right-wing media were quick to label these not as protests but as riots, and in doing so attempted to reverse accusation. That is, rather than seeing African American protesters as victims of police brutality, they themselves came to be portrayed as perpetrators.

If anything, we are currently witnessing a tendency where clear-cut boundaries are in high demand. As illustrated in this volume, the East/West debates in Europe today are as vivid as ever (see Svatoňová and Harboe Knudsen, Chapters 7 and 11), while the debate on refugees is at its height (see Khan, Chapter 10), just as the debate on Roma minorities is not seeming to lose relevance (Ivasiuc and Slačálek, Chapters 8 and 9). Thus, if we return to the spectrum of colours, it appears that fear, insecurity and blurred categories in any society may lead people to reclaim a sense of right and wrong, even if ‘right’ comes to exist in the overly large shadow of ‘wrong’, as the chapters in this volume demonstrate.

Overview of the Volume

The volume is divided into three sections, the first of which is entitled ‘Devils Within’. Here the folk devil emerges as an internal figure. Focusing on questions

of gentrification, goblins in eerie cities, and accusations of sorcery and sugar as devilish, the chapters focus on communal aspects where the folk devil does not appear as an outsider but as a problematic insider.

Elias le Grand draws on a case study of contested societal reactions to the middle-class hipster figure and gentrification in contemporary London. He shows how public reactions involve forms of class politics and classificatory struggles over the moral meaning gentrification processes and the role of the hipster figure in the latter, and, through this, discusses how the folk devil can be conceptualized as a social type by drawing on Bourdieu's research on classification.

The chapter by Tom Bratrud ethnographically explores a Christian revival movement in Vanuatu led by children. Examining events surrounding the hanging of two adults accused of sorcery, Bratrud challenges the assumption that moral panics are only created with the assistance of mass media, showing instead that they also arise in contexts where gossip, dreams and visions play a similar role in both defining social problems and moral panic.

In their contribution, Tamta Khalvashi and Paul Manning focus on traditional folk devils in the form of goblins and spectres in cities of the Republic of Georgia. These are traditional figures of local folklore that have not disappeared with modernity but rather re-emerged through new anxieties and moral conditions. Moreover, while devilry is often perceived as humans taking on non-human (or devilish) characteristics, Khalvashi and Manning present a case where the opposite is actually at stake, namely where non-human entities such as goblins take on human characteristics. In describing this, Khalvashi and Manning add a fascination aspect to how folk devilry and panic or anxiety may intertwine.

Susanne Højlund's chapter focuses on how a food item, namely sugar, suddenly emerged as devilish in Danish children's institutions. How, she asks, has it become possible within a relative short number of years to change the perceptions of sugar and agree on it as a dangerous foodstuff to an extent that there are written rules for its use for nearly all children in Denmark? As with the previous chapters, the devil here is something, or someone, that has always been there but which suddenly (re)emerges as particularly evil.

While these four contributions align with Cohen's study in terms of focusing on the emergence of folk devilry from within, they also all move beyond Cohen by including new theoretical perspectives, from Bourdieusian notions of categorization (Gallant), Melanesian perspectives on personhood and relationality (Bratrud), hauntology (Khalvashi and Manning), and anthropological studies of the interrelation between food and morality (Højlund). Moreover, the chapters in this section broaden our understanding of what may actually constitute a folk devil in the first place.

The second section of the volume, 'Devilry from Above', explores the institutionalization of folk devils. Whether focusing on media campaigns, policymaking, or political discussions of borders, the chapters in this section highlight the increasing role of folk devils in political practices and media representations. Media representations were also central to Stanley Cohen's argument, but the

principle of sensational news that may serve as a catalyst for panic is undoubtedly more widespread today than 50 years ago. ‘Today alarmist stories and sensational journalism play out in real time’ writes Lancaster (2011, 26), and both media conglomerates and political factions ‘provoke panic to sell newspapers, to forge “community”, to curb dissent, or to foster various kinds of social discipline’. The combination of sensationalism, politics and fake news has proven fertile ground for moral panics.

Drawing mainly on examples from France and the UK, Matt Clement examines the actors and institutions that carry out particular forms of victimization through prejudice, and analyses the mechanism employed by state actors to create or even boost climates of fear. Through this, he shows how it is often those labelling others as folk devils that in the end constitute the greatest threats to society.

The presidency of Donald Trump is another core example of the role of sensationalism in politics. As mentioned earlier, he has accused political opponents of both devilry and moral degradation, but such accusations have gone both ways. In her examination of German media coverage of Trump, Katharina Gallant shows in her chapter how Trump has been portrayed as politically and morally inadequate. Bringing together Cohen’s traditional framework with Paul Joosse’s work on charismatic leadership, Gallant shows how Trump has emerged as a devil figure for the left wing in Europe, but one that they have few options for dealing with.

In the following chapter, Eva Svatoňová introduces us to how internet forums such as Facebook can be used in creating and spreading misleading stories and stimulating fear and panic. With the example of the Czech society, she analyses various web forums that are based on anti-LGBT rights and anti-feminist ideologies, promoting these as threats to nuclear families and traditional gender norms. Svatoňová shows the paradoxical portrayal of LGBT activists as, on the one hand, freaks living on the fringe of society, not much more than a laughing stock, and, on the other hand, as a threat with the potential power to destroy traditional values in Czech society.

In the chapter by Ana Ivasiuc, we follow the anti-Roma laws in Italy, where the government has moved away from inclusion policies for the Roma to downright ethnic repression, policing and surveillance. Despite the fact that the majority of Roma are no longer nomadic, the public still associate them with nomadism and use their non-nomadic lifestyle as a weapon against them, by monitoring the camps closely and creating special laws that secure the continuous repression of the Roma. Thus, while their status as outsiders and nomads previously made them devilish figures and imagined as travelling and stealing Gypsies, it is now their lack of nomadism that is seen as a threat, as the Roma have now settled in society.

What all chapters in this section show is that determining whether or not particular forms of sensationalism are based on falsity or truth matters little in processes of moral outcries. As with the classical folk tales and ghost

stories, they ignite fear regardless, and, whether ignited by political discourses, the media or internet phenomena, they may end up being perceived as actual realities despite their origins in rumours or false accusations.

Chapters in the third section of the volume, 'From the Devils' Point of View', engage with a perspective that is oddly absent from Cohen's work, namely the perspective of the perceived folk devils themselves. We never really hear in Cohen's book from the mods and rockers themselves, but, as the chapters in this section make clear, adding this angle to the study of folk devils and moral panics provides us with a better understanding of the consequences of accusations and demonization.

Based on a study of anti-Roma mobilizations in the Czech Republic, Ondřej Slačálek examines how the image of the Roma as a folk devil exhibits not only stigmatizing characteristics but also complicated relationships in terms of tension and expectations between the 'decent and productive majority' and the 'inadaptable minority'. Through this, Slačálek shows how 'given that decency means complying with norms defined by the behaviour of the majority, the minority is at the very least an object of suspicion from the start'.

Amadu Khan critically reviews policies and news reporting in the UK that create, circulate and sustain a labelling of asylum seekers as folk devils. Drawing on interviews with asylum seekers on their preferred forms of representation, Khan argues that, while the news media is mainly blamed for moral panics and representations of asylum seekers as folk devils, policymaking is equally complicit in the current demonization of asylum seekers in the UK.

The chapter by Ida Harboe Knudsen analyses an increased number of arrests made on young Lithuanian burglars in Denmark. Following the newspaper hype and political reactions to the burglaries, a distorted picture of the 'devils' is produced, letting the public believe that the Lithuanian lawbreakers are particularly inhumane, ruthless and violent. Despite the police reporting that they never have had any violent incidents with Lithuanians, the public image prevails. This negative image ends up affecting their treatment and their rights in Danish detention centres, as prison guards act in accordance with the image, rather than in accordance with their own experience. This makes Lithuanians a particularly vulnerable group of inmates in Denmark.

Victor de Munck presents an empirical case of a young Sri Lankan woman who is ostracized from her local community for being an adulteress, despite no one in the community having any real proof of this being the case. De Munck engages with the preceding chapters of this volume in order to find comparative connections to both understand this case and to situate it in the contexts of the symbolic roles folk devils may play in a society.

Following this is Paul Joosse's Afterword, which returns the focus specifically to Cohen and considers how questions of contextualization and historicity can be productively added to Cohen's original framework, as shown by the chapters of this volume.

Conclusion

Alan MacFarlane has argued that, in the European context, the notion of ‘evil’ disappeared as the witch-hunts stopped and the rationality of science took over (MacFarlane 1985). This Weberian view has been challenged in recent anthropological studies (e.g. Bubandt and van Beek 2014; Musharbash and Presterudstuen 2014; Steffen, Johncke and Raahauge 2015). And, as this volume illustrates, perceptions evil has not merely come to reside in fantasy or science fiction but remains an aspect of social and political life. On the final pages of his book, Stanley Cohen himself states that:

it is not enough to say that witches should not have been burnt or that in some other society or in another century they might not have been called witches; one has to explain why and how certain people get to the stake now. (Cohen 2002 [1972], 233)

Cohen was pessimistic about the future of moral panic, stating that ‘more moral panics will be generated and others, as yet nameless, folk devils will be created’ (ibid.). If anything, this volume proves his prediction correct.

In his introduction to the third edition of the book, Cohen comments on the inherent dualities of folk devils:

They are *new* (lying dormant perhaps, but hard to recognize; deceptively ordinary and routine, but invisibly creeping up the moral horizon) – but also *old* (camouflaged versions of traditional and well-known evils). They are damaging *in themselves* – but also merely *warning signs* of the real, much deeper and more prevalent condition. They are transparent (anyone can see what’s happening) – but also opaque: accredited experts must explain the perils hidden behind the superficially harmless (decode a rock song’s lyrics to see how they led to a school massacre). (Cohen 2002 [1972], viii, emphases in original).

Cohen suggest a series of theoretical extensions that were not available when he first started writing about folk devils, but which have proven fruitful additions to examine the theme. These include social constructionism, media studies and risk theory (Cohen 2002 [1972], xxvi). Added in this volume is an anthropological perspective, and, as Peter Myers notes, the ethnographic method may forcefully correct distortions seen in the popular or media depiction of particular groups and through this aid ‘in the reduction of stigma for those mistakenly attributes of “folk devils”’ (Myers 2018, 75). Our hope is that this volume will contribute to ongoing discussions of moral panics within anthropology, sociology, criminology and media studies, but just as much that it will reach some of those group that play a vital role in unravelling and containing these

situations, such as journalists and policymakers. What the chapters that follow collectively point to is that the figure of the folk devil, unfortunately, is alive and well and that the moral panics surrounding them continue to have negative consequences for those who find themselves in their midst.

Notes

- ¹ See ‘Trump Used Words Like “Invasion” and “Killer” to Discuss Immigrants at Rallies 500 Times’ (*USA Today*, 8 August 2019, <https://eu.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/elections/2019/08/08/trump-immigrants-rhetoric-criticized-el-paso-dayton-shootings/1936742001>, accessed 5 December 2019).
- ² See ‘“It’s a Witch-Hunt”: Donald Trump Lashes Out as Impeachment Calls Grow [Video]’ (*The Guardian*, 25 September 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/video/2019/sep/25/its-a-witch-hunt-donald-trump-lashes-out-as-impeachment-calls-grow-video>, accessed 5 December 2019) and ‘Trump Russia Affair: Key Questions Answered’ (BBC, 24 July 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-42493918>, accessed 5 December 2019).

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