

Organ Theft Narratives*

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Organ-theft narratives express a unified set of beliefs in organized criminal groups of organ traffickers who use kidnapping and murder, often of children and infants, to procure human organs for a vast network of medical professionals engaged in covert transplants that yield huge sums of money for both the criminal traffickers and the medical professionals. The narratives occur in three categories, baby parts, sacaojos, and stolen kidney.

1. *Baby Parts*. Many of these narratives relate alleged cases of large-scale criminal diversion of infants from the network of international adoption agencies. These texts, which first appeared in Latin America around 1985, have since spread to other parts of the globe and have spawned many rumors that have led to incriminating accusations and passionate denials. An official controversy emerged when a motion "condemning the traffic in organs of Third World babies" was initiated by French Representative Danielle de March (affiliated with French Communist Party) and was adopted by the European Parliament by majority vote on 15 September 1988. This document reiterated accusations against the United States and Israel that had appeared in 1987 in popular media throughout Latin America when clandestine orphanages housing children to be adopted internationally (and often obtained by devious means, which included out-right kidnapping) were dismantled in Honduras and Guatemala.

Israel did not react to the European Parliament's action, but on 8 October 1988, the American Under Secretary of State Richard Schiffer wrote an official letter to Karel de Gucht, Chair of the European Parliament's Human Rights' Committee, protesting the Parliament's action (Cam-

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pion-Vincent 1990). These official protests to the accusations have continued ever since to characterize American diplomacy. The United States Information Agency (USIA), which is linked to the State Department, continues to campaign vigorously against these accusations while eliciting denials from American authorities. From 1987 to 1996, Todd Leventhal, a USIA officer, identified himself openly with the fight against "The Baby Parts Myth" (Leventhal 1992) which he later designated as "The Child Organ Trafficking Rumor" (Leventhal 1994).

Narrative accounts of this alleged trafficking appeared in popular media of various countries from 1987. Then in 1992 a new variation occurred, when after the collapse of the Iron Curtain, the stories were set in eastern Europe. The emergence of a surge of international adoptions of eastern European orphans generated popular suspicion of the criminal diversion of children for their body parts; the rumors soon led to official action by several involved nations. Bulgaria, for example, required prospective foreign adoptive parents to pledge (by signing a form) that "I will not permit my child to be an organ donor nor allow the child to give organs or be a part of any medical experiment" (Leventhal 1994:6). Such actions were, above all, the result of beliefs in and tales about human body parts that arose from popular fears that were first elaborated in the media and then adopted by government authorities and other elite segments of society.

2. *Sacaojos*. A parallel belief tradition about organ theft from children became prevalent in Latin America in these same years. In documenting the criminal activities of alleged *Sacaojos* 'eye thieves,' these beliefs provided the raw materials for authentic folk tales. A plethora of such stories soon were in circulation telling of the kidnapping and mutilation of children. They quickly assumed a mawkish-tragic tone in telling of the reappearance of a lost child, now mutilated, blind, or missing one kidney. In his pocket is an important or ridiculous sum of money and a scribbled note, e.g., "Thank you for your eyes." They are powerful horror stories in which the kidnappers are described as foreigners, dressed in black leather and armed with sub-machine guns, who suddenly pop out of big shiny black (red, blue, or yellow) cars or ambulances to kidnap children whom they later release with missing body parts. The stories were disseminated in press accounts of a single paragraph and often included the report that official inquiries were in progress, as was, for example, the case in Mexico in 1990 and 1992.

Some *Sacaojos* episodes, such as the Lima scare of November 1983

which emptied schools for a few day in poor districts, have been studied by social scientists (Ansion 1989; Ansion and Sifuentes 1989; Degregori 1989; Rimachi 1989; Sifuentes 1989; Wachtel 1992). The pervasive fears in northeastern Brazil in the early 1980s has also been investigated by an anthropologist (Scheper-Hughes 1992).

The paranoid fears generated by these accounts have sometimes led to violent and tragic episodes. Riots and lynchings occurred in Guatemala in March 1994 after stories of *Baby Parts* and *Sacaojos* circulated. In separate episodes, two American women-tourists were attacked by mobs, and one who was lynched survived, but remains in a coma more than two years after the event. Not even visiting scientists and academics are above suspicion as was shown when a Swiss vulcanologist was lucky to escape with his life after he had been accused of kidnapping very young children (Mays and Ellis 1994; Shonder 1994; Sieveking 1994). A popular notion that the kidnappers attracted their young victims by dressing as clowns—who had earlier played a role in British and American child-abduction scares—has been popular in Central and South America since the mid-1990s. One such legend surfaced in Guatemala in April 1994, to which must be added a case in Carapicuíba, a poor suburb of Sao Paulo, Brazil in April 1995 and a case in Honduras in November, 1995. Such popular cultural media as films, television, and tabloids have contributed to the emergence of the demonic clown in popular beliefs and narratives. In the case of Honduras there was apparently an actual kidnapping of ten small children by a man dressed as a clown, an event that spawned a host of these legends. As a protest against the role of sinister clowns in kidnappings, sixty actual clowns publicly burned their clown-costumes in Tegucigalpa, Guatemala (Sieveking 1994), and a similar event was reported having occurred in Brazil (*Newsweek* 26 June 1995) and in Honduras (*The Times* 3 November 1995; *The Independent on Sunday*, 5 November 1995).

3. *Stolen Kidney*. Another popular organ-theft narrative is that of the "Kidney Heist" (Brunvand 1993). The stories, that first appeared in Europe in 1990, told of the misfortune having occurred to a careless tourist or business traveller to a foreign land where he falls under the control of a kidnapper or a seductive woman only to awaken the next day to discover that one kidney has been removed. Often the elegantly sutured scar on the victim's back testifies to the intervention by highly trained physicians. The story first surfaced in the German press in the summer of 1990. The first occurrence, printed in the tabloid *Bild der Frau*, in September 1990 told of the misfortune of a married couple in Istanbul, where the husband fell vic-

tim to the ploy, and included a photograph of the unfortunate pair. The Turks were quick to deny the story and a reporter from the *Milliyet* checked and found no complaints had been filed with the Turkish police nor with the German Consulate in Istanbul (*Milliyet* 9 October 1990). The rapid spread of the story in Germany caused concern and alarm, and official warnings were issued to tourists. Brednich (1991), for example, mentioned that a German blood donors' association advised tourists going abroad not to take along their blood group card, so as to make the job of the kidney thieves more difficult.

Variants of this "Kidney Heist" narrative appeared at this same time in Australia where it was reported that Australian tourists fell victim to the "kidneynappers" in Los Angeles, California, a favorite destination for Australian tourists (Moravec 1993).

It was not long before variants of the "Kidney Heist" were reported from places around the world. In a Swedish tale, a young tourist couple innocently signed up on a Brazilian beach for what they believed to be a "Save the Rain Forest" appeal. It was presented to them by an honest-looking young boy, but as it turned out, was actually a donor's consent form, as the pair discovered when they, after having been kidnapped, woke up on operating tables. Bengt af Klintberg heard the story from a girl studying engineering after a lecture he gave in Lerum, Sweden on 21 October 1992. The girl had "heard it from a friend" (Klintberg, personal communication 1992).

Another variant was told by physicians in England as a "cautionary tale," and appeared in the *Observer* 4 December 1994. When a young female tourist was stricken in India with an acute appendicitis, she had no choice but to give her consent to undergo emergency surgery. All appeared to go well, but when she was back in England, she once again suffered from the symptoms of an appendicitis. The physicians who examined her discovered that it was not the appendix that had been removed, but her kidney.

Brunvand (1993) had noted the "Kidney Heist" story as early as 1991, but the site of the theft was not an exotic foreign land but rather an American big city, where the victim had gone on business travel and was misled by the typical seductive blonde. Later versions from northern Europe also set the story, not in far-away places such as India or Brazil but rather, for example, in Paris.

When the victim of the heist is a man who succumbs to the wiles of an attractive woman, the story assumes the characteristics of a "cautionary tale," but when the victims are innocent children the effect is that of cruel and tragic exploitation. These stories that emerged in France in 1995, coin-

cided with the opening of EuroDisney (now called Disneyland Paris), and told how the children were abducted within the amusement park only to appear later, however with neither money nor the cruel note, but with one of their kidneys missing after it had been surgically removed. Often the oral versions implied that the amusement park was involved in the "kidnappings."

After 1992, the stories appeared most frequently as relatively unstructured rumors throughout Europe, where the victims disappeared in sites such as parking lots, shopping malls, supermarkets, schools, and night clubs. It was usually assumed that the principals, who could be children or adults, had fallen victim to groups of organized organ traffickers, and the texts frequently described the sites in vivid detail. When the kidnappings occurred in night-clubs, it was usually told that the victims were operated on in a surgically-equipped truck located nearby; a theme that was often linked to the rather fast reappearance of the victim after the surgery.

These rumors often emerged in conjunction with the authenticated disappearance of real people. After such mysterious disappearances, one can detect a surge of these organ-theft rumors. Such was the case in Belgium in the summer of 1995 when four young girls mysteriously disappeared. They were followed by a second disappearance of two more young girls in 1996. Both cases occasioned emotional involvement of the Belgian populace in the fate of the missing children, a situation that provided grist for the rumor-mill. The enigma of these events was tragically "solved" in August 1996 when all six children, victims of a single criminal, were found; the two latest victims were still alive, but the four girls who had been kidnapped earlier had been murdered. Although the sensationalism of this case contributed to the emergent rumors, the rumor mill was often also set into motion by insignificant incidents or even without any apparent cause. This fact demonstrates that the belief structures are often more important than the factual kidnappings in spawning the surges of stories and rumors.

The rumors that erupt often provide opportunities for the expression of xenophobia. While the popular media usually downplay the xenophobic beliefs in their reports, the oral variants give them full expression. Thus the stories circulated orally told of strange, foreign photographers operating in school playgrounds or of "North-African gangs" who came through neighboring France; whereas neither the photographers nor the ethnic-group gangs were mentioned in the 30-minute RTBF Charleroi TV program covering the scare, *Fumées sans feu* ('Smoke without Fire'), that aired 31 January 1996.

It must be noted that German-speaking countries show a proclivity for telling and believing such stories. Bengt af Klintberg has informed me that almost all the letters he has received concerning Stolen Kidneys came from these countries. One should also recall that the European tradition of beliefs and legends about stolen kidneys began with the German account of the tourist couple in Istanbul in 1990. And in France, the Stolen Kidney stories have circulated as unstructured but localized rumors mainly in regions close to Germany, especially in Metz and in the Moselle Valley in May 1995.

The Italian response to these stories has been influenced very much by the press which has reported frequently and in some detail on reports coming from Latin America. The Italians are also highly receptive to the anxieties concerning the safety of children. The Italians were incensed when missing Austrian children were reported in the Austrian press of having been transported to Italy. The Italian press was quick to deny such reports categorically, and after a time ceased to report the stories (Olla 1991, Toselli July 1991). Italians often focussed their attention on fashion stores where women were believed to be taken captive and operated on in adjacent caves and cellars or in nearby trucks where the kidneys were removed. Such reports were reported about fashion shops in Bari (1989), Palermo (1991), and in Milan in 1994 (Bermani 1991a 1991b; Toselli 1994:139-148).

Italy was also the site of *Sacaojos*-type panics that began in Sicily where the disappearance of a young girl spawned emotion-laden stories and rumors that soon spread to other Italian regions (Rome and Emilia-Romagna 1990, 1991). The stories sometimes targeted Gypsies as the perpetrators and even spawned a punitive raid on a Gypsy-camp near Bologna in 1990 (Stilo and Toselli 1991, Toselli 1994:158-164).

As is often the case with legendry, the first response to such stories is one of belief, passion and outrage that combine to inhibit rational examination of the evidence. Nevertheless, a lingering doubt about the veracity of the report often lingers after the initial adhesion. In such cases, individuals look for confirmation or denial on the part of authority figures whose attitude carries much weight.

The surge of organ-theft stories has not escaped the attention of folklorists or anthropologists. I investigated the first of the "Baby Parts" story (Campion-Vincent 1990). Brunvand (1993), Brednich (1991, 1993) and Toselli (1994) all treat the "Stolen Kidney," but their accounts remain mainly descriptive, while Moravec (1993), Klintberg (1991, 1993) and Burger (1995) are more analytical in their investigations. Among anthro-

pologists, the studies of Ansion (1989) and Wachtel (1992) for the Andean region and of Scheper-Hughes for northeastern Brazil have already been mentioned. Scheper-Hughes has recently (1996) compared the organ-theft rumors of Brazil with those of South Africa.

These stories are reminiscent of the frightening accounts of episodes of "White Slavery" that have been known in the United States for most of the decades of the 20th century. In order to put an end to the trade in "white slaves," that is, captive white women forced into prostitution, the United States government enacted the Mann Act in 1910. In France the story was known as *La rumeur d'Orléans* that surfaced in 1969, and which engendered great emotional reaction among French citizens, especially because the rumors targeted a group of Jewish shop owners which, in turn, led to fears of a revival of anti-Semitism (Morin 1969). Legends and rumors thrive on the degree and intensity of belief. Even though these stories are so bizarre as to strain credulity, they play on fears and concerns that are so intense that they seem plausible. Moreover, they thrive in an environment in which the medical profession has developed life-support systems that can prolong the life of people who are brain dead. The notion of brain death is not accepted by the non-specialized public whose perceptions are contradicted by the brain-dead "cadaver" that still breathes (albeit with life-support equipment).

Suspicions are prevalent among the families of those mostly young victims of accidents, aneurisms, etc. who lie brain-dead in emergency rooms and kept breathing only by the life-support systems. These people are frequently poor members of minorities (Joralemon 1995). Brutally bereaved by the condition of the victims, these people wonder whether the physicians have done all they could to save their loved ones, whose sudden and unexpected disappearances, mostly accidental, haunt them. Because transplant operations are very costly, some feel that social justice is ill served by spending so much on advanced medicine when basic services are not available to large segments of the population (Fox and Swazey 1992). Advanced surgical facilities that practice organ transplants are especially viewed with suspicion in very non-egalitarian countries where a large sector of the population lives in poverty. Intense opposition to organ transplants has arisen in many countries such as Argentina (Cordoba), in the Philippines (especially after the case of the "murderous surgeons" still to be discussed), and in South Africa, where a moratorium on transplant operations was enacted in 1995. In such countries, concern, fear, and suspicion dominate the perception of the modern medical establishment. This perception is based on the intense distrust people harbor

toward such medical practices as fertility aid and transplants. Especially in the case of organ transplants, there is the deeply felt conviction held by non-specialists that the body and the person are one. No wonder that these people fear medical professionals, who seek to depersonalize the transplant experiences of donors and receivers. This malaise is expressed in documentary articles and books, as well as in worst-case fictional stories that circulate both at the popular level and among the literate elite. This fear and distrust is not entirely new. It is easy to find earlier parallels to these contemporary cases of hostility toward the medical profession in the 18th and 19th centuries when the new practice of anatomical necropsies and dissections spawned public revulsion toward such medical developments, and especially toward such unsavory attendant practices as grave-robbing and body-snatching. Then as now, much of the public's perception was influenced by wild rumors and narratives. Indeed, in November of 1768 a frenzied riot erupted in Lyon against the newly established School of Surgery after the rumor spread that kidnapped children were being dissected alive within the institution's walls.

Both technical and cultural factors have hindered the practice of organ procurement from cadavers in many parts of the world. The technical obstacles such as few emergency medical centers for the treatment of road casualties and inadequate transportation networks exist in all poor countries, but these impediments pale in comparison to the cultural taboos that are especially prevalent in the countries of Asia and the Middle East. It is here where a very high value is assigned to the preservation of the bodies of the deceased in their entirety until funereal rites can achieve closure to the individual's existence. Although the effect of these cultural factors is never relayed by Western media, their presence is revealed by the failure of Asian and Middle-East countries to enforce, or often even to enact, laws to facilitate organ procurement from cadavers. Such laws are in pronounced evidence in all Western nations, rich or poor, and are especially prevalent in Latin America. In Anglo-American countries the organ procurements are based on explicit consent, whereas in Latin America on "presumed" consent.

In India all of these factors have converged culminating in a medical crisis. 80,000 kidney failures are diagnosed each year in India, yet only 650 dialysis units exist in the entire country. Thus, the need in India for kidney transplants is undeniable, and since 1990 the estimated number of remunerated kidney transplants is of some two thousand per year. From 1990, when two important articles exposed the "trade" in human organs (Chengappa 1990, Salahudeen et al. 1990), until 1995, when the complaint of an

"involuntary donor" entailed arrests of physicians and intermediaries in Bangalore, the practice of transplanting organs has been increasingly marginalized and even rejected by a growing section of the medical profession. Recently, "The Human Organ Transplant Act," which aims to organize procurement from cadavers and to outlaw "rewarded gifting," has been increasingly adopted by Indian states. However, it is apparent that the organ trade's disappearance will be a long and progressive process. Meanwhile some surgeons have chosen to accept "rewarded gifting," and sometimes to organize it, so as to save the lives of renal patients. They defend their action vigorously while asserting the Act's adoption would spell death for many patients.

In China, by contrast, authorities have revived the ancient practice of removing organs from executed prisoners to use for patients needing transplants, and the practice was legalized in 1984 by government decree (Wu 1995:13-15). The procedure made headlines in the world press in August 1994 when the organization "Human Rights Watch Asia" released a report that asserted that two or three thousand transplants from executed prisoners occurred every year, while denouncing cases of "vivisection" in which livers or kidneys were said to be removed from prisoners before their executions. Then in October of the same year BBC released the documentary "Organ Trafficking in China" co-authored by BBC reporter Sue McDowell and U.S. Citizen, Chinese-born dissident Harry Wu, Head of the Laogai Research Foundation that opposes the system of forced labor practiced in China (Wu and McDowell 1994). The Chinese were furious and vigorously protested the allegations. In a somewhat contradictory mode, the Chinese authorities first asserted that the main source of the transplanted organs were brain-dead victims of automobile accidents, that the consent of the prisoners or their families had been obtained, and that the prisoners' families received financial compensation.

The degree of accuracy and authenticity of the documentary's accusations is difficult to determine. The most sensational of the accusations are reported in a curiously matter-of-fact manner. For example, the documentary includes the testimony of an expatriate physician while he was dining with pleasure in a crowded restaurant. He explained how he had removed two kidneys from a condemned prisoner prior to his execution and added that the organs were destined for high-ranking Chinese officials. This curious context of the filmed interview does not inspire confidence in the authenticity of the documented data. Several layers of curious practices, magical and scientific, are combined and presented together in the denunciations. Thus, shortly after the documentary was aired, a com-

mentary thereon was released by the Laogai Foundation that begins with the description of a horrible incident witnessed by Harry Wu in 1970 while he was a forced laborer. After a prisoner's execution who was "sentenced to death for writing 'down with Chairman Mao' on a pack of cigarettes," the inmate's "brains were immediately scooped out, reportedly for the 80-year-old father of a public security cadre; it was hoped that ingestion of the inmate's brains could restore the father's deteriorating brain function" (Wu 1995:1).

Although it is impossible with our present knowledge to determine the degree of accuracy of the denunciations that were presented in the documentary, one must also bear in mind that in a totalitarian system, the most extreme practices are at least imaginable.

I must confess to a certain personal malaise toward the denunciations. I fear that they do not target the main cases of abuse. Perhaps more important than the organ removals, are the frightening numbers of executions that are carried out every year. It has been estimated that as many as 1500 prisoners are executed in China every year (the exact figure is not published). This number, even for a country as populous as China, is huge. One should bear in mind that, in the United States, since the death penalty was re-established in 1976, there have been 330 penal executions. Even in the Soviet Union, another totalitarian state, human rights organizations estimate that there were, from 1960 until 1990, an average of 700 executions per year. In my opinion, human rights organization should target the huge number of executions in China every year as the most significant of the totalitarian abuses.

The decision to permit a condemned prisoner to donate his organs for use and thereby redeem himself had been implemented in another Chinese state (Taiwan) in the 1980s. However, these donations, which often entailed the dedication of a memorial plaque to the executed man's memory, have been discontinued after protests from the Western medical community.

In Latin America, where the criminal abuse of imprisoned criminals has also been documented, the authorities have added the homeless, bag-people, beggars and other street people to the list of victims, a practice that has reached grotesque and bizarre proportions since the early 1990s. The first case occurred in the Caribbean Colombian city of Barranquilla which has over 1 million inhabitants. The events began in February 1992 during the celebration of carnival. It was then that a garbage recycler named Oscar Rafael Hernandez appeared at a local police station with a harrowing story to tell. He claimed to have been lured on the street to the city's Free Med-

ical University by a group of the school's guards who told him they had some cartons to sell. Once in the clinic he was severely beaten by his captors. Thinking him dead, the guards deposited him at the morgue. After he regained consciousness and escaped, he reported the incident to the police who then staged a raid at the university's morgue where they found a dying man and eleven recently murdered cadavers of homeless and destitute people. Four days later there were fifteen arrests of university guards and administrators. At their trial, the guards' chief admitted to fifty murders, but declared to have acted upon orders of the University's Rector who explained that bodies were needed for the students' practical exercises in anatomy. Although further investigation revealed that preserved anatomical parts and skeletons had been sold to other medical schools, the case was not retained by the judges because there was nothing illegal in this practice.

The Barranquilla case is rather straightforward: the nature of the victims' wounds—bullet shots and bludgeoning of the head—precluded all possibility of use of their organs for transplants. Nevertheless, the case is important for our topic for two reasons: First it highlighted inhumane social conditions as well as the systematic murders of marginal men, women, and children. These victims, who in a vivid self-deprecating manner, called themselves *desechables* 'throw-aways,' staged collective protests in their city which spawned similar demonstrations in Carthagene and Bogota. The second reason is because the case resurrects the early crimes linked to body snatching, and especially the murders committed in 1828 in Edinburgh by the infamous Burke and Hare who killed sixteen homeless people and sold their bodies to the anatomist Knox.

It was also in March 1992 that the world press discovered the horrors of the *Colonia*, a mental asylum in Montes de Oca, Argentina where 1,200 patients, most of them severely retarded, had suffered such extreme mistreatment that many of them died. The official investigation of the case was not initiated until 1993, even though the abuses had begun as early as 1976. The passage of time and the deaths of many victims made it difficult for the authorities to adduce enough data to prosecute the case. The fact that all this occurred during the Argentinean military dictatorship that produced so many "disappearances" (murders), also helped prevent the authorities from pursuing justice in the case.

However, even before the discovery of the maltreatment of patients, law enforcement agencies had targeted the *Colonia* for investigation of violations of the law. At the end of 1991, Dr. Florencio Sanchez, the *Colonia's* Director for fifteen years, was arrested on suspicion of embezzlement.

When the popular press discovered the case, it put forth some of the wildest accusations. It was asserted, for example, that Dr. Sanchez had trafficked in blood (he had operated a blood bank in his private clinic) and in babies. (The newspapers reported that the mental patients had been encouraged to lead promiscuous lives, and the resulting babies, snatched from their mothers soon after birth were sold abroad for adoption.) Even though the press had sensationalized their reports, there were indeed many abuses committed by *Colonia's* personnel.

The major accusation was for trafficking in body parts, which were allegedly obtained through the murder of the patients, who the asylum maintained were runaways. The asylum reported that there were 1,321 runaways from 1976 to 1991, a median of 88 disappearances per year, however, other sources maintained there were 1,100 runaways from 1986 to 1991 which yielded the staggering figure of 275 per year, almost 25% of the inmates. This accusation was supported by the fact that the body of one "runaway" (Marcello Ortiz whose family had filed a complaint as he was paralyzed which made his escape most unlikely) was found with its eyes removed in the vicinity of the asylum. Other families had filed complaints against the asylum but no legal action was taken. Then in 1985 a complaint against the hospital was filed by the family of a staff member, Dr. Cecilia Giubileo who had disappeared mysteriously. The family maintained that she had been done away with after her inquisitiveness had convinced the other staff members that she intended to blow the whistle on the trafficking activities of the *Colonia*. The family's complaint was dismissed thus clearing Dr. Sanchez of any wrongdoing. Of the many complaints filed by families of patients, the only ones that remained on the books after 1993 concerned over a hundred cases of post mortem eye removal, done without the relatives' consent, from 1978-1985. The eyes had been sent to Hospital Lagleize, where specialists in ophthalmology used them for cornea transplants. A legal debate arose between the doctors, who insisted that the hospital had the right to make such decisions for the common good, and the prosecutors who argued that the post-mortem removals without consent were illegal. The issue was apparently never resolved.

Dr. Sanchez died in jail in 1992 after having published a book with the intent of clearing himself. If he did use his position to engage in trafficking in body parts, he was not very successful, for he never became a wealthy man. That there were very serious abuses of patients at the *Colonia* is certain, but whether they were the act of Dr. Sanchez and his assistants or the sadistic acts of orderlies, guards and other underlings will never be known for certain.

Other major problems in the case of the unfortunate has arisen as a result of a surge in international adoptions since the late 1960s. Since 1990 in France out of 4500 annual adoptions each year, 3000 come from abroad. In such prosperous lands as Western Europe, Israel, Canada, and the United States the serious shortage of children to adopt has led to an escalation in the demand for children, while at the same time, poor countries with high birth rates (and where contraception and abortion are often illegal) there is a plethora of unwanted children, especially among the poor. It is no surprise that there has been a pronounced move to match would be parents in wealthy nations with the unwanted children in the poor lands. While this matching activity is sometimes conducted legally by charitable organizations, illegal trafficking in children thrives. The situation in drug trafficking in which the poor producing lands supply the wealthier consuming nations with the wanted wares is certainly analogous to the trafficking in children (Trillat and Nabinger 1991).

While the members of rich nations often perceive international adoption as a good deed, redressing injustice and putting an end to the distress of both abandoned children and to the void of childless couples, the matter is viewed differently in the producing nations. Although the members of wealthy nations may well deplore child trafficking, it is often tolerated as part of the process of international adoption. The judgment is often different in countries of origin where it is seen as a plunder of human resources and as a remnant of yesterday's colonial exploitation. Against this background, the readiness of the nations that supply children for adoption to believe the accounts of organ-theft, trafficking in body parts, and murder is certainly not surprising.

The deviant intermediaries of international adoption that engage in child trafficking draw an illicit and abusive profit from the children which they put in contact with adoptive parents. Because the children are often put in contact with loving families and real homes, the story ends well for them. But such is not the case for the many children victims today for whom the alternative to adoption is often forced labor, crime and prostitution. The globalization of exchanges has worsened their plight, for it is now easy and cheap to send children to where they can bring in largest sums of money. Thus in 1989, children from the Indian sub-continent were sent to the Middle East to work as jockeys in camel races. It is also not expensive for the exploiters to travel to where the children are, as has been the case where wealthy travelers from all over the world travel to Asia to engage in the exploitation of child prostitutes. The current plight of unwanted children in poor nations and their exploitation by greedy

adults is finally occupying a prominent place in world opinion, as the scheduling of the very first conference on "The Sexual Exploitation of Children" in the summer of 1996 in Stockholm demonstrates.

I have already mentioned the case in Barranquilla where the "disappearances," that is, the murder of the homeless poor was evidently a thriving practice. Barranquilla, where the murderers were arrested, is, unfortunately, a rare exception. The practice of murdering the homeless has been all too common in some Latin American countries—especially in Colombia and Brazil since the mid 1980s. Perpetrated by policemen or by militias hired by shop owners, these murders are deemed "useful" by a vast sector the public, and thus go unpunished. Although these murders are tolerated they are not legal, and justice-seeking liberals and some human rights activists have called attention to these crimes through their protests. The result of their action is to drive the perpetrators underground so that their operations are now clandestine, a situation that produces a climate that favors rumors.

In the attempt to spread terror among the ranks of the vulnerable poor, the bodies of the murdered victims are often mutilated. Indeed, this mutilating of the corpses was already practiced during the Colombian *violencia* of the 1950s, but they are now often considered proof of organ theft but not in every instance. For example, even though the world has been made aware of the murders of street children in Brazil since the 1980s, the serious books describing the street children and the violence they endure do not posit a link between the murders and organ theft (Dimenstein 1991; Meunier 1977).

In the periods of the civil strife that have existed in many Latin American nations (Argentina in the 1970s and later in Guatemala, Nicaragua, El Salvador, Colombia, and Brazil) the elimination of political enemies and protestors through their "disappearance" have touched large sections of the populations of these countries. Curiously, it has not been during these reigns of terror that there emerged the rumors and stories of *Sacaos* and other organ thefts, but after the terror had ended and daily life was returning to normality. This fact means that there is not a direct correlation between political terror and the lore of organ thefts. In her book on the organ-theft rumors, the anthropologist, Nancy Scheper-Hughes (1992), attributes the phenomenon to the social inequality of the participant nations: "child-trafficking that accompanies international adoption, a non-egalitarian medical system that provided quality care only for the affluent, and the general exploitation of the poor throughout Latin America." It may be true that the wretched state of the poor worsened during the

period of dissemination of the organ-theft lore, but even though this lore emerged first among these deprived peoples, it has since reached all social classes including the affluent who do not suffer from the same harsh conditions known to the poor, nor do they feel the same fears and insecurities. Moreover, organ theft lore is found in the most diverse of Latin American nations, large or small and with or without a sizeable "Indio" populations.

One curious phenomenon of human behavior everywhere is the readiness with which people will believe those elements they fear the most. When people who have suffered from the exploitation of colonialism hear of a new hideous exploitation that threatens their own vital organs, they are ready and willing to see their worst fears confirmed. People have readily believed that anything is possible from an enemy who ruthlessly exploits his fellow humans; they even endow the evil trafficker with quasi-superhuman powers. It is only after some time has passed that we engage in reflective thought and realize that we adopted too soon the logic of a dime novel, transforming the trafficker into a near superman of evil, when, in truth, he is hardly better off than those he rents or sells. The important point is that it is not only the poor, ignorant, and uneducated who share this will to believe the worst, it is a pandemic human trait that even scholars share. The only difference between "them" and "us" is that the educated individual often has the mental tools to engage in reflective thought and to decide between the plausible and the implausible.

When one reflects on the organ-theft lore, one can realize that the very existence of a widespread organ trade itself disproves the organ-theft allegations. Why would people bother to steal when there are so many sellers. And is there enough money to be made in such criminal endeavor when the legal alternative exists?

Several medical facts also point to the implausibility of the organ-theft stories. These accounts ignore the fact that organ conservation for transplants posits severe time limits and needs for sophisticated equipment. Far too many people are involved in transplants for secrecy to be maintained, and the principals in such an endeavor would have to be highly trained medical personnel who would have much to lose and little to gain engaging in any illegal scheme. A transplant also imposes the need for preliminary examinations with long-term follow ups; it is not a one-time operation. The lack of convincing evidence provides a compelling argument for those who employ reason and logic to doubt the truth of the allegations. Some of these alleged crimes were reported on tens years ago, but no compelling evidence has ever surfaced. "How is it possible," asks the

exasperated Spanish Transplant Co-ordinator, Dr. Rafael Matesanz, "that thousands of supposed clandestine transplants in the whole world leave no trace?" (*El Pais*, 20 March 1996). However, the missing evidence is, for the firm believers and conspiracy-theorists, compelling proof of the traffickers' power who employ "the implacable law of silence" in order to ensure their impunity. Finally, it can be asserted with certainty that, if authenticated cases of organ-theft rings had been uncovered, the story would have been reported as headline news and as lead stories on television newscasts. But until now, the only mention of organ-theft rumors has been limited to cable-television "documentaries."

Even though the beliefs, rumors, and narratives about organ-theft rings exist primarily as a form of popular lore, this matter has also been adopted and disseminated by well-intentioned elite groups of socially aware individuals who have been waging the struggle against inequalities, injustice, and exploitation for many years, and who have used the harsh realities of the organ trade as instruments to attain their own goals. These groups either denounce organ thefts or simply allude to them obliquely. The choice between these two modes accurately reflects the degree and intensity of belief in the phenomenon. The denouncing mode is indignant, tries to convince people of their truth, and seeks to prove the alleged horrors. The alluding mode, by contrast, assumes that the facts are already established, and are used as weapons in achieving the aims and goals of the groups' discourse. Whatever their mode, these human-rights-groups consist of elite citizens who, as moral entrepreneurs, use the organ-theft phenomenon to promote their causes, to mobilize allies in their struggle, and to disseminate their beliefs. Any evoking of the horrors of organ theft are thus invariably subordinated to their socio-political programs.

There is no consensus among NGOs (Non-Government Organizations) that are engaged in the struggle to defend human rights as to the reality of organ-theft rings. And because they are staffed by non-professionals from varying national and ethnic backgrounds, the NGOs are heterogeneous and protean international agencies. Thus the worldview and program of a single organization can vary widely as it exists through time and space. In France, for example, the FIDH (International Federation for Human Rights) has undergone many changes in the years from 1988 to 1993, and similar changes are evident within other groups. Although the centralized headquarters of such agencies as DCI (Defense of Children International) and Amnesty International are very cautious in speaking of organ-thefts, their local correspondents often voice loudly their

indignant convictions to the news media, as was the case with the pronouncements made by DCI's Dutch correspondent, Stan Meuwesse (Burger 1995) and by Amnesty's French member, Dr. Jean-Claude Alt. The vigilance of the NGOs is certainly both legitimate and useful, and—as is the case with human-traffickers everywhere—the possible future authentication of the existence of body-parts rings cannot be completely ruled out—these organizations have come to realize that their capital is the trust placed in them, and they are further aware that wild, unsubstantiated charges can deface their good name and diminish their effectiveness. Thus these responsible NGOs have learned to operate with caution. Other such agencies have, however, pursued other aims. Such is the case with IADL (International Association of Democratic Lawyers) a Marxist-oriented agency that, although it survived the collapse of Communism, nevertheless continues to adhere to their anti-Western bias. Its main representative, Renée Bridel is most probably sincerely convinced of the reality of organ-theft rings, no doubt while expecting nothing else from the capitalistic Western world. Another example, bordering on caricature, of militants using organ-theft accusations to boost their own causes can be found in a Swiss Anti-Vivisection Bulletin (OIPA 1993). Another group that attempts to capitalize on shocking revelations of the actions of organ-theft rings is the OMCT (World Organization Against Torture) apparently having been tempted by the celebrity and media access that accompany these sensational reports. It is evident that the NGOs can be divided into the responsible, cautious groups, and the less cautious groups that are all too ready to let themselves be convinced of the reality of organ-theft rings.

One of the main forums for the NGOs is the Human Rights Commission of the UN in Geneva, and especially the "Working Group on Contemporary Forms of Slavery." The Special *Reporteur* of the Working Group's "Special Committee on the Sale of Children," Vitit Muntarbhorn, was especially active in trying to convince others in the reality of organ-theft rings. His excessive zeal caused him to lose credibility, and he resigned in late 1994. Since 1995 the Human Rights Commission's reports have reinstated the term "allegations" when mentioning organ thefts. It can be presumed that diplomatic action, overt in the case of the United States or of the accused Latin American nations, and covert in the case of most Western European countries, played a role in Muntarbhorn's resignation.

Although the responsible NGOs as well as the Human Rights Organization of the UN have recently been operating with restraint and caution in their handling of organ-theft allegations, there surfaces occasionally

some wild allegations from unexpected sources. Such was the case in September 1993 when the European Parliament released a report calling for the complete ban on trade in human organs for transplants within European Union countries. The report referred directly to the 1988 motion without mention of the protest it had spawned. It furthermore asserted loud and clearly that the allegations made about organ-theft rings were indeed based on the facts. It is evident that publicity seeking on the part of the Director of the group that produced the report, medical figurehead and politician Dr. Leon Schwartzberg, provided the motivation for the drafters of the document. Dr. Schwartzberg, who acted for the European Parliament, based his "findings" largely on IADL's accusation that had been published in August 1992 in a cover story in the *Monde diplomatique*, a quality monthly that was, however, militantly opposed to the "tyranny of market ideology," and also strongly anti-American (Pinero 1992).

Attacks of the same kind have continued to appear more recently. For example in August 1995, the *Echo of Islam*, a propaganda magazine published by Iran's "Foundation for Islamic Thought" released a special issue (in a language approximating English) devoted exclusively to "The International Market in Human Lives," which is a good example of how ideologues in the Third World exploit the organ-theft rumors to attack the West as the exploiters of the Third World and the sole cause of all their misery and woes. *Echo of Islam* explicitly stated that its aim was to expose the West's defense of human rights as an imposture.

At the end of 1994, Pope John-Paul II used his position as a moral authority to target organ thefts, together with enforced prostitution and wanton killings as among the worst evils befalling the street children of the Third World. His denunciation was meant to illustrate evils caused by materialism and greed in the modern world. Then in the summer 1995 in France, a moral authority of the medical sphere, ADOSEN, an association promoting the adoption of donor cards for transplants, routinely mentioned "the unbearable removal of eyes from Latin American children" as an example of the horrors of the organ trade (ADOSEN 1995). The mention of the horrors "out there" had a unifying effect on the French medical community that still suffers from the emotional trauma of the contaminated blood scandal that had shown that the practice of volunteer donorship was not a sufficient condition to rule out contamination. In the process a well established dogmatic assumption of the French was shattered.

The quality media, which also considers itself a moral authority, often

allude to organ-theft narratives and stories of organ-trafficking as sadly emblematic and exemplary of the horrors of modernity. Three examples of such reports that appeared in magazines in August and September 1995 suffice to illustrate this phenomenon:

I.

In India, unwed women are a social stigma and a financial burden to families. But without cash or consumer goods to offer a groom, they have little chance of marrying. Last week a young man took his own life in an attempt to provide dowries for his two unmarried sisters. Unemployed and without job prospects, Sunil Kumar, 19, hit upon the idea of selling his organs. Although the trade in human kidneys is illegal, many impoverished Indians sell their kidneys. Assuming that additional organs could be harvested from his body if he were dead, Kumar hanged himself from a ceiling fan. His scheme backfired. Because all suicide cases must be autopsied, none of his organs can be transplanted. His grief-stricken family says that, in any event, they would never have sold Sunil's organs" (*Time Magazine*, 8 August 1995).

II.

A Bangladesh court has sentenced a woman to death for murdering her three-year-old daughter and removing her eyes and kidneys for sale. The incident occurred in the north Bangladesh district of Rangpur in September last year.

This Reuters item reflects an improbable accusation presented at a trial as an explanation for an infanticide. It was published in *The Times* 6 September 1995 under the title "Murderer sold daughter's eyes" and reused a week later by French columnist Delfeil de Ton, who in the *Nouvel Observateur* gives each week to his intellectual audience a sample of sad (but so horribly sad they are also funny) "stories of our times." The columnist did not comment the Bangladesh item, but he amalgamated it with another from Egypt (relayed by AFP from the daily *Al-Akbar*) that referred to a highly probable case of pressure put upon a dependent person; he added a humorous final note of derision.

III.

In Egypt it's a 22-year old girl that her father forced to sell a kidney so he could buy a new car. He's been put in jail, and meanwhile the car stays on the pavement and rots (*Nouvel Observateur* 14/20 September 1995).

The AFP item explains that the daughter had refused to come back and

live with her father after the operation (which had raised the equivalent of \$5000.) and gone to stay with neighbors. The father had then complained to the police, saying that his daughter had been kidnapped, but she was quickly found and told the story. The AFP item did not mention that the father had been jailed by Egyptian authorities.

Reporters from the mainstream media also share the intuitive knowledge that organ-theft narratives are "good stories" that will sell. *Faits divers* from distant lands are thus sure to find an echo throughout the world through press agencies, especially if they contain shocking accusations of organ theft and of kidnappings of infants and children, for scandals and horror stories are staple fare on the menus the media prepare for us daily. In order for these stories to be published in newspapers, they must pass the "gatekeepers" who will reject those stories that situate, explain away, or deny the truth of the shocking stories. Such rejected accounts are destined to remain in their countries of origin, as they are generally long-winded and devoid of shock appeal. The following are two examples of this type of treatment:

The Rio kidnapping took place in March 1992 when a woman declared to have been kidnapped in the last stages of her pregnancy, the child being snatched from her after the birth induced by the baby traffickers. This moving story was fully covered in the French and Italian press. However, when three days later, it appeared that the pregnancy naturally terminated 4 months earlier, and that the kidnapping story was an invention which the 42-year old woman had made up to cover her lie to her younger husband to whom she had not revealed her spontaneous abortion. This fact was not announced in France and only very briefly in Italy (*AFP, France-Soir, Unita, Stampa, Nazione*, 28/31 March 1992, 10 articles).

"The murderous surgeons from the Philippines" happened in August 1994. A Reuters agency item titled "Murder for organ transplant" circled the world. It announced the indictment of 4 Filipino surgeons who, in 1988, had removed the organs of brain-dead accident victim Armelito Log-mao without his mother's consent. But none of the explanatory articles published the following days and months (till October) in the Philippines Press, stating that this was just one episode in a long-term judicial saga, that the prosecutor did not recognize the notion of brain-death, and that the procedures to establish brain-death had been carefully followed by the surgeons, reached the international media (Leventhal 1994:32-33).

Two sensational and distorting film documentaries appeared in 1993,

one Anglo-Canadian (*The Body Parts Business* [Harris and Jackson 1993]), and one French (*Voleurs d'organes* [Robin and El Tahri 1993]) which found a larger audience when it was released in a shorter version as *Voleurs d'yeux* early in 1995. Both works reinforced the "truth" of the accusations of organ thefts by drawing upon the testimony of their respective star witnesses. In *The Body Parts Business*, it was Charlie Alvarado who had asserted that he had escaped from kidnappers (Honduras 1993); and in both films, it was Pedro Reggi, whose family said he had been blinded in Montes de Oca (Argentina) when he was an inmate there; and in *Voleurs d'organes*, it was Jeison, a young blind Colombian boy, whose touching photograph showing him playing the flute, was circulated around the world. It has since been revealed that all these cases had been fabricated.

The Swiss consular attaché in Tegucigalpa explained in 1994 to Barbara Hoffstetter that two social workers, a German and a Swiss, had been arrested after Charlie Alvarado accused them of attempted kidnapping. However, they had been cleared by the investigation and set free (Hoffstetter 1994).

Pedro Reggi's brother retracted the accusations he had made on a television show in Argentina on 25 November 1993 after the release of the Anglo-Canadian documentary. He then admitted publicly that Pedro's blindness had been caused by an infection and that his corneas were not missing; however, he did insist that the infection that cost him his sight was the result of maltreatment he received in Colonia (Grondona 1993).

And finally, Jeison's mother asserted in a very moving declaration to the TV camera that her son had been blinded by a hospital in February 1983 when he was five months old. In early 1994, hardly three months after the film's release, an inquiry led by the Colombian Ombudsman proved conclusively that the blindness was the result of an infection (Colombia, *Defensoria* 1993, 1994). Trust in Colombian authorities is very low among the media, which may explain why no French media reported the findings of the Colombian inquiry. When people sought to cast doubt upon the mother's testimony on television by asserting that French Television had paid her for her appearance, the argument lost its impact when it was revealed that the amount of \$60.00 given was too insignificant to discuss.

Furthermore, because the hospital had provided no explanation for her son's blindness in 1983, she was convinced that the son was the victim of medical malpractice (Renard et al. 1995).

Even though the theme of organ theft would seem to be a modern phenomenon, coming into being only after the medical profession developed the techniques for transplants, both the thefts and organ transplants

have been known in popular fiction at least since the early nineteenth century. A favorite character in popular fantasy-literature is the Mad Scientist who tries to create life and achieve immortality through transplants. Such fantasies pointed to the potential dangers of science while predicting the evil rule of a hubris-ridden scientific oligarchy. Examples are too numerous to quote, but they go back at least to 1818 with the publication of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley's *Frankenstein or the Modern Prometheus*.

In 1920, the pianist of the *Mains d'Orlac* 'Hands of Orlac,' hero of a novel by Maurice Renard, received the hands of a murderer in a transplant operation. These hands retain an autonomous existence and drive the man to murder. In the 1950s, a number of stories telling of the search for immortality through the implanting of stolen glands appeared in such diverse forms of popular culture as comics (Feldstein 1950) and movies (Dein 1950). In 1965, the joint thriller of the authors Boileau-Narcejac depicted in *Et mon tout est un homme* 'And the Whole is a Man') a beheaded murderer who ensured his survival through a series of transplants made with the active complicity of a criminal surgeon.

Contemporary thrillers, often with socio-political and medical themes, exploited the theme of organ-theft intrigues often organized by evil physicians, and ranging from Robin Cook's novel *Coma* (1977) and the film adaptation thereof by Michael Crichton (1978) to the recent *Organ Hunters* by the British "investigative reporter" Gordon Thomas (1995). The latter was a sensational novel in which the villains are ex-Stasi agents who murder to procure vital organs for the most powerful gangsters on the planet. It was concluded by a ten-paged epilogue that sought to prove that "this novel is rooted in fact." Thomas is a specialist in shock stories that alternate between sensational fiction (e.g., *Organ Hunters* 1995) and "authentic" documentaries about controversial subjects, such as the successful medical mind-control experiments conducted by the CIA in the 1950s: (*Journey Into Madness: The True Story of Secret CIA Mind Control and Medical Abuse* 1989a). The author draws here on authentic data, that are blown out of proportion by the conspiracy theorists of today, who see this as the beginning of the first phase of "Operation Monarch," allegedly the code-word for the take-over of the United States by the CIA, acting as auxiliary to the "New World Order" or in the service of extra-terrestrials (Harrington 1996:39). Thomas has also authored a totally distorted presentation of isolated facts of kidnappings and traffic in human beings (*Enslaved: The Chilling Modern-Day Story of Abduction and Abuse in the Global Trafficking of Men, Women and Children* 1989b).

The plots of these organ-theft intrigues are sometimes ingeniously

plausible, as, for example, *Sonata for Solo Organ*, an episode from *Law and Order* (Morgenstern 1991) introduces a criminal surgeon, who is seeking a match for the kidney of a millionaire's daughter who has already rejected two transplanted kidneys. If he can save her life he will be paid two million dollars. Not concerned about legal consent of the donor, the surgeon lies to prospective donors when he tells them that they must submit to a blood test to qualify for a disability pension. In this way he locates an involuntary, homeless donor, who is a perfect match for his patient. One of the latest examples of this type, is an episode of the "X-Files" series aired in April 1996 in the United States in which agents Scully and Mulder investigate a lottery administered in San Francisco's Chinatown, in which the losers have to donate an organ, the game, of course, having been rigged.

When such films and TV-episodes are well made, they awaken in the viewer "the will to believe" (William James) or at least "the willful suspension of disbelief" (Samuel Coleridge). When we are swept up by the wave of emotion that occurs especially in the portrayal of the *Baby Parts* and *Sacajoes* variants in which helpless, deprived children are the victims of the atrocities of ruthless villains, it is our impulse to believe the stories are true. A number of scholars have observed such thought-processes in action, and they have been labeled "emblematic thought," a process that permits symbols and fables to flourish while expressing our deep concerns, interests, and fears. This "emblematic" mode has been variously designated as *pensée sauvage* (Claude Levi-Strauss 1962), "natural" or "social thought" (Michel-Louis Rouquette 1973), "mythical thought" (Nicole Belmont 1984), or "metaphoric or analogous thinking" (Peter Lienhardt 1975). It is generally accepted that these forms of emblematic thought alternate in each of us with the mode of rational or analytic thinking.

If one wishes to understand the contemporary beliefs, rumors, and narratives that comprise the organ-theft tradition, one must investigate the examples of these emblematic thoughts that inform them. In discovering that there are universal thought patterns at work in these traditions, we can gain insight into human behaviors that are centuries old, and understand that, even though the organ-theft tradition is a modern phenomenon, it rests upon ancient, universal notions of the kind that Salomon Reinach, in a more normative era, called "prejudices," but which are essentially the emblematic thoughts that attribute to bodies of men and animals, "as well as their secretions" the power "both to restore health and to confer illusory immunities" (Reinach 1892:177). To the potency attributed to body fluids are added the powers conferred upon innocence that sus-

tain universal concepts of sacrifice and exchange. To please the forces above, it is always the immaculate innocent victim that will be the most effective. Part of this thought process is the notion that the ailments of a contaminated, diseased individual can be eliminated by the exchange of fluids and other powers from the pure and innocent body to that of the afflicted. In this mode of thinking, the disease was thought to have material support. It was thus believed that the innocent could "take over" the disease and get rid of it. This terrifying conception of a magic exchange explains some authentic cases of voluntary contamination linked to contagious diseases such as small pox (Bercé 1984:208-209) or syphilis (Tardieu 1857:100-111). Still widespread in the United States, for example, is the notion that having intercourse with a virgin cured such venereal diseases as syphilis and gonorrhea and today one can add AIDS to this list (UCLA Archive of Popular Belief; Brunvand and Goldstuck 1994, Goldstuck 1993:208-209). One such occurrence was reported in 1995 in a newspaper from Jaipur, India. The story told how a Delhi Railway policeman raped and killed a colleague's daughter "to cure himself of AIDS" (Rajasthan 1995). Whether the newspaper reported an actual event or merely retold a contemporary legend cannot be determined with certainty. It is, however, apparent that the story reflects the belief in the healing powers of an innocent child through sexual intercourse.

Because many of the cases of voluntary contamination occurred during major epidemics, they have been largely discredited, leading many scholars to the erroneous inference that such voluntary contamination never existed.

It is, of course, difficult to determine whether a given occurrence of the theme of voluntary contamination is based on an actual occurrence, a belief, a literary theme, a rumor, a fanciful legend, or on a combination of these elements. In regard to the related theme, the cure of a dread disease by the blood of an innocent child, we know that it occurs in such diverse forms as belief, rumor, legend, literature, and perhaps even as an historical occurrence. That these notions are quite old is confirmed by the fact that in the MHG verse novelle of *Der arme Heinrich* (Hartmann von Aue, ca. 1195) a young virgin offers to sacrifice her life so that her blood can cure the leprosy of the hero. The latter, however, at the last minute, refuses to accept the sacrifice, for which God rewards him by curing the disease. Because God imposed the disease upon the hero as punishment, He certainly has the power to cure the disease when the hero redeems himself by his love and compassion. The noble hero then marries the maiden even though she is a peasant's daughter.

Related to this episode is the motif of the man who readily sacrifices his own children so he can use their innocent blood to redeem his dearest friend from a fatal curse (mot. S268.2), a motif that plays a role in the folktale of Faithful John (Type 516.) [See Erich Rösch, *Der getreue Johannes*, FFC 77 (Helsinki 1928); see also P. Cassel, *Die Symbolik des Blutes*, 1882; H. Strack, *Der Blutaberglaube*, 1891)], a theme that is also well known in world literature, e.g., Amicus and Amelias, Amis et Amiloun, Engelhart und Engeltrut, etc. That such accounts were either rooted in folk belief or provided the matter for superstitions is confirmed by the riots that occurred in eighteenth-century France. In Paris in 1750, it was said that the leprous King's need for blood baths was the cause for child abductions (Farge and Revel 1991), and in 1768 in Lyons a parallel accusation was that some priests of the Order of the Oratorians, which shared the building with the School of Surgery, "hid a one-armed Prince and every evening kidnapped a child whose arm was amputated so that the surgeons could try to attach it to the Prince" (Morel de Voleine 1851:276). Such stories have not disappeared. It was not so long ago that people believed that the Rumanian dictator Ceaucescu massacred young innocents to sustain himself from their freshly drawn blood. Similarly, stories that the Jews sacrificed Christian children to use their blood to cure themselves of blood and skin diseases have circulated from the Middle Ages to the present (Dundes 1991; Fabre-Vassas 1994). This theme has also been adopted by parents as a scary story to put naughty children to bed. Thus in nineteenth-century Antwerp parents warned children of the evil princess who roamed the city's streets in *De Bloedkaros* ['The Bloody Coach'] (Burger 1995).

A striking link with emblematic thoughts of the past with modern traditions of organ-thefts can be observed in the modern incarnation of a vampire-like ogre, the *Pishtaco* whose appearance in the Andes was documented in the sixteenth century (Ansion 1989, Wachtel 1992). The monster was successively identified with the Spanish conquerors of the sixteenth century, the mendicant friars of the Bethlehemites in the eighteenth century, and the evil Sacaojos of present-day Andean towns and cities. Ansion and Sifuentes (1989) who collected and analyzed this Andean lore in 1986, two years before the Lima scares, tell us that *Pishtaco* has become the involuntary purveyor of the modern world's riches because it is from his extracted fat that are fabricated medicines for the rich, and fluid to lubricate modern machines and computers. The *Pishtaco* is also said to be a clandestine butcher, and purveyor of children's flesh for the luxury restaurants of Lima. It is evident that this centuries-old demonic tradition paved the way for contemporary Sacaojos accusations of kidnappings

and mutilations of children to provide organs for the rich.

Parallel traditions from other parts of the world are apparently spawned from the same universal patterns of emblematic thought that produced the *Pishtaco* narratives. For example, in nineteenth-century China suspicions focused on the missionaries who housed and schooled abandoned children. A legend of the theft of the children's eyes to furnish materials for new technologies played a central role in starting the riots and massacre of Tsientsin in 1870. It was specifically maintained that "the French Sisters of Mercy, who undertook the education of children, afterwards put out their eyes to obtain the liquid necessary for the preparation of photographic likenesses. This report circulated all through China and was credulously believed" (Prejevalsky 1876:253-255).

These kinds of xenophobic traditions are found in many regions of the world. In Africa, for example, several ethnologists have mentioned the widespread practice of identifying the conquering Europeans with vampires, cannibals, and kidnappers (Arens 1979, Augé 1972, Stevens 1991, White 1993a, 1993b, 1997). And in his investigation of the recurrent rumors of kidnappings among the Dayaks, Richard Drake (1989) has noted the role such rumors have played in the emergence and spread of an anti-state ideology, a link that is also evident in the case of organ-theft narratives.

Another widespread tradition characterized by beliefs, rumors, and distortions that can contribute to our understanding of the origin and nature of organ-theft narratives is that of the so-called "White Slavery" movement. The term, which early reformers used to refer to all forms of prostitution, assumed in the late nineteenth century, the more specific meaning of enforced prostitution in which criminal males employed systematic abductions, druggings and other forms of coercion to force innocent women to become the prostitutes. The exaggerations and distortions of this lore inspired fear and panic among large segments of Western society, and the issue soon became one of intense emotion and indignation that distorted the fact that prostitution is often voluntary.

The term "enforced prostitution" is quite vague in that it refers to wide-ranging and diverse behaviors. That different degrees of coercion contribute to a woman's becoming a prostitute, be it poverty, social prejudices against minorities, entrapment of the young and gullible, deceit, terror, or by pressure upon women the trafficker knows personally, it is clear that the notion of random kidnapping that was trumpeted far and wide by abolitionists, was relatively rare. Indeed, enforced prostitution is of small importance compared to the major social and economic causes that lead

to voluntary prostitution. "There is no doubt that there were cases of white slavery. But the force of circumstances, of abysmal ignorance and grinding poverty, were much more important than the wiles of the white-slave trader in keeping the brothels filled" (Bristow 1977:58).

In the course of the nineteenth century, with expanding imperialism and colonialism, trade in women became international and global, as European expansion overseas opened new markets in distant and exotic lands where new, predominantly male, populations of Europeans demanded European women. The rumors, exaggerations, and distortions about the global trade in white women (some of them still children) received their impetus in 1885 when English publicist and reformer W.H. Stead pretended to buy a twelve-year old girl whom he took from England to Brussels and created a sensation in his installments in the *Pall Mall Gazette* under the lurid title: *The Maiden Tribute to Modern Babylon*). Soon there emerged an international movement for the abolition of "White Slavery" that led to several world conferences and a network of national committees. International conventions against "traffic in women and children" were held 1902 and 1910. It was in the latter year that United States Congress enacted "The Mann Act," that forbade the trafficking in women. Even the American Heavyweight Boxing Champion of the World, Jack Johnson, a black man who always had white women among his entourage of trainers, seconds, and sparring partners, had to flee the country after he was indicted for violating the Mann Act.

The hysteria that erupted then has not yet completely subsided. For example, special police units for repressing "Traffic in Human Beings" still exist in France to this day. And the UN's Commission of Human Rights in Geneva, and especially its "Working Group on Contemporary Forms of Slavery," a successor the "Commission of Inquiries into Traffic in Women and Children of the League of Nations," still operates today.

The distortions and exaggerations that created the notion of "White Slavery" resulted from a tactic of the reformers who wanted to eliminate enforced prostitution, but the assertions of kidnappings soon overtook these abolitionists. As Edward Bristow has written:

"The image of female abduction and ruination was so symbolically supercharged, so psychologically overloaded that the reformers themselves, to say nothing of the public, got carried away with their own rhetoric [...] There followed a series of outbursts of mass publicity about how white slavers lurked everywhere, waiting to lure unsuspecting females into bondage."

That the various forms of popular culture would exploit this sensational

topic became inevitable, and there were soon dime novels, movies, newspaper installments, and magazines disseminating melodramatic abduction stories throughout much of the world in the early twentieth century. Edward Bristow the British Historian, presents a number of examples of this literary exploitation and of the localized panics that followed. In 1910, England staged *The White Slaves of London* in a music hall, and in Italy, *The White Slave*, a five-act melodrama depicting an Italian girl trapped in Buenos Aires, was staged. In 1911 the first *White Slave* film—that was financed by the Swiss and Danish National Committees of the movement—was released to movie houses. However, these committees refused to finance the sequels, for fear they might inflame prurient instincts. In the United States it was said that by 1914 over one billion pages had been published on the subject. Tracts with such titles as *The Great War on White Slavery, Fighting for the Protection of our Girls: Truthful and Chaste Account of the Hideous Trade of Buying and Selling Young Girls for Immoral Purposes* abounded and novels on the same theme were also successful, thus *The House of Bondage* was in its 14th edition in 1912.

The Fear of White Slavery reached epidemic proportions during Summer and Autumn of 1912 in London. All sorts of stories of sudden disappearances, abductions and attempts to entice innocent girls were repeated from mouth to mouth, and Frederic Bullock [the Head of Scotland Yard's special new White Slavery Bureau] judged them to be unfounded rumors. "Fake nurses were said to be on the prowl in department stores, a Hampstead hairdresser's daughter was carried off in a motor car and girls were being chloroformed in the streets." Still in 1913, "The 5,000 girls of London's telephone exchanges were given official warnings to watch out for drugged chocolates and similar dangers" (Bristow 1977:192-193). A similar surge of panic occurred in America from 1912-1914, involving all classes of young women: students, shop attendants, and telephone operators among others. Any contact with a stranger was grounds for a complaint and accusation. Other panics occurred in the 1920s and 1930s. In England a new surge of anxiety erupted in 1929 when it proved "impossible to stem the tide of reports about pinpricks and numb thighs on provincial transportation systems and in cinemas.

One widespread tale concerned the hag-like old lady who asked for help crossing the street and then bagged her prey with the aid of a 'dope ring,' a hollowed-out piece of jewelry fitted with a needle and filled with quick-acting curare poison" (Bristow 1977:197).

These attacks of panic occurred against a background of genuine fears generated by a changing world; it was the age of the dark cinema

house, the powerful motor-car that resembled a private hotel-room on wheels, mass transportation systems that enabled rural folk to have indiscriminate contact with city dwellers, all combined with new freedoms won by women in the emancipation movement to create new fears and insecurities which—even when repressed—provided fertile grounds on which the hysteria of the White-Slavery rumors could grow and prosper. All of these fears were expressed in the anguish and hatred that people felt for the evil traffickers that played for adults the same cathartic role as scary folktales do for young children. As in the case of the “Blood Libel Legend,” the hatred was often directed against Jews as Anti-Semitism was nourished by the horror tales of White Slavery. As one investigator has expressed:

White-slavery allegations were similar to the other notorious charges in the anti-Semite arsenal; that Jews were by nature criminal, that they organized widespread conspiracies to corrupt and pollute the Christian world and that they ritually murdered Christian children [...] The parallels between the blood libel and white slavery are particularly striking. Each involves violence to a defenseless young person and the projection of hate onto a symbolic substitute for the evil father. White slavery was the sexualization of the blood libel (Bristow 1982:46).

Although the notion that the blood of children was a powerful curing agent anticipated the later organ-theft lore involving children, it was the hysteria of the White Slavery legends that had the greatest influence on the emergence of organ-theft beliefs and legends. The hysteria that emerged from both the White Slavery tradition and from organ-theft lore was supported by a foundation of reality that not only made the accounts plausible but also generated well-founded fears and concerns. In both legend cycles there are realities (enforced prostitution and the internationalization of prostitution for White Slavery), and crimes linked to the development of international adoption and trade in organs for organ-theft lore which provided the atmosphere that both reflected and gave expression to valid concerns and fears. It is popular culture that selects and expands—in close partnership with spontaneous folk creation—frightening but good-to-tell narratives that are vehicles for well grounded fears; one might say that even though many of the tales are not factual, they are, in a symbolic sense, true. It is a fact that opportunistic propagandists manipulate the stories to exploit their symbolic force to influence public opinion for attaining their own aims; but the stories eventually elude their manipulators and continue their independent existence.

In order for a body of narratives to maintain itself in popular tradition,

there must be a willingness on the part of the tradition bearers to accept the stories. And this acceptance presupposes that the tales give expression to the dominant interests, concerns, and fears of those who consume and disseminate them. In the case of the organ-theft cycle of tales, it is the harsh social conditions of developing countries that account for their ready acceptance. The dominant concerns and fears of the suffering populace of these cultures is the manner in which the powers of the "First World" use exploitation and manipulation to plunder their resources. In Latin America, the narratives are often confirmed by small and middle-level authorities and expanded by the international media, a process that only reinforces the credibility of Sacaojos stories. However, when denials come from high-level administrative and medical authorities in whom the populace has little trust, they often backfire and reinforce belief. In wealthy, industrial nations, the authorities deny with consistency at all levels, and the media generally disclaim the organ theft narratives situated within their own borders. Therefore the "Stolen Kidney" stories do not enjoy a high credibility rating in these lands. Belief, however, comes more readily when children are designated as victims, for here, in spite of the authorities' constant denials, the organ-theft narratives are reinforced by the pervasive and widespread fears concerning children's safety. Acceptance can vary considerably among wealthy countries as well. It has been my experience that, in Western Europe, organ-theft narratives are more plausible than they are in the United States. This inference may seem too sweeping and general to be accepted as fact; however, if it is true that the news media tend to reflect and thus correlate with the views of the majority, then the fact that the media are far more skeptical in the United States about these stories than they are in Europe tends to support this inference. The mention of the "Stolen Kidney" in an Oregon newspaper can serve as an example:

[After describing the main story, the classic Canadair horror story of an air tanker picking up water from the sea to fight forest fires having unknowingly picked up scuba divers who they then drop with the water upon the fires, the journalist then cites other examples of urban legends:]

About a year ago, people were calling me to insist that a Eugene man went to Las Vegas with friends, got picked up by a woman in a bar, went to her hotel room and awoke three days later to find his kidney missing, headed for the transplant black market. But if anyone can produce the kidnapping victim, or the smoldering scuba divers, I'll apologize in print and promise never to be skeptical again. (Don Bishoff, *The Register Guard*, Eugene, Oregon, 7 February 1996).

The difference in attitude between the United States and Europe can probably be attributed to the fact that, a less parochial attitude prevails in Western Europe than in the United States, the Europeans reporting the news from Africa, Latin America and Asia more frequently and in greater detail than is the case in the U.S. As a consequence Europeans show a stronger preoccupation with the growing economic discrepancy between the First and Third Worlds.

Documentary films and stories also have a pronounced tendency to assign greater credibility to organ-theft stories from the Third World nations than their American counterparts. For example, in 1995 and 1996, two journalism prizes were awarded in France (a film) and Spain (an investigative series) both of which assumed the stories to be factual. The film was the French documentary *Voleurs d'organes* (Robin and El Tahri 1993), which has been discussed earlier. It received the prestigious *Prix Albert Londres* in April 1996. The series, whose author was Anna Beatrix Magno, had been published in *Correo Braziliense* 24-31 July 1994. Covering mainly the traffic in children linked to international adoptions, the author also asserted that infant kidnappings for organ theft were widespread and re-told the star cases of the two accusing documentaries as if they had never been disproved. The series received the *Premio Iberoamericano de Periodismo Rey de España* ['Latin American journalism prize of the King of Spain'] in March 1996. Although both awards encountered controversy, they were not withdrawn.

The medical profession remains highly skeptical and some of the accused countries responded by voicing emphatic and emotional denials. Mainstream media, by contrast, depict the investigative journalists as courageous "white knights" who denounced well-established traffic networks that operate with the active complicity of the very authorities engaged in denial. The investigative journalists, of course, also participate in the self-portrayal of this "white knight" image. Thus the French film's author successfully built up a persona of the persecuted heroine, a victim of the USIA/CIA and of the demonized Colombians who were exemplified in the book she published on the making of the film and on her struggle to reject the reactions thereto. (Robin 1996). An article from a Catholic weekly aimed at an audience of intellectuals reveals how successful this strategy has been with the French media:

Marie-Monique Robin has been, these last months, the object of slander attacks. She has been the victim, especially from the Colombian and American side, of a dirty, odious campaign that greatly overstepped the frame of a deontological debate. That her 'sincerity' is

recognized is only fair" (Thierry Leclère *Télérama* 16 April 1996).

The two sides to the controversy cannot be reconciled, even though they both can advance compelling arguments. The facts may well support the skeptics (systematic clandestine organ transplants are highly unlikely because of the medical constraints limiting them.), yet the emotional plea underscoring the plight of Third World children reflects a tragic situation that is all too real. Even though it may not be true that the American USIA/CIA is involved in supporting an organ-theft ring, it cannot be denied that these American agencies have played a powerful manipulative role to the detriment of the poor of Third World countries. Perhaps it is up to folklorists to demonstrate to governments and media alike that the narrative lore that finds resonance in a population does not have to be factual to be true. Even though the accounts are not factual, they nevertheless demonstrate symbolic truth. Perhaps the willingness of so many people to believe the versions produced by the two elite groups cited here confirms this very symbolic truth of their accounts. This point is complicated by the fact that for such topics, the folk (You and I) can adopt alternately the stance of the skeptic and the believer.

CONCLUSION

Organ theft narratives are in harmony with the dominant mood of rumor that denounces perceived enemies while revealing ghastly secrets and evil conspiracies. It conveys powerful protests and anti-elite messages. But meanings of rumors vary according to the social circles in which they circulate, and we have seen earlier that, among elite groups, organ-theft narratives have become an emblematic mode for pin-pointing the evils of modernity. Like all black market items, rumor exists because it fills a need. "The need for an interpretation which suddenly and magically strings together disconnected fears and hopes, nostalgia and hatreds and displays them in a single significance" (Ascherson 1990).

Again, it is by articulating symbolic truths, that organ-theft narratives fill the needs of individuals and communities for expressing the significance of their lives. They articulate the anxieties that are felt but which cannot be expressed openly in societies in which science is touted as a positive force improving human lives. They obliquely attack modern medicine which transgresses boundaries that seemed immutable and which modifies our traditional conception of life and individual identity. The organ-theft narratives reactivate the immemorial fable of the massacre of innocents thus appealing to our emblematic mode of thinking while functioning at a metaphoric and emotional level. Several dysfunctional sit-

uations, and the harsh and aggravated plight of Latin America's poor have combined to make the exaggerated, highly emotional organ-theft stories plausible. This is precisely the mechanism of the creation of what I chose to call *Dark legends* which are mobilizing tools that bring new social problems to the collective consciousness. They incite emotional anger and indignation around dysfunctional elements in a community, disturbing facts, social conflict, the tensions among social groups. These legends are worthy of analysis for they structure the social sphere: "Legends engender discourses and practices, they contribute to weave the political and social fabric as they raise or justify conflicts or allegiances, as they polarize the field of memory" (Boureau 1995:254).

Truer than truth, the *Dark Legends* are collectively elaborated and entertaining fictions that generate among the listener emotional reactions to social problems. However, it must not be forgotten that these *Dark Legends* also carry strongly negative elements: demonizing of the Other, reduction of complex situations into simple caricatures, and the like. In the contemporary world, *Dark Legends* are mostly expanded by the popular media which exploit them with a callous indifference, just because they raise in the general public a spontaneous interest and are "good sellers."

Thus the *Dark Legend* of organ thefts has been created and sustained by:

- collective creativity of the folk, as the legends are listened to, enriched and transmitted for their symbolic value.
- exploitation by propagandists who take advantage of its mobilizing value to pursue their own goals.
- exploitation by popular media that appreciate its selling potential.

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