



4

Us and Them: Martyrs, Prophets and Mythic Narratives of Refused Knowledge

Paolo Bory 

4.1 Introduction

In the public debate, refused knowledge communities (RKC)s openly contesting the scientific community and expertise are usually labelled as marginal, fragmented and/or minoritarian aggregates of people. The claims and demands of such communities are rarely accorded space in the mainstream media, such as national newspapers and TV. Even when widespread opposition to official science is publicly acknowledged (e.g. in political debates and talk shows), it is usually depicted as the extemporary and irrational response of misinformed people to certain issues of public concern. During the COVID-19 pandemic in Italy, for example, the contestation of scientific institutions was portrayed as a spontaneous reaction triggered by fear and panic, rather than the outcome of a long-standing process by which people share everyday practices, information sources and social and cultural beliefs. During the pandemic,

P. Bory (✉)

Department of Design, Politecnico di Milano, Milano, Italy

e-mail: paolo.bory@polimi.it

© The Author(s) 2024

F. Neresini et al. (eds.), *Manufacturing Refused Knowledge in the Age of Epistemic Pluralism*, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-99-7188-6_4

communities opposing mandatory vaccines or emergency laws, as well as alleged violations of constitutional rights and individual freedoms, were relegated—by the mainstream media in particular—to the domain of irrational, hysterical and fleeting reactions typical of the populist hype emerging in crisis contexts (Mede & Schäfer, 2020; Tomasi, 2021).

However, contrary to this partial and monolithic perspective, not only do most RKC's share certain key social practices, experiences (Crabu et al., 2022) and information on an everyday basis but the members of these communities also share stories (i.e., anecdotes, key characters and historical events) which may contribute to their epistemological and cultural foundations. Both distant and recent, these narratives provide RKC's with a set of common beliefs and reference models from the past and the present. But most of all, shared narratives bond communities more closely together, thus strengthening their members' sense of belonging, and drawing—as I will argue—on the boundaries between RKC's and other social worlds.

The purpose of this chapter is to enquire into RKC's' mythical narratives to highlight the relevance of certain key figures, events and objects around which these communities weave their common goals, visions and sense of belonging. By analysing the construction of, and tropes surrounding, mythic narratives—both scientific and religious—the sections which follow will also emphasise the ways such narratives stimulate everyday discussions, practices and even ritual forms within RKC's. In addition to martyrdom stories, a special focus on the myth surrounding Dr Ryke Geerd Hamer and the foundation of German New Medicine will also serve to display an archetypal story in which mythic science and the religious prophet trope interweave.

This chapter is divided into four sections. Section 4.1 focuses on the relationship between science, myth and narratives and shines a special spotlight on the 'mythic science' concept in historical and popular accounts of scientists' lives. Section 4.2 dwells on RKC's founding and mythical narratives, listing a series of recurring patterns characterising the RKC 'martyrs'. Section 4.3 enquires into the archetypal intertwining of mythic science and religious/prophetic narratives within one of the communities under scrutiny, the 5BLs community, also focusing on the key tropes surrounding the biography of its founder Ryke Geerd Hamer,

revolving around this prophet/scientist's revelation, conversion, persecution and exile, his commemoration and the dissemination of 'false prophets' and internal schism within the community. The last section summarises the main contents of this chapter in order to highlight the relevance of these founding and mythic narratives as bonding stories contributing, on one hand, to internal RKC cohesion and their positioning within a specific social world and, on the other, to demarcating these communities from the rest of society. As I will show, this opposition should not be understood purely from a scientific perspective but also seen in all its socio-cultural, political and anthropological diversity.

4.2 Scientific Myths, Mythic Science and Founding Narratives

In recent decades, mythical science and technology narratives have been analysed not only by historians but also in Science and Technology Studies (STS) and by media scholars, who have emphasised the importance of recurring tropes, anecdotes and characteristics of the birth, emergence and co-shaping of technologies and scientific innovations within a variety of socio-cultural contexts (e.g. Flichy, 2007; Jasanoff & Kim, 2015; Ortoleva, 2009). As these scholars argue, in common with geographical and archaeological discoveries, techno-scientific achievements and revolutions have been often narrated from the starting point of founding stories, or myths, which provide a simple explanation of certain crucial steps in the history of science and technology. Recently, in his *A Final Story*, historian Nasser Zakariya stressed the longstanding complexity of the relationship between the terms 'science' and 'myth', seeing two main ways of ensuring dialogue between the two.

On one hand, 'scientific myth' is presented as an enlightened and reasonable tale, a self-interrogated superstition, the rational submission of reason to the need for meaning' (Zakariya, 2017, p. 9). Scientific myths frequently oversimplify the process underlying scientific inquiry—for example, mishaps, mistakes and empirical or theoretical failures during research—to provide laypeople with an accessible, easy-to-understand

(and use) story. In other words, scientific myths are user-friendly strata-gems with which the history of science can be made more universally understandable, familiar and immediate. Scientific myths are generally very simple and rely to a greater extent on storytelling than the complexity and potential contradictions emerging from historical sources. Think, for example, of the anecdotes surrounding scientific discoveries, such as the apple falling on Isaac Newton's head and inspiring him with the formulation of the universal theory of gravity or of the decoding of Nazi codes by a lonely Alan Turing stubbornly working away at his Enigma machine or, once again, to the many stories surrounding the discoveries of such polyhedric geniuses as Tesla and Pasteur.¹

On the other hand, although meaningful per se, such anecdotes do not always stand alone, but can act as lynchpins for wider narratives contributing to what Zakariya labels mythic science which he sees as entailing more salient tensions and cultural resonances. Mythic science is an already tamed, if multivalent phrase, the adjectival form of myth bearing little suggestion of 'objectively false', but rather the sense of 'epically scaled' or 'famously successful' (Zakariya, 2017, p. 9).

Mythic science is based on more than simply anecdotes and stories emphasising the ingenuity of inventors and scientific figures but also showcases a longer, more troubled story of struggle between geniuses and their theories/discoveries and a hostile system which, in order to preserve the status quo, even went as far as rejecting the clear empirical proof he provided. In this regard, mythic science presents scientific achievements and innovations as an epic fight between brilliant minds and a system that resists the threat they pose to normal science, and not only on the scientific but also on the political and economic interest planes. There is nothing accidental about the fact that, in narrative terms, mythic science usually melds with epic, for example hybridising inventors' histories with the hero's journey narrative trope (Natale & Bory, 2017), as outlined by Joseph Campbell in his famous book on recurring patterns in worldwide mythologies and epics (2008).

¹ The life of Pasteur is a case in point of the struggle between scientific myths and mythical science and historical enquiry (see Cavaillon & Legout, 2022; Latour, 1987).

On their part, historians have bitterly criticised the production and dissemination of these narratives. For example, Douglas Allchin (2004) labelled scientific myths ‘pseudo-histories’, comparing the lack of reliability of their sources to the empirical fallacies of pseudoscience. By contrast, several authors have emphasised that myths and, in turn, mythic science should be read through a range of lenses. Rather than seeing these narratives as false or fictional tales, it is more helpful to shed light on the meanings conveyed by founding myths and narratives, especially the possible reasons underlying their long-term persistence in the social imaginary. In this regard, since myths are socio-cultural sense-making tools, they act as ‘bridges between the human and the cosmos’ (Ortoleva, 2019) and should be studied less in true/false dichotomy terms than as living or dead beliefs (Mosco, 2005) prevailing over historical enquiry or empirical revisionism.²

Where RKC are concerned, scientific myths, and mythic science in particular, are extremely widespread and serve as precious narrative resources within their social worlds. For example, certain key mythic science concepts are used as analogies with which to justify these communities’ struggle with the academic, economic and political elites preserving the status quo. In the Italian RKC social world, influential figures such as Giordano Bruno and Galileo Galilei are often described as RKC predecessors whose aim is to overturn current conceptions of science and scientific truths. It is worth noting that, unlike other prominent figures in the history of science, these men failed to reach their goals during their lifetimes. It is this which makes them not only heroes but also martyrs. They died or were punished—both psychologically and otherwise—for bearing witness to a faith or an idea. This contributes to a key demarcation between the founding narratives of certain RKC and mythic science: As I will show, the stories surrounding RKC’s best-known characters—particularly those of the 5BLs community—and what is portrayed as the final destiny of most of their members, tend to conflate

²It is worth noting that mythical science also serves scientific communities, keeping their social worlds tightly bound up. For example, rituals and celebrations such as annual prizes and global events in honor of history of science heroes are a clear demonstration of the relevance of these figures to scientific community self-identification, thereby contributing to the mythologising of great scientists.

epic with religious content, thereby hybridising the hero and martyrdom and religious prophet tropes.

4.3 The Martyrs of Refused Knowledge

Like Bruno and Galilei, three of the mythical characters of the communities under scrutiny in this book have been rejected by the scientific community as well as publicly and formally condemned by the scientific and legal institutions by means of ‘exemplary punishments’. Dr Robert O. Young, one of the key figures in the alkaline water community and author of the ‘pH Miracle’ series of books, was convicted of several crimes relating to practicing medicine without a license and widely discredited in traditional media. Andrew Wakefield—a key Pro Vax Choice community figure globally famous for his theory regarding the link between autism and MPR vaccinations—has been repeatedly attacked in magazines, newspapers and TV shows and was struck off the medical registers in both the UK and the US. In addition, Dr Ryke Geerd Hamer, the founder of the German New Medicine movement based on the 5BLs, lost his license to practice medicine in several European countries, was jailed in Germany and served a prison term in France for fraud and unlicensed medical practice. From the RKC perspective, all these public and formal punishments go hand-in-hand with the sacrifice that goes along with protecting not only their discoveries but also their moral and ethical values and, in turn, the community they belong to and represent.

Furthermore, these stories go far beyond contingency. Public condemnation of what the scientific community sees as quackery, or pseudo or mock science, can trigger a boomerang response by RKC. Sometimes with the support of media and political influencers, such communities (Bory et al., 2022) generate brand new content and materials—such as petitions, documentaries and counterfactual documentations—to debunk the legal and scientific proofs which discredit their founders and martyrs. Occasionally, RKC martyrs promote and distribute new materials regarding their unjust persecution, as in the case of the documentary *Vaxxed—From Cover-Up to Catastrophe*, produced and directed by Andrew Wakefield in 2016 to demonstrate the accuracy of his research

on the relationship between vaccines and autism, which circulated widely on social media platforms and is still a ‘must-see’ for the Pro Vax Choice community in Italy and abroad.³ This chain reaction between exemplary punishments and the production of counterfactual evidence underlies the construction of martyr figures like Wakefield.

However, martyrs are not necessarily transnational figures. They can also emerge in local or national contexts. All the figures mentioned above are reference models or founding fathers of RKC in the West. However, in addition to internationally recognised men such as Wakefield, Young and Hamer, RKC also have local and context-specific leaders who occasionally perform the same roles as mainstream international figures. Maurizio Martucci, one of the leading figures of the Italian Stop 5G scene, is a clear example of a leader who also acts as spiritual guide. Martucci’s struggle against 5G in Italy is, in fact, not only political but also has a strong spiritual connotation which sees technocracy as contrary to mother nature’s rules and inner dynamics. Thus, there is nothing accidental about the fact that, in his bio, Martucci describes himself as leader of Alleanza Italiana Stop 5G, and also a holistic discipline and age-old tradition enthusiast who practices Kundalini Yoga combined with an interest in the spiritual path taken by native peoples in symbiosis with nature. [...] He is the founder of the natural information website OasiSana (AT: Healthy Oasis).^{4,5}

Other Italian communities, such as Pro Vax Choice, together with a series of political and leaders generally labelled populist, rely on certain exemplary cases or genealogical anecdotes from the past. Some of these stories have made vaccination hesitancy history in the Italian context. An example of this is the story of the Tremante family, a major vaccination controversy, which made Italian news headlines from the 1970s onwards. After the death of his first child in 1971, Giorgio Tremante lost two more

³ The sequel to *Vaxxed*, *Vaxxed 2*, was directed by Robert Kennedy Jr, the son of another US political history’s martyrs and well known for his anti-vaccination beliefs and promotional campaigns worldwide.

⁴ <https://www.terranuovalibri.it/autore/maurizio-martucci-182514.html> (accessed 6 October 2022). For an overview of Martucci’s role, see Simone Tosoni’s chapter in this book.

⁵ From now on, all text excerpts from Italian blogs and websites, and in-depth interviews are translated by the author.

children, and another remained paraplegic, because of the adverse effects of mandatory vaccinations.⁶ After 14 years of legal battles, Tremante received state compensation for his children's deaths but no compensation for the damage, for which he filed an appeal at the European Court of Justice which is still awaiting trial. This exemplary story of loss, suffering and legal battles eventually led to the foundation of Comilva, one of Italy's most active associations against mandatory vaccinations.

If the Tremante case is specific to the Pro Vax Choice community, occasionally martyrs succeed in crossing the RKC boundaries into other RKCs, constituting temporary symbols in a common struggle for one social world (centred on various forms of refused knowledge) as opposed to another (usually led by the academic and scientific élites). For example, during the COVID-19 pandemic, Italian doctor Giuseppe de Donno promoted an alternative cure based on the transfusion of plasma from healed to ill patients. De Donno argued that this would cost much less than other forms of treatment and would allow nation-states to remain independent of the oligopoly of pharmaceutical companies. Eventually this 'plasma-based cure' was rejected by the scientific community on the grounds that there was no empirical proof or statistical data indicating that it worked (RECOVERY Collaborative Group, 2021). Concurrently, a few RKCs, such as the Pro Vax Choice community, began promoting the plasma cure as the 'people's cure for the people' as opposed to the vaccines, which were simply filling Big Pharma's pockets. The plasma cure became a miracle artefact amplifying the centrality and public aura of its discoverer. In narrative terms, the miracle cure-persecuted scientist combination eventually spawned a new martyr. In fact, a few months after the public rejection of his findings, De Donno committed suicide in his apartment. Shortly before his death his profile had been censored by social media platforms such as Facebook and he had been sidelined by the Italian scientific and medical communities. Beginning on the day after his suicide, De Donno was hailed as a martyr by various communities, and became the human embodiment of the public value of the

⁶On his website, named 'Holocaust caused by vaccination practices' and displaying the dates of his children's deaths, Tremante has published all the articles and parliamentary questions regarding his legal case and other vaccine-related legal issues. See: <http://www.tremante.it/> (accessed 6 October 2022).

sacred/miraculous artefact. De Donno's suicide was described on RKC social media as suspicious with some users suggesting that he had probably been assassinated by the scientific/political élite to 'eliminate' a potential enemy. De Donno's sacrifice ultimately made him a symbol for numerous RKC's of the struggle for 'truth' against the power of the scientific and political establishment.⁷ It should be noted that not all RKC's reacted in the same way to this episode. The 5BLs community, for example, did not endorse the cures proposed by De Donno, but honoured his lonely fight against the 'system', while other communities agreed on the presumed evidence for the efficacy of the 'plasma-based cure'. Like De Donno, notwithstanding the diversity in their epistemic backgrounds, all the characters associated with RKC's—such as Hamer, Wakefield, Young and many others—are fighting together in the front line of a shared struggle against scientific elites. It should be noted that, unlike global martyrs such as Wakefield, the stories such those of Tremante and De Donno are 'common man' stories of people heroically fighting for their rights, generating a mythical aura that is as powerful as other more common martyrdom stories.

4.4 In the Name of the Prophet: The Ryke Geerd Hamer Archetype and the Birth of the Five Biological Laws Community

In the RKC social world, certain myths have taken on such importance that they resemble the foundational myths which have long characterised human history and have occasionally equated scientific myth with sacred myth in a hybrid part-scientific-genius-part-prophet system. This is the case of Hamer and the five biological laws. Of the numerous founding narratives of the Italian RKC's, the story of the discovery of the 5 Biological Laws (5BLs) is probably the most archetypal and fascinating. All the

⁷False prophets emerged during the pandemic as well. An example is Pasquale Bacco, one of the doctors who led the campaign against COVID vaccinations in 2020 and then changed his mind in 2021, withdrawing all his previous statements and making himself a 'common enemy' for several RKC's.

founding narrative traits and tropes listed thus far conflate in the mythical figure of German doctor Ryke Geerd Hamer, founder of German New Medicine (GNM), a blend of scientific epic and spiritual implications, combining the story of a great scientist with the life of a prophet.⁸ Scientific myth narrative tropes such as the eureka moment and scientists' fight for public acknowledgement of their discoveries are there in Hamer's life story, together with certain key life-of-the-prophets tropes. To summarise the stages in the prophet's journey, four tropes will be analysed in this section: revelation, conversion, persecution and exile, and the fight of the prophet and his followers against 'false prophets'.

4.4.1 Revelation

In 1978, while on vacation in Corsica, Ryke Geerd Hamer's 19-year-old son Dirk was shot in the leg by Vittorio Emanuele di Savoia, the former Italian crown prince. Dirk Hamer eventually died, and his father was later diagnosed with testicular cancer, which was operated on. Following these episodes, Hamer dreamt of his son, who guided him to the discovery that cancer is caused by sudden trauma leading to biological conflict. In 1981, Hamer elaborated a theory according to which all diseases are caused by biological conflicts and only profound understanding of the origin of the disease and, thus, of the conflict itself can bring healing. He called this process the Dirk-Hamer-Syndrome (DHS) in homage to his son, thereby baptising the Five Biological Laws (5BLs). Hamer credits his son's appearance in his dreams for his discovery of the 5BLs. On one hand, Dirk's appearance in his father's dreams can be seen as a form of hierophany (Eliade, 1963)—i.e. a manifestation of the sacred. The hierophany of Dirk Hamer partially fits with other anecdotes like the

⁸The scientist/prophet dichotomy has already been examined in rhetorical and historical studies (Lessl, 2011; Walsh, 2013). For example, in her book *Scientists as Prophets* (2013), Lynda Walsh points to the prophetic role of contemporary scientists, analysing the scientific rhetoric used. According to Walsh, contemporary 'great' scientists tend to not only forecast the future of society to strengthen their scientific paradigms and discoveries but also to disseminate their personal views on political and societal issues. Unlike Walsh's contribution, the scientist/prophet parallel used in this chapter focuses more on the religious features and narrative tropes surrounding the stories and prophets and thus not only on their role as 'oracles' (Walsh, 2013, pp. 160-161), which is mainly based on their claims to foresee the future.

annunciation of Christ to Mary by Archangel Gabriel or the finding of the Tablets of Stone in the Moses story. However, unlike these examples, Dirk did not reveal everything about the natural laws to his father, but provided his father with a series of clues and scientific paths to it, for example,

this [the 5BLs] will cause a revolution in medicine. You can publish it in my name. But you will have to do more research. You haven't understood everything, you are missing two important things. (Post on Facebook from Hamer's testament, published on 17 March 2022)

According to this story, Dirk's revelation of the laws was not self-explanatory. As a scientist Geerd Hamer had to follow his son's advice and study, research and prove the validity of the laws. This revelation story had a great impact on the 5BLs community. On one hand, Hamer was not the creator of the laws, but rather the scientist who translated the laws provided by Dirk for the people. In Geerd Hamer's words,

my Dirk deserves credit for not only initiating the knowledge of cancer correlations through his death, but also inducing it after his death and passing it on to me. (ibidem)

The character of the son Dirk is essential to the 5BLs community, since he was both the first source and the depository, it might be said, of the 5BLs copyright. It is no accident that his picture is everywhere on GNM followers' social media profiles and several magazines and books on GNM display Dirk's picture on their covers. However, if Dirk is the 5BLs saint, Ryke Geerd Hamer is the medium capable of conveying his word and simultaneously the scientist required to test and disseminate the laws and make them understandable and verifiable worldwide.

4.4.2 Conversion and Persecution

Ryke Geerd Hamer's background was in theology and medicine. It is no accident that religious and scientific reasoning and wordings are often

used side-by-side in his writings. After the 5BLs discovery/revelation, Hamer took another important step along the path taken by many prophets: conversion to a new medicine and rejection of orthodox medicine and the elitist organisation of which Hamer himself was part. In fact, Hamer's conversion to German New Medicine went hand in hand with bitter criticism of medical practices and protocols and also of the medical establishment's organisations and infrastructures, such as hospitals and psychiatric facilities. Such criticisms were juxtaposed to a spiritual and evangelical mission: to help the weakest, poorest and most unfortunate victims of a cruel and dehumanised medical system. For example, in his account of a visit to a psychiatric hospital, Hamer argued that what I saw there was dreadful and horrific. Patients, including young people with schizophrenia, who had dreams and hopes like you and I, were sitting in a closed facility like animals in a cage. Nobody knew what diseases these unfortunate people really had. Since that time, I had the strong desire to help those poorest of the poor. I believe that I have succeeded. (Hamer, 1987, p. 3)

Hamer's mission and conversion is consistent with those of other prominent figures in the history of prophets. Think of the story of Siddhartha, born into a wealthy family as a prince but moved by the world's suffering to give up his wealth for a life of poverty and help people find the true path to spiritual balance. Similarly, Hamer gave up his wealthy and authoritative role in orthodox medicine to help those in need. But, once again, this religious conversion conflates with a radical change in scientific practice, leading Hamer to a new vision regarding the role of technology in medical practice. Notably, Hamer's redemption from orthodox medicine went hand in hand with a shift from a hyper-technological job to a medical practice that excluded most medical artefacts and technologies. The founding narrative recounts that before his conversion to 5BLs, Hamer was famous for patenting and selling innovative surgical instruments. Once redeemed from cold allopathic medicine, he was to use medical instruments—for example, X-ray machines—only to demonstrate the validity of his theories, while rejecting and condemning most of orthodox medicine's technological and pharmacological

applications.⁹ This paradigm shift led Hamer to condemn medical practices such as chemotherapy on the grounds that they interfere with the natural progression of diseases. This rejection of technocratic medicine resonates in the discussions and posts of the 5BLs community, both orthodox and more flexible. For the 5BLs community, on top of various criticisms of vaccines, chemotherapy and other specific technologies, the entire spectrum of allopathic medicine is also to be condemned:

The average man continues to throw down pills for high blood pressure, blood sugar, cholesterol, prostate, and a variety of other reasons, without having any knowledge of the substances and their real ‘usefulness’, out of sheer confidence. And he continues to undergo often humiliating and invasive examinations, performed with increasingly cold and sophisticated machinery, out of sheer confidence. (AT Blog post by 5BLs expert, 20 June 2020)

The conversion to 5BLs and rejection of the ‘cold and sophisticated machinery’ specific to orthodox medicine was followed by a long series of trips and experiences through which Hamer evangelised his medicine, triggering a powerful reaction from the scientific community which, according to the narrative, began persecuting him all over Europe:

In Chambéry and other places there were people coming from Spain and from Italy, you could see the queue of patients on three floors: and then he was convicted of illegal practice of medicine, you know? I witnessed all this process, and I saw how nobody listened to him. Eventually, they tried to kill him: he has a bullet hole in the windshield of the car. They tried to intern and lock him in an asylum. And, so, in short, my belief was at that time that Hamer was slandered, also because he had a view of the whole scientific world that was appealing to his findings, saying that they were Jewish Masonic lodges. (Interview with 5BLs expert)

The persecution of Hamer, like those of religious prophets such as Christ or Jeremiah, turned into a series of official and exemplary

⁹In particular, German New Medicine is against chemotherapy as a cure for cancer and also condemns the use of various forms of analgesics (particularly morphine) because they interfere with mental processes and are dangerous to patients’ health.

condemnations. Hamer was jailed, colleagues from various countries criticised and publicly condemned his earlier work and he was disbarred from the medical profession and attacked by the mainstream media, especially in Italy. The boomerang effect of this multipronged attack is that today, according to orthodox GNM followers, medical experts should follow Hamer, despite the risks involved:

From the outside, one practically expects that the system to which one belongs by duty, and with which one does not interact, must at some point implode. Hamerian doctors must ask to be disbarred and get out of the system to be honest with themselves. (Blog post by 5BLs expert 20 June 2020)

Furthermore, Hamer's conversion, subsequent persecution and consequent pain and suffering make the scientist/prophet extremely 'human', suggesting that anyone, not only scientists and doctors, can change their minds about health and medicine—irrespective of their age—and embrace the 'truth' revealed by the biological laws.

4.4.3 Exile, Death and Commemoration

Certain prophets' narratives end with a death penalty. When Hamer was persecuted, some members of the 5BLs community even went as far as to hope for such an end. Again, recalling the life of Galileo, one member of the community claimed

Even Galileo was targeted for his discoveries and yet it is still the earth that revolves around the sun. If we want to get to the juice, indeed, at the moment of the squeeze we discover that it is still 'love that moves the sun and other stars'. Why don't they just kill him and end this for good? I think the power that would create a martyr of this magnitude is truly infinite. (Posted by 5BLs member on Facebook group 12 December 2016)

However, Hamer was never killed. The last part of his biography led him to another prophet trope, his lonely exile in Norway to take refuge against all the trials, journalists and other potential persecution from the European scientific establishment. Soon, Hamer's home in exile became

a place of pilgrimage and the followers of German New Medicine attempted on various occasions to reach out to the prophet, meet him and listen to his truth-speaking voice live. It is no accident that Hamer interviews during his exile, some of which are still available on YouTube, have become key social media content shared by the members of the 5BLs community. Even today, the followers of German New Medicine frequently discuss, re-post and comment not only on Hamer's medical and scientific thought but also his incredible ability to foretell the future, as with the dangerous and elitist project that eventually led to the pandemic vaccination campaign.

The scientist/prophet in exile must be met, touched and listened to by his followers, and this is exactly what three young members of the 5BLs community did when they embarked on a long trip to Hamer's house in Norway the following manner:

We are three friends, three colleagues, three scholars who have decided to draw from the source, the fundamental, the essential substrate, the energy behind the discovery. [...] The target is Norway, the target is a doctor, or rather, The doctor. I'm talking about Dr Hamer himself. [...] I want to give this diary a magical and mystical note, as this journey has been and will be, magical and mystical. We are so grateful to Dr Hamer that despite the complexity of the situation we will pay visit to him without knowing if he will open the door. But we will meet him, despite all the obstacles ahead, we are too determined. (From the diary *A Discovery Journey to the Source*, published on 5BLs Facebook groups)

The last mass pilgrimage to Hamer took place in July 2017. On 2 July Hamer died of a stroke and recordings of his funeral on 14 July 2017 show hundreds of people attending a magnificent event whose ritual solemnity and sacredness were enhanced with flags, choruses and testimony. After his death, Hamer became both GNM and the wider 5BLs community prophet and martyr. Every year, on 2 July, members of the 5BLs community share Hamer's picture on social media accompanied by the words 'Thank you Dr Hamer',¹⁰ and prayers and comments on their

¹⁰ *Thank you, Dr Hamer* is also the title of the most widespread and prominent Italian book about GNM.

founder's greatness, goodness and profound kindness and humanity. Once again, in this ritual, the prophetic and mythic science narratives conflate, as users' posts like the one below show:

Ryke Geerd Hamer (Mettmann, 17 May 1935–Sandefjord, 2 July 2017)

Man, Doctor, Genius, Martyr.

(Posted 2 July 2021 by 5BLs expert on a Facebook group)

This moment of commemoration has a twofold meaning. On one hand, the community congregated around its founder, commemorating him for his gift of the 5BLs. At the same time, as Marcel Mauss argued in his anthropology classic (Mauss, 1990), every gift brings with it the donor's identity and his human values. Commemorating Hamer's death serves both to give the community cohesion—it is a ritual of communitarian reunion—and facilitate the sharing of values and attitudes and a shared struggle against the status quo. Like Hamer, 5BLs followers have a mission to accomplish—to assert their right as human beings to return to nature, follow its rules and oppose elitist control over health and medicine practices by a small number of cold actors and technocratic institutions.¹¹

4.4.4 Schism and False Prophets

Prophets' biographies generally discuss their struggles against those who attempt to mimic and overturn their teachings. False prophets are presented as impostors or traitors who distort the 'word of God', as in Catholicism's apocryphal gospels. This kind of struggle for the truth is also visible in certain scientific controversies, particularly when scientists and inventors dispute their origins and empirical proof.

In certain cases, false prophets find their own followers who launch a new version of the cult, thereby provoking a schism that splinters the original community. Within the 5BLs framework, false prophets are guilty of three major sins: misinterpreting or mixing the laws with other

¹¹ On this topic, see Stefano Crabu's chapter in this book.

false claims; portraying themselves as new prophets, usually overshadowing the true prophet Hamer; enriching themselves with the sacred word and misappropriating the biological laws from their collective ownership.

Towards the end of Hamer's life and after his death, a number of adepts decided to establish their own schools and training programmes, triggering an internecine struggle within the community. Hamer himself disavowed a few of his pupils, particularly in Italy.¹² For example, in a letter to the members of the first Italian 5BLs association named *Associazione Leggi Biologiche Applicate—Association of Applied Biological Laws* (ALBA) Hamer wrote,

I want to have nothing more to do with the superiors of ALBA, who have betrayed me, the German New Medicine, and deceived our patients (by 'superior order?'). [...] I consequently formally forbid ALBA executives, to defraud me and all patients in my name and under the banner of the German New Medicine. (Letter from Hamer to the members of ALBA, 16 March 2007)

Although the movement's founder/prophet has never been questioned as such by any associations or training schools promoting the biological laws, three sub-groups relying on Hamer's work but with various degrees of flexibility can be distinguished. The first, and probably the most apocryphal, of these, and also the largest, is made up of people who rely only partially on the 5BLs—for example, adding and mixing the contents of GNM to allopathic medicine or to other approaches such as Chinese traditional medicine and homeopathy, among others. For these people, Hamer is one of many charismatic figures who have contributed to individuals' emancipation from a monolithic and elitist vision of medicine and science.

The second can be labelled progressive and is led by a series of 5BLs experts, most of whom have a research background in fields such as psychology and alternative and/or complementary medicines. This group, like most scientific communities, aims to promote Hamer's discoveries and combine the 5BLs with other approaches, whilst retaining 5BLs as

¹²Hamer condemned one of his pupils in particular. The dissemination of false prophets here conflates with another recurring trope of religious stories: the betrayer, the Judas.

the cornerstone of medicine. Some of these figures—many of whom have renamed GNM, thus hiding Hamer's name from their promotional campaigns—claim that GNM, like science, needs to be explored further. Some of the progressives have been bitterly criticised by other followers of GNM, mainly on the basis of accusations that they are attempting not only to appropriate 5BLs but also to make money from it:

There are people who have based their wealth, their income, on the use of this information. (Sighs) Which is ok, it's not wrong to want to make money or create an economy around this thing; however, what I regret is not seeing anything given away. Nothing freely donated. That is, the five laws are a heritage of nature, they are not a copyright. They are not a patent! They are not patentable. It's like wanting to patent gravitation, you know? I mean gravitation is gravitation. Whether you are walking or flying, there is always gravitation. And it's not patentable, so why do you keep it for yourself? All for yourself? I don't understand that. (Interview with 5BLs expert)

The third group can be labelled the orthodox group—that is, those who trust and follow only Hamer's first-hand writings and lessons. This group generally criticises false prophets, particularly those who attempt to 'update' the 'already perfect' GNM:

There are two methods of spreading the GNM: in one we talk about the 5BLs, we never go against official medicine (on the contrary, the GNM integrates...), the 5BLs (which have no therapy) are mixed with the most disparate alternative 'therapies', and very little (practically never) is said about Hamer. And in this modality, the new gurus are created, those who 'know', who 'save you', and who are protected by the adepts in a stupid and childish way [...]. It is the same modality of the patient-doctor relationship in official medicine. In the second method, we talk about Hamer's medicine, we talk about the propaganda, the lies, and the idiocy of the official medicine; we do not mix the GNM with anything else because there is no need for that, because the SBS programs are already a therapy—the therapy of nature. (Blog posted by 5BLs expert on 20 September 2020)

This dispute between adepts and false prophets notwithstanding, the prophet and great scientist trope that is the cornerstone of GNM contributes to the very survival of this approach. The Hamer founding narrative ensures that the 5BLs are always discussed, reinterpreted and, in certain cases, questioned and updated. In this regard, rather than generating a paradigmatic shift in the 5BLs community the schism led only to a partial evolution in its genealogy, thereby widening its potential audience into new types of followers.

As one of its experts has argued, the most important schism in the 5BLs community in Italy notwithstanding, the biological laws will never disappear:

Five minutes after the advent of all the greats of the earth, the most disparate truth-claiming groups were formed within the very core of innovative thinking. Thus Christ's birth was followed by that of the Catholics, Protestants, Calvinists, Orthodox, Lutherans, Mormons [...]: all claiming to have the best God. [...] So, we have a God for Muslims, for Orientals, etc. [...] So it happens a little bit to all currents of thought. [...] As far as Hamer's findings are concerned, I feel particularly calm, because biological laws do not give a damn about internal divisions and, since they are laws that have always existed and will always exist, they fortunately continue to apply as natural processes. (Trupiano, 2015, p. 284)

Overall, the truth of the 5BLs will always prevail in any forms of schism. Just like scientific and religious myths, scientific truth and holy truth go hand in hand. The comparison with religious systems here is not coincidental: like God, the laws of nature survive any kind of 'truth-claiming groups', and false prophets cannot even scratch the surface of the truth.

4.5 Between Us and Them

The archetypal Hamer story, and the melding of mythic science with prophets, is a clear example of the contribution a founding narrative can make to the creation, stability and preservation of an RKC over time. In this narrative, ingenuity, spirituality, epics and sacredness are mixed up

together, following tropes regarding scientific achievements alongside religious contents, rituals and internecine conflict between the community's followers. On one hand, the power of such narratives lies in their shareability and familiarity, in other words, its set of recurring patterns, metaphors and figures which constitute the building blocks of epics and religious texts worldwide. On the other hand, additional intricacy, complexity and concurrent forms of resistance within the 5BLs community to external epistemologies go hand in hand with the quality, recognisability and solidity of its founding narrative regarding its scientist/prophet Hamer.

Simultaneously, other communities such as Stop 5G, Alkaline Water and the Pro Vax Choice community also have their own founding narratives and martyrs. However, these communities often recall their founding fathers, martyrs and key anecdotes in a more functional manner, depending on the struggle under way or the enemy targeted, as in the last pandemic. Unlike transitory martyrs (e.g. De Donno during the pandemic), founding fathers are heroes and, simultaneously, martyrs representing a common mission to revolutionise not only science, health and medicine but also politics and culture. In this regard, the 'us' and 'them' dichotomy is summed up by these characters and their biographical journeys, thereby also leveraging another recurring prophetic narrative trope—millennialism. Notably, founding fathers (and very rarely mothers) and legendary scientists—such as Galileo Galilei and Giordano Bruno—often do not achieve their goals. Rather, they anticipate and contribute to a long-term achievement that can be either a full 'evangelisation' of society or, more often in RKC, an apocalypse, a final judgement, in which those who 'know' or have learned 'the truth' will be saved. Whilst the words they use may vary contemporary RKC prophets and leaders recursively share a common philosophy: 'As far as we know, our community will survive, while they will eventually pay or perish'.¹³ In a

¹³ This is a rhetoric characteristic not only of scientific and religious beliefs but also of conspiracy theories and populist narratives. In a sense, in RKC as well as in science-related populism, the religious discourse revolving around the final judgement, according to which 'those without sin will be saved', intersects the resistance rhetoric found in political movements (e.g. partisan movements) and according to which the final liberation of the people will depend not only on an 'act of faith' but also on a daily struggle for survival or, in other words, on a constant act of 'resistance'. The fact that the social world of refused knowledge communities appears to subsume religious beliefs and political views into a single system of thought and belonging certainly requires further analysis and empirical research, from both sociological and historical perspectives.

motivational post at the beginning of the pandemic, the most prominent Italian magazine on the 5BLs claimed:

The crisis is not now, the crisis will not be later: think about it, the crisis started long before this phenomenon. We recognised it but we always gritted our teeth to adapt and survive and not only in economic terms. Before our life was survival not life, now our life is an opportunity to start living again, to change how our world works. Not with manifestations but by individually raising our vibrations. If we allow ourselves to transcend the manifestation of current reality and keep our new reality intentions for the future alive, on a daily basis, we have the ability and all the necessary talent to create it. The ‘how’ will present itself at the right time along our way with new opportunities, new ideas and new actions which have never been tried before. If you are listening to this, it is because you have already set off on your personal path, also thanks to the five biological laws. Now there is nothing you can do because you have already acquired the tools, and earned them with the sweat of your brow. (Posted on 5BLs Magazine on 18 April 2020)

As this quote shows, the pandemic amplified millennialism’s discursive presence as one of the most recurring tropes in RKC’s and several religions worldwide (Lynch et al., 2021; Murru, 2022). Notably, the ‘us and them’ dichotomy is also a demarcation between those who believe in the inner eschatology of their scientific, but also cultural and religious, paradigms and those who will be condemned for following the ‘false prophets’ of dogmatic science. Founding narratives, the martyrdom stories, prophecies of a future in which orthodox science will be overturned by a pure and human-centred science—these are all part of a common action plan designed to separate RKC’s off from the rest of society, not only in scientific but also in shared belief terms and, in turn, of political views and everyday behaviours. As Claude Levi-Strauss argued in his seminal study (2013), myths are designed to resolve the inner contradictions and uncertainties of a specific society or community. Overall, the understanding of the values and the exquisitely political meanings of RKC mythical systems will not merely serve to bring down the refused knowledge ‘house of cards’ (i.e. revealing its ‘false’ myths). Such understanding is rather essential to shed light on what the house is built on, and also to explore the vulnerabilities, inadequacies, contradictions and communicative biases of contemporary science and of scientific narratives.

References

- Allchin, D. (2004). Pseudohistory and pseudoscience. *Science & Education*, 13(3), 179–195. <https://doi.org/10.1023/B:SCED.0000025563.35883.e9>
- Bory, P., Giardullo, P., Tosoni, S., & Turrini, V. (2022). ‘We will multiply the fires of resistance’: The catalysts of dissent against institutional science and their interplay with refused knowledge communities. *Public Understanding of Science*, online first, 1–18. <https://doi.org/10.1177/096366252211135>
- Campbell, J. (2008). *The hero with a thousand faces*. New World Library.
- Cavaillon, J. M., & Legout, S. (2022). Louis Pasteur: Between myth and reality. *Biomolecules*, 12(4), 1–22. <https://doi.org/10.3390/biom12040596>
- Crabu, S., Picardi, I., & Turrini, V. (2022). Refused-knowledge during the COVID-19 pandemic: Mobilising experiential expertise for care and well-being. *Science as Culture*, 32(1), 132–155. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09505431.2022.2138309>
- Eliade, M. (1963). *Myth and reality*. Harper & Row.
- Flichy, P. (2007). *The Internet imaginaire*. MIT Press.
- Hamer, R. G. (1987). *Vermächtnis einer neuen Medizin*. Amici-di-Dirk-Verlag-Ges, Malaga.
- Jasanoff, S., & Kim, S. H. (Eds.). (2015). *Dreamscapes of modernity: Sociotechnical imaginaries and the fabrication of power*. University of Chicago Press.
- Latour, B. (1987). *Science in action: How to follow scientists and engineers through society*. Harvard University Press.
- Lessl, T. M. (2011). *Rhetorical Darwinism: Religion, evolution, and the scientific identity*. Baylor University Press.
- Lévi-Strauss, C. (2013). *Myth and meaning*. Routledge.
- Lynch, R., Sturm, T., & Webster, J. (2021). Apocalyptic futures: Morality, health and wellbeing at the end of the world. *Anthropology & Medicine*, 28(1), 1–12. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13648470.2021.1888548>
- Mauss, M. (1990). *The gift*. Routledge.
- Mede, N. G., & Schäfer, M. S. (2020). Science-related populism: Conceptualizing populist demands toward science. *Public Understanding of Science*, 29(5), 473–491. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0963662520924259>
- Mosco, V. (2005). *The digital sublime: Myth, power, and cyberspace*. MIT Press.
- Murru, M. F. (2022). QAnon and its conspiracy milieu: The Italian case. In H. Eslen-Ziya & A. Giorgi (Eds.), *Populism and science in Europe* (pp. 163–184). Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-97535-7_8

- Natale, S., & Bory, P. (2017). Constructing the biography of the web: An examination of the narratives and myths around the Web's History. In N. Brigger (Ed.), *Web 25: Histories from the first 25 years of the world wide web* (pp. 29–42). Peter Lang.
- Ortoleva, P. (2009). Modern mythologies, the media and the social presence of technology. *Observatorio (OBS) Journal*, 3(1), 1–12.
- Ortoleva, P. (2019). *Miti a bassa intensità: racconti, media, vita quotidiana*. Einaudi.
- RECOVERY Collaborative Group. (2021). Convalescent plasma in patients admitted to hospital with COVID-19 (RECOVERY): A randomised, controlled, open-label, platform trial. *Lancet* (London, England), 397(10289), 2049.
- Tomasi, M. (2021). Populism, politics, and science in the midst of the pandemic. *Tecnoscienza*, 12(2), 145–154.
- Trupiano, C. (2015). *Grazie dottor Hamer*. Macro Edizioni.
- Walsh, L. (2013). *Scientists as prophets: A rhetorical genealogy*. Oxford University Press.
- Zakariya, N. (2017). *A final story: Science, myth, and beginnings*. University of Chicago Press.

Open Access This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons licence and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons licence, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons licence and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.

