'Localised' and 'unlocated' contemporary legends and their function on the Greek internet

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Abstract

Contemporary legends tend to function as a way of sustaining prevailing manners and dominant social norms. Thus, they are situated near the time and place of the narrative action. By connecting to a given known place – that is, by being localised – they promote a sense of plausibility.

Nevertheless, amongst the legends found on Greek internet, few link the narrated event to a specific location. Most of the known legends are transmitted with no spatial and temporal reference at all. Having lost the connection to specific places, they become, therefore, 'unlocated'. In fact, most of the acknowledged contemporary legends circulating on the Greek web are usually depicted as terrifying incidents that happen to random people at unspecified times and locations.

What does the loss of locality entail for the function of the genre if it was one of the key elements that turned modern legends into possible and plausible stories? Tales? How do they seem to function online? Do localised stories still exist? And if they do, does locality enhance the function they already have or does it eventually lose its impact?

Keywords

contemporary legends; locality; Greek internet; digital folklore; scary stories

Llegendes contemporànies adaptades culturalment i internacionalitzades i la seva funció en la internet de Grècia

Resum

Se sap que les llegendes contemporànies solen funcionar com a mitjà per sostenir les maneres imperants i les normes socials dominants. Així, se situen a prop del moment i el lloc de l'acció narrativa. En connectar-se a un lloc conegut determinat, és a dir, localitzar-se, promouen una sensació de plausibilitat.

No obstant això, entre les llegendes que es troben a la Internet grega, poques històries relacionen l'esdeveniment narrat amb un lloc concret. La majoria de les llegendes conegudes es transmeten sense cap referència espacial i temporal. Després d'haver perdut la connexió amb llocs concrets, esdevenen, per tant, «no localitzades». De fet, la majoria de les llegendes contemporànies reconegudes que circulen a la xarxa grega solen ser representades com a incidents terrorífics que succeeixen a persones aleatòries en moments i llocs no especificats.

Què suposa la pèrdua de la localitat per a la funció del gènere si va ser un dels elements clau que va convertir les llegendes modernes en històries possibles i versemblants? Contes? Com sembla que funcionen en línia? Encara existeixen històries localitzades? I si ho fan, la localitat millora la funció que ja tenen o finalment perd el seu impacte?

1. The meaning of space and place. Why locality is important for the function of contemporary legends.

Traditional and contemporary legends are linked to reality in an attempt to create a plausible reconstruction of it. To make this link to reality, they make specific references to historical figures or locations that are, to some extent, verifiable. In order to function as a means of disciplining cultural groups, as defined by Dundes (1980: 6), legends describe situations that are perceived as important, experienced, or even potentially possible at some point in the lives of both narrators and listeners (Smith 1997: 492). In this way, the receivers of the message can connect to it, identify with the central characters in the story and their suffering, which is perceived as a warning about their own actions.[1] To make this function possible, the narrated event is delimited to the location and time of its transmission, creating the conditions of appropriation by the group in which it circulates (Pettitt 1996: 7-14). Hence, the narrated event is nearly always related to a specific location that is recognized or known to the group, regardless of what the narrated event is about. Thus, the main features that have been attributed to the genre, based on its definition and the theoretical discussion that has arisen, are the "where" and "when" of the reported events: that is, the space and time of the narrative (Pettitt 1995: 96). In this paper we are going to focus on the location of the contemporary legends under consideration. We will try to highlight their locality and the ways in which it tends to be adjusted to the function of the genre on the internet.

Space is not a natural phenomenon; rather it is a man-made concept which strongly reflects the social context in which it is created.[2] In brief, experience is what transforms space into location.[3] Hence, people's actions are 'registered' in the space and define the place. Therefore, the aspect of place[4] in the genre of contemporary legends must reflect the anxieties of modern people and provide information on present cultural conditions. After all, legends "have always lived in and grown out of living context" (Gunnell 2008: 14). That is, by incorporating familiar features, the story of the legend becomes acceptably plausible. Therefore, the warning conveyed by this legend – that if something happened once, it could happen again – is more easily accepted by the group members if the story alludes to an incident that happened within the group's social sphere. Eventually, as Gunnell (2008: 14) mentions, legends "are one of the features that turn 'spaces' into 'places'": that is, they have an effect on the way in which the environment they are told in is understood by the tellers and listeners that inhabit it. Of course,

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1 Of course, they were also being transmitted as a way of having fun in specific situations (for example, around the camp fire), but their main function according to scholars was political (Ellis, 2001: 64, see also Fine & Turner 2001: 17).

2 The concept of space is of great importance in Estonian folkloristics, where 'place-lore', a new concept that emerged in the 1990s, soon became a distinct field of study (Valk & Sävborg 2018: 9). On the concept of socially constructed space, place and landscape, see Giddens (1990), Hirsch (1995: 1-30), Lefebvre (1991), Augé (2009 [1992]), Hirsch & O'Hanlon (ed.) (1995), Basso (1996: 53– 90), Tilley & Cameron-Daum (2017). On the relationship between landscapes and legend, see Simpson (2008: 25-38), Gunnell (ed.) (2008).

3 On the relationship between space and place, see de Certeau (1984: 117).

4 On this topic and in relation to other genres of folk narrative, see Nicolaisen (1980: 14-18), Tucker (1980: 19-25).

there are several types of places. They can be familiar, homely or unknown, mysterious, or even dangerous. Places can become lived experiences and, as such, they can evoke different feelings (Valk & Sävborg 2018: 11).

Do the modern Greek legends that have been discovered and collected online maintain this idea of place and location, though? The genre has been recognized by Greek folklore studies rather recently (since 2005) and has received little attention from Greek scholars.[5] This has created a big gap in folk narrative genre research, because there are no records of the contemporary legend's spread through the years in Greece. But first, we must describe the research area before responding to this query.

2. Digital folklore: Internet as a folkloric field

Due to globalization and the speedy development of technology, particularly in the area of communication technologies, the modern world is characterized by the rapid and widespread dissemination of information. As a result, technology, and particularly the modern internet, has emerged as a promising field for the development of folklore and popular culture. Dégh (1994) argues that folk culture is a dynamic historical process that constantly re-examines the contemporary manifestation of traditional genres such as fairy tales and legends (e.g., in television commercials); thus, absorbed by technological innovations, they remain active. Folk culture evolves, adapts and incorporates new data from each era. Internet can be considered as a tool that facilitates the spread of folk and popular culture not only more widely – even globally – but also more quickly (Blank 2009: 9). The environment of technology in general, as well as the internet, seemed a promising field for the spread of contemporary legends, too (Blank 2007: 15-26).

Still, which part of internet's chaotic space are we going to examine? We have found and gathered the modern legends studied here on the 'localised'[6] internet, in this case the 'Greek internet'[7] . Nonetheless, on account of the globalized nature of the field and globalization per se, cultural items frequently cease to contain only the characteristics of a local tradition and instead follow the new path of a multimodal spread that is now global, due to increased mobility across national borders (Brednich 2001:7). This is also one of the first aspects discussed in this paper.

5 See Benekos (2006: 159-170) and Kouzas (2017: 363-381).

6 See McNeill (2009: 85-97), Gordon & de Souza e Silva (2011).

7 See Kakampoura & Nounanaki (2022: 46-78).

3. Contemporary legends on the Greek internet

As a result of our searches for contemporary legends on the Greek internet,[8] we found several stories that were similar in morphology, theme and content stories (for example, ghost stories, personal experience narratives and creepypastas). This study concentrates on those stories in the indexes collected by folklorists worldwide so that, in the absence of local guidelines, they can somehow tame the material and begin to make a collection of Greek contemporary legends. Using as our main guides the international bibliography and the respective motif indexes (Brunvand 1981, 1984, 2012, Smith 1983, 1986, Bennett & Smith [eds.] 2007 and many others), we attempted to locate similar narratives on the Greek internet. Additionally, to take into account the features attributed to the internet, we determined the 'Greekness' (locality) of the legends not in terms of spatial or temporal reference, but in terms of language. Several of the contemporary legends we have considered to be Greek explicitly mention their connection to foreign places but, even so, we regard them as Greek because this is the language they were actively disseminated in. One such example is *The Woman with the Torn Mouth*, in which the event depicted is located in a foreign country[9] (Japan). We shall discuss this in detail below.

Space references in Greek contemporary legends

49% ■ Reference to place (Greek or foreign)

51% ■ No spatial reference

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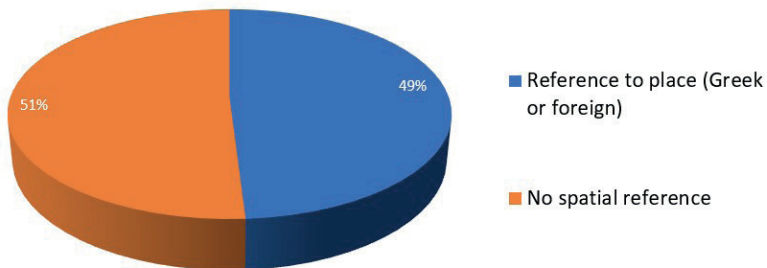
8 This paper discusses the legends collected from the long-term web research that has been carried out for the doctoral thesis of A. Nounanaki (2022), in the Department of Primary Education, National and Kapodistrian University of Athens under the supervision of Associate Professor R. Kakampoura. They were collected between 2013 and 2018 from the "surface web" and the most popular social media (Facebook, Twitter and Instagram). From the "surface web", articles about contemporary legends were collected and analysed from 103 websites, 59 open blogs and 12 open fora. Videos were also collected from 27 YouTube channels. In the social media accounts examined, 78 Facebook pages and groups, and 14 Instagram profiles were located, but no results found on Twitter.

9 This legend is about a samurai's cheating wife. Her husband punished her by tearing her mouth from ear to ear with his katana sword and cursing her never to die. She is still wandering in the world asking for acknowledgment of her beauty from passers-by and killing those who do not find her attractive after she has shown them her horrific scar. See "The Slit-Mouthed Woman" in Brunvand (2012: 345-347).

It is a given that contemporary legends have fluid morphological features when transmitted orally. Nevertheless, in their digital dissemination, the way they are transmitted through "copying and pasting" is crucial because it seems to limit the creation of variations. Only a few different versions of the stories are found in those collected from the Greek web; most of the stories are reposted by copying and pasting. Therefore, this catalogue contains 102 stories that appear in the same words every time. The primary factor that distinguishes the stories is their locality. Some of them (49%, see below) specifically allude to a given space – Greek or foreign – while others, even narratives with the same fundamental motif, were found to have no reference to any space at all (52%). This lack of reference to a place is one of the central features of the contemporary legends collected from the internet.

The internationally known contemporary legends found on the Greek internet are 'The Vanishing Hitchhiker' with four localised variants (which are 'The Apparition of the Penteli Mountain",[10] 'The Soldier and the Girl',[11] 'Maria'[12] and 'The Girl'[13]), 'The Boyfriend's Death' with three variants (one local version the 'Ravisher of Sheikh Sou Park',[14] one located in a foreign place – France –[15], and one with no

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10 The Penteli Mountain is one of the mountains around the city of Athens. Although the city has grown to such an extent that it now almost reaches these mountains, until the 90s they were considered to be so remote, there was no reason to drive through them. This might have been the reason why the story of a ghostly apparition has been set there. Legend has it that in the early 60s after breaking up with her fiancé, a girl committed suicide by jumping from the mountain of Penteli. She is said to wander around the mountain after 8 p.m. looking for her partner. She is described by locals who live in the more remote places, as well as drivers who were just passing by, as a tall woman with long blonde hair and a lovely [or gentle or sweet] face. They also claim that they have seen her stop passing cars and ask the drivers to take her to her fiancé. Drivers who are willing to give her a lift do not have to drive her for long as just a few meters further on, she asks to be dropped off and says that this is the place she was killed. Alternatively, she asks to be dropped off and then simply vanishes from the vehicle.

11 A young soldier on duty on a Greek island lends his jacket to the local girl he is dating. He goes to her home to pick it up, only to find out that the girl is long dead and he finds his jacket on her grave.

12 Two young men were on their way to a festival in a village. As they were walking, they met a very beautiful girl, Maria. She asked them where they were going and decided to go with them. On the way back, Maria was cold and one of the young men gave her his raincoat. They took her to her house and Maria told them to return the next day to get the jacket back. The next morning the young man went to the girl's house and an old woman in black clothes opened the door. The young man asked to see Maria, but she told him that her daughter Maria had been dead for years. Together they went to the cemetery and the woman showed the young man Maria's grave. On it there was the young man's coat.

13 Same story with the soldier and the girl, only this time it involves a journalist meeting a girl in a bar after he has covered an event in a small village. The girl leaves her jacket in the car, the journalist tries to return it to her the next day and finds out that she has been dead for years. There are no details about who these people are or where the story took place.

14 This was the only serial killer who ever existed in Greece. He lived in the 1960s in Thessaloniki and was killing girls in the Sheikh Sou park. A story has been added to the real events, which is the contemporary legend known as the 'the boyfriend's death'.

What is interesting in all these variants is that the story loses its connection to the location.

15 In Paris in the 1960s, a young couple drove into the woods so that no one could see them. At some point the boy got out of the car. He was taking such a long time that the girl went

spatio-temporal specification bearing the title 'The Noose'[16]), 'The Roommates',[17] 'The Licking Hand', which is known with the title 'Not Only Dogs Lick',[18] 'The Kidney Heist',[19] 'The Choking Doberman', 'The Graveyard'[20] and several more.

Some of these legends take the same form as ones that are more internationally known,[21] while others are more oikotypical,[22] and can be considered to be local variations. The "Last Smoke" or "The Train Journey"[23] are two examples. This

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out to look for him, but she was frightened by a shadow in the wilderness. She quickly got back into the car and tried to leave. She heard strange squeaks from the roof. The car could not move because someone had tied it with a rope to a nearby tree. Getting out to see why the car was not moving, the girl realized that her boyfriend was hanging from the tree.

16 It is the same story, only there is no specification about the location: A young couple drove into the woods so that no one could see them. At one point the boy got out. He was taking such a long time that, the girl got out to look for him, but saw the shadow of a man and ran back quickly. After a while, she heard a sound and the girl decided to leave, but she could not because someone had tied the car to a tree with a rope. She tried again and then heard a scream. The girl got out of the car and saw her boyfriend hanging from the tree over the car.

17 Two girls, students, are sharing an apartment in the city (Athens or Thessaloniki). One night one of them goes out while her roommate stays home. When she returns, she enters her roommate's room in the dark to get something she needs. She goes back in again the next day, and finds her friend stabbed to death and a note: "Aren't you glad you didn't turn on the light?"

18 A girl is comforted by her dog licking her hand, because she is at home alone. She hears a weird sound only to find that it was caused by the dripping blood of her dog, who has just been killed. See "The Licked Hand" in Brunvand (2012: 375-376).

19 One night a boy was having a drink in a bar and met a very beautiful girl. After chatting for a while, they decided to leave and continue their evening at his house. When they got there, the girl asked him for a drink. The boy had one too. From that point on, he remembered nothing. All he remembered was waking up in a bathtub full of ice, while next to him was a telephone and a note: "Call immediately for an ambulance. We removed one of your kidneys!" This guy survived and is still alive, although he really does have a kidney missing.

20 Two friends challenged a third to spend a whole night in the cemetery alone and he had to stick a knife in a grave as evidence. The third friend accepted. The next day they found him dead next to the grave! It turned out that he inadvertently pierced his coat with his knife and died of shock, believing that the dead man had been resurrected. See Brunvand ("The Graveyard Wager", 2012: 274-275).

21 One such example is the contemporary legend 'The hairy-armed hitchhiker' (see Brunvand, 2012: 285-287), whose Greek title is 'The grandma-grandpa': A woman went to the parking lot where she had left her car. There was an old woman waiting for her and asked where she was going. The young woman answered that she was heading to Kifissia (an area in Athens). The older lady said she was heading to the same place and asked if she could give her a lift. On the way the young woman was surprised to see the old woman's hand was as hairy as a man's. The frightened woman intentionally ran into the back of the car in front of her and quickly got out to call the police. By the time the police arrived, the old woman had gone. While searching the car, the police officers found a bag on the back seat that belonged to the 'grandma' and inside was a kitchen knife and a rope.

22 See Hasan-Rokem (2016: 110-137).

23 This contemporary legend is about a couple traveling by train. The boy left the cabin for a beside an open window. The girl stayed inside the cabin, but she soon noticed that her boyfriend had been gone far too long and got up to look for him. The sight of her boyfriend made her scream. He had put his head out of the window to smoke, but a train going in the opposite direction knocked it off and his body hung there headless.

story falls into the broader category of 'Decapitated Riders and Drivers' (Brunvand 2012: 170-171),[24] which includes the motif of decapitation in a series of events.

Nevertheless even 'locality' has "degrees". This means that some stories are connected to very specific parts of the country, such as 'Davelis' Cave',[25] 'The house at 13 Gidogiannou Street',[26] and so on, while some refer more generally to the country, such as 'Female Students' ('Roommates') who live somewhere either in Athens or in Thessaloniki,[27] 'God Samaritan',[28] or the oicotype 'Black-Clad Woman of Evros',[29] but are still connected on some level to the given space of Greece. Some stories are connected to specific foreign places too: 'Alligators in

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24 Brunvand (2012: 171) links this urban legend to the effort of parents to warn their children about the dangers of traveling by car (or other means of public transport).

25 This is an actual cave in one of the mountains surrounding the city of Athens, where this very famous thief used to hole up in the late 19th century. Legend has it that somewhere in this cave, his treasure is still buried. In fact, it is said to be beneath the nearby small church and that the cross on top serves as a lever that would reveal a hatch and lead to the hidden treasure.

26 This story is about a deserted house in Amfissa, a small city in central Greece. According to the legend, it all started during the Second World War, when the house belonged to a very wealthy local man who had had an illicit affair with one of his maids. An unwanted pregnancy led to a heinous crime that was to stigmatize the house once and for all. Fearing the general outcry of the small community, the rich owner led the young pregnant woman to one of the basements of the house, where he hung her! Ever since the girl had been haunting the house.

27 This is a very general reference because these are the largest cities in the country and thousands of young people flock there to study, since they housed the largest percentage of university departments at least until 2000, when there was a considerable decentralization and schools were set up in different parts of the country.

28 Of course, not all contemporary legends are about the gloomy side of life; many also refer to funny or surprising incidents (Smith 1986: 15). The following is such an example: You stop on the street to help someone whose tire has burst and after a week you are sent a check for 100,000 euros. The man you helped was Latsis – a very wealthy local person – and he was paying you back.

29 This is a legend about a demonic figure appearing in a military camp in the area of Evros. Evros is the northwest border of Greece, where many such camps guard the borders of the country and make an immediate defence possible. So, this report is again very broad and general, but it is still connected, on some level, to reality.

New York's Sewers',[30] 'The Mothman',[31] and 'Black Volga'[32] from the USSR. Others have more arbitrary connections: 'The Boyfriend's Death', set in France and 'The Choaking Doberman',[33] in Australia. In these, the location is neither explicitly stated in the narrative nor supported by any compelling evidence.

The vast majority of the stories being shared on the Greek internet, however, lack any spatio-temporal information. Despite those mentioned above, there is a long list of legends that are not connected to any familiar person, space or time and are, thus, transmitted as something that once happened somewhere to someone. Examples of this type of legend are 'Check the Back Seat'[34] and 'Bloody Mary'.[35]

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30 The classic story about the alligator-filled sewers of New York. People used to flush their alligator pets down the toilets because they wanted to get rid of them. They survived, though, grew and lived under the city. See Brunvand (2012: 15-16).

31 This legend is attributed online in the following way: If you've seen the movie "The Mothman Prophecy" you, probably, know this strange creature that is said to have appeared in the small town of Point Pleasant. The mystery began in 1966, when two couples driving around the town, near a complex of large warehouses, noticed two large red circles in the shadows of the buildings, like eyes watching their car. The fame of the flying creature soon spread throughout the city. Every night cars would go to the spot to see the creature they had already named Mothman. Many reported seeing or encountering it, while visits by men in black and the unexplained mutilation of animals increased. The city had been plunged into mass hysteria and everything stopped when in 1967 the bridge connecting the city collapsed for no apparent reason and 46 people were killed. At times residents claim to see the flying shadow and to receive strange phone calls from voices speaking in an incomprehensible language. The investigation is still ongoing.
The connection of contemporary legends to movies will be examined shortly.

32 See Czubala (1991:1-3). A black car of the once legendary brand "patrolled" the streets of Warsaw in the 1960s with the grim goal of kidnapping children. According to the legend, the passengers in the car were senior Soviet officials. In the many versions of the story, children were used as sex slaves for the ruling Soviet class, as providers of human organs or even blood for the rich who suffered from leukaemia. Nothing has ever been proven, of course, but the legend lives on and reigns in Poland.

33 This legend has its origin in Sydney. One night a couple returned home and found their dog choking. The woman immediately took the dog to the vet. After a while the vet called and told them to leave their house immediately. Unaware of what had happened, the frightened couple left, and met a policeman looking for them. The policeman informed the couple that the dog had been choking on a finger and that the burglar must still be inside the house! Indeed, the thief was found unconscious in their bedroom.

34 A woman driving on a deserted country road at night was almost out of gas. She stopped at an open gas station, gave her credit card to the clerk to pay, but he told her there was a problem with it. She suspected he was lying, went inside the store and saw him locking the door. Terrified, she hit him and escaped. The clerk ran after her, but she had already left. So, he shouted: "Someone is hiding in the back seat!".
See "The Killer in the Backseat" in Brunvand (2012: 358-361).

35 This legend is attributed online in the following way: According to this legend, if someone stands in front of a mirror in a dark room and shouts "Bloody Mary" 12 times, starting at midnight, the scary face of a girl will appear in the window. It is the spirit of a girl, who was born with a deformed face and was accidentally killed when a stupid joke went wrong. (Many variations say that the spirit attacks, or even kills, the person who has called her).

4. Interpreting how locality emerges in online contemporary legends

Locality and its absence lead us to slippery speculation. We assume that those narratives that are connected to a place in Greece could have been actively disseminated at some point in the 'offline world'. However, we cannot assume that a narrative – e.g., 'welcome to the world of AIDS'[36] – has never been transferred as an actual event somewhere in Greece too. Still the only form in which this legend is found online is the following:

> Online rumours about AIDS-infected pins being left in public places like cash registers, theatre chairs, or buses have been going around since 1995. In fact, in 2000 there was another sick story about contaminated syringes being placed under the handles of gas pumps and even writing on them: "Now you have Aids".

This example may indicate that there were no previous major collections. But still, some of the stories, at least on the Greek internet, are not being transferred to familiar places, probably because they do not contain a familiar or recognizable framework. Two such examples are the case of 'The Choking Doberman' and 'The Old Man'[37] since they are set in houses. Even in rural areas (such as villages), apartment buildings have been the predominant form of housing in Greece since the 1960s. Since houses are primarily occupied by upper-class individuals who can afford the higher maintenance costs, it is difficult for the general Greek population to relate to the main characters in these stories.[38] The "Old Man" story also implies the existence of a front yard, which in the locals' collective fantasy is connected to the "American dream", rather than the Greek domestic way of life. Another example, 'The Babysitter', mentions an 'employee' for the children's care, who is usually young and whose services are requested only when needed. In Greece, 'nannies' appeared only rather recently or, if they existed in the past, they were quite limited because the 'task' of both the nanny and the babysitter was almost unquestionably assigned to the grandparents. So, rather than being

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36 See Henken (2002: 259-276), (2010: 7-11).

37 On a snowy night, a girl was sitting alone in the living room of her house watching TV, behind which there was a large window. At one point she saw an old man staring at her from the window. She panicked and called the police, but when they arrived, they found no one there, not even footmarks in the snow. The girl invited the policemen inside to thank them. Then they discovered the truth. There were footprints behind the couch! All the time the old man had been behind her, behind the couch, and she was seeing his reflection in the window.

38 Although nowadays some people do have houses, they could not possibly be so big that a stranger could live in them without the owners noticing, as happens in the legend "The Clown Statue": A girl babysitting for a couple calls them to ask if she can remove the clown statue, the one they had in the living room, because it scared her. The parents told her to hide the children and call the police because they did not have a statue and the children had been complaining that a clown was watching them while they slept. Eventually, it turned out, the "statue" was a homeless dwarf, disguised as a clown, and having nowhere to stay, entered the house, which was so large that he could easily avoid "unwanted encounters". When the police caught him, they found that he had been staying at this house for two weeks. The moment the babysitter entered the living room, in order not to be noticed, he pretended to be a statue.

believable situations, these stories were more easily seen as horror movie themes[39] because they do not relate to the local way of life.

Because of their ability to terrify users, who enjoy being scared,[40] contemporary legends consequently become part of horrifying online entertainment, similar to horror movies, which integrates a variety of stories. With reference to cinematic horror that works as a means of entertainment, Pinedo (1996: 17-31) claims that viewers enjoy horror movies because they know that what they see on the screen is not real and, therefore, cannot harm them. Elias (2008: 150-173) also points out that what people seek in their mimetic leisure activities is not to be released from tension, but actually to be subject to a certain kind of tension, a form of enthusiasm that is often associated with terror, sadness and other emotions they seek to avoid in their daily life.[41] People seem to look for this kind of entertainment on the internet as well, where it can be found in the form of short multimedia-narratives that also incorporate contemporary legends. This idea is supported by the way that movie scenes are often chosen to 'portray' these legends online, as a good story often becomes more popular when accompanied by audiovisual material (Blank & McNeill 2018: 11). Sometimes, this material is taken from films such as *Urban Legend* (1998) (figure 1), or others that have a similar theme as the legend: for instance, "The Clown Statue", which is usually accompanied by the clown[42] from the movie *It* (1990) by Steven King (figure 2). These depictions disconnect the story from a known place and a familiar victim and connect it instead to popular cinema and horror movies.

Screenshot from the movie *Urban Legend* (1998) which is identified with the theme of the urban legend "check the back seats" <http://news247.gr/eidiseis/psixagogia/humor/deite-toys-15-pio-gnwstous-astikous-muthoys.3493900.html>

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39 See e.g., the on-screen transfer of the legend "The Babysitter and The Man Upstairs", as depicted in the movie 'Urban Legend' (1998), the movie 'Fright' (1971), the first film to use the horror trope of an isolated babysitter who gets stalked by a madman, 'When A Stranger Calls' (1979), or even 'Halloween' (1978), 'Babysitter's Nightmare' (2018) and many others.

40 On the satisfaction of getting scared, see Twitchell (1985), Hills (2005) and Hanich (2010). The aesthetic paradox of turning horror into a form of entertainment was even touched on by Alfred Hitchcock in his 1949 article "Can Fear Be Pleasurable?" (Hanich 2011: 3).

41 On 'cinematic horror', see George (1982:159–79), Freeland (1995: 126–142).

42 For this 'cinematic' clown, see Cantor (2004: 283–304).

The movie clown who accompanies the urban legend "The clown statue"
<https://www.svouranews.gr/2013_09_27_archive.html>

Of course, when the stories are told orally, the narrator entertains the audience by deliberately trying to cause a particular feeling.[43] In the context of the internet, contemporary legends, are being transmitted along with other stories that function similarly (for example, dream narratives, "personal metaphysical experiences", metaphysical creature sightings, ghost stories),[44] in the same way and for the same reason. The stories offer a way of dealing with suppressed emotions that are not dealt with in everyday life, even though most users are aware they are not true.
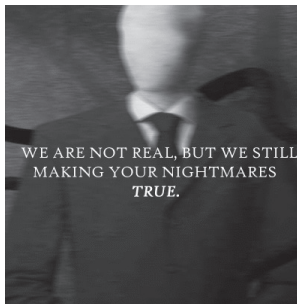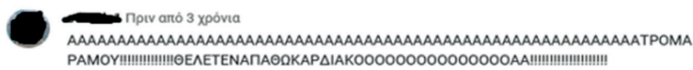

Gif referring to this kind of scary online entertainment.
<https://giphy.com/gifs/horror-creepy-black-zBabq1LYlexVe> [last retrieval 15/3/2022]

Thus, the narratives' online function demonstrates that their social role is weakening. Disconnected from any "true" social function generally attributed to contemporary legends which is enhanced by locality, these online narratives emphasise the satisfying feeling of terror they cause, confirmed by users who comment on stories (figure 4) and by the way they are retransmitted (mainly through the copy-paste function).

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43 These stories have been described by various terms, such as fabulates. They are essentially narratives developed and standardized by the narrator's desire to tell an entertaining story (Ellis 1997: 275).

44 See De Vos (1996), (2012).

Πριν από 3 χρόνια
ΑΑΑΑΑΑΑΑΑΑΑΑΑΑΑΑΑΑΑΑΑΑΑΑΑΑΑΑΑΑΑΑΑΑΑΑΑΑΑΑΑΑΑΑΑΑΑΑΑΑΑΤΡΟΜΑ
ΡΑΜΟΥ!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!ΘΕΛΕΤΕΝΑΠΑΘΩΚΑΡΔΙΑΚΟΟΟΟΟΟΟΟΟΟΟΟΟΟΟΑΑ!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

«Μου σηκώθηκε η τρίχα 😂😂😂😂😂😂»

«Γιατί αποφάσισα να δω αυτό το βίντεο την ωρα που είμαι μόνη μου στο σπίτι αααααα 😨😨😨😨»

«Ένα μεγάλο χειροκρότημα στους gloomy που κατάφεραν να με κάνουν να μην κοιμηθώ σήμερα»

«I got goosebumps», <https://cutt.ly/Nv4mioq>, "Why did I decide to watch this video while being alone at home aaaaaa 😨😨😨😨«, «A big round of applause for Gloomy who managed to make me not sleep today» <https://cutt.ly/mv4mwLD>

Users still find ways to reinterpret the stories, even though some of them are definitely reposts of the unchanged images or texts. These stories consequently 'survive' because they are constantly shared, users leave comments on their 'effectiveness', and they are constantly reinterpreted (Blank & McNeil 2018: 6).

Still, to serve as a fun fright, they do not seem to need to be located in a specific and familiar place. The connection to a specific place is even less necessary thanks to the internet, as even the "local internet" is designed for a diverse group of users who, despite having similar cultural traits, live in a rather large offline area. This means that the perception of the familiar is transformed into a subjective concept.

Even though electronic "meta-language" is used to embellish the rendering of the stories as "instant" transcriptions of oral ones, the narration tends to be textually and morphologically consolidated. In other words, these legends have acquired a consolidated body, a fixed narrative with a specific sequence of motifs. There are only a few distinct versions and no variations. Having said all that, there is an inevitable question: are these online stories still legends? This question comes up each time a new aspect of the genre is discussed. However, it is important to keep in mind that contemporary legends do not have just one meaning or function, but different ones both for all the people that get involved with them. This is because they are presented in different contexts. In other words, any narrative can be perceived or promoted as simultaneously conveying information, entertainment, and/or several messages. Additionally, these legends are constantly transmitted and constantly renegotiate matters of truth and believability,[45] even if they are presented as lies, hoxes, jokes, or, in this case, creepypastas and scary stories. This is because they tend to contain a defining truth about the familiar aspects of everyday life (Smith 1997: 494). The textual characteristics of the narration, its subject matter, the ease with which it can become a fun activity and its ability to transform to other narrative genres is the reason why it resembles other narrative forms (i.e., rumors, gossip, conspiracy theories). This aspect relates also to the narrator's belief in the subject of the story (Smith 1997: 494; Clarke 2008). Eventually, the point is not always to return to the question of what a legend is, but rather to turn our interest to how a legend is constantly reinvented.[46]

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45 See Dégh (2020: 55-68).

46 The very motto of ISCLR, as written in the magazine 'Contemporary Legend. New Series', seems to seek to sidestep this question and to promote fruitful dialogue about the active functioning of the genre in the groups in which it is spread. See Smith (1991: 1-3).

5. Conclusions

To summarise the above, Greek contemporary legends are considered to be all those stories that circulate on the internet in the Greek language, regardless of whether they refer to places in Greece or not. Some of them seem to have been connected, at some point, with places familiar to their audience, but most of them are 'de-framed' narratives that reinforce the distinction between stories as stories and stories as evidence for belief. Every localised version becomes local because they are connected with familiar places or concepts. They attach to familiar conditions and experiences of the group that can be linked to either the main character of the story or the situation, so that no one can doubt their connection. Legends that became popular because they were scary do not have this kind of connection. Those told "for laughs" may resemble folktales more than legends (Bennett 1988: 13-36) because they are presented as scary stories that allegedly happened sometime to somebody so the audience does not feel connected to them and just enjoy the story. Thus, they provide the user with the thrill of being scared, just as horror movies do. This means that there is less need to maintain those features that make the legend plausible. Since locality does not seem to be a precondition to let someone have fun, these legends become 'unlocated'.

In short, contemporary legends serve a particular purpose in the digital age. Along with other stories, multimedia posts and visualized media with a similar impact appear to be primarily intended to give internet users a "fun" fright. Of course, the attribution of believability in such stories is also found, but they are mostly considered to be scary stories to have fun with. Therefore, it seems that Greek internet users regard modern legends as "horror stories" (or creepypasta), which clearly provide terrifying entertainment. The fears they used to mirror have turned into just a frame of dread. Hence, these stories are no longer perceived as true experiences or as a way of disciplining people in modern social norms. As a result, they are no longer being located in familiar surroundings, since locality does not add to their purpose anymore. Still, this altering of function should be considered an evolution not a decline. These kinds of legend, as well as folk narratives in general, are alive: they draw on tradition, but evolve by adapting to the modern urban environment, and changing forms and functions through dissemination on media such as the internet.

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