



# Unleashing Scepticism: Panic Rumours and Philosophical Doubts

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## Abstract

The goal of the paper is to focus on the phenomenon of a “panic rumour” as an interpretation of a kind of philosophical scepticism, presented by Wittgenstein in his late work, which is coming out of our feeling of unknowability of the social world embedded in our form of life. I claim that the sense of unknowability of others (also referred to as scepticism in a sense V. Das and S. Cavell use it) emerges of confronting boundaries of one’s self and one’s humanity. Sceptical philosophy and violence are two examples of triggers that can unleash it to take a form of a philosophical doubt or a panic rumour. In a way that philosophical scepticism causes doubting everything and destroys every possibility of establishing a language game, panic rumours share the same characteristic of annihilating any context and parasitizing on language itself. That is why I suggest that philosophical doubt and panic rumours are similar in their conduct since both lack a particular context and are so vague, they can fit any context and spread destroying every other language game except their own.

**Keywords:** Veena Das; Stanley Cavell; Scepticism; Form of Life; Wittgenstein; Panic Rumour; Philosophical Doubt

In this article I would like to show how American anthropologist Veena Das is using Wittgenstein’s notion of the “form of life” to suggest that “philosophical scepticism” is an integral part of our everyday life and may manifest itself as a panic rumour. In its beginning I will explain how the sense of the unknowability of the social world and others which I also call in a Cavellian way the “scepticism” belongs to the human form of life. Here I describe how we construct our identity confronting the otherness, but also how realizing we are different makes us fragile towards sceptical arguments. So, living with others make us ourselves, builds our form of life and doubts its grounds at the same time by attacking our inability to see into each other’s mind (from the sceptical philosophical point of view). After that I will suggest that panic rumours described by Veena Das in her ethnographic work are similar to philosophical doubts and can be attributed to the human form of life generally.

As an ethnographer Veena Das emphasizes in her article on “Wittgenstein and anthropology” [1], the question of “how one comes to a sense of shared culture as well as one’s own

voice in that culture in the context of everyday life” is rarely anthropologically addressed [1]. If asked at all, it is mainly concerned with the rule-following issue, the question of boundaries and the problem of intersubjectivity. On contrary, the topic of subjectivity itself and its borders within a culture is being often ignored.

First, I would like to concentrate my attention on the topic of the importance of being a part of social world for construction of one’s self, which repeatedly appears in Wittgenstein’s early and later works. (I would also like to emphasize that working with so called “one Wittgenstein” and following the development of the concept of self and others from the early stage of “limits of my world” to the late Wittgenstein’s “farmer” allusion is highly important here) [2]<sup>1</sup>. The main reason why I’m dealing with the topic is that in my point of view it’s profoundly connected to the sense of

1 The concept was introduced by D. Stern to doubt the multiple Wittgensteins’ narrative [6]. As this is not the topic of my article, I will just assume this position and not argue for or against it.

scepticism which I will explain later.

The subject does not belong to the world, but it is a limit of the world, writes Wittgenstein in the *Tractatus* [3]. This Wittgenstein's claim has been often interpreted as an invitation to relativistic discussions on plurality of cultural and social worlds. In Das's opinion what is Wittgenstein proposing here is that the experience of being a subject is the experience of a limit or of boundaries of our world [4]. If the subject is also the boundary of the world, there is clearly no particular point in the course of my life that I can locate as the point at which my subjectivity emerges, she explains. Experiencing subjectivity through experiencing boundaries implies constant confronting something different, unknown lying outside our world. Feeling of unknowability of the social world is something which belongs to the ordinary immanently, claims Das. The similar idea, likewise based on reading of Wittgenstein, had been proposed by Clifford Geertz. According to him, our sense of subjectivity and identity depend on our encounters with foreigners or just others:

"The trouble with ethnocentrism is that it impedes us from discovering at what sort of angle, like Forster's Cavafy, we stand to the world; what sort of bat we really are" [5].

From the late Wittgenstein's point of view, being surrounded by other people sharing our form of life and language is crucial for our self-definition process. The argument of the private language shows that only by criteria of the shared language we are able to consistently identify and talk about ourselves [2]. "Foreignness does not start at the water's edge but at the skin's," Geertz writes [5]. What he means is that our ability to experience subjectivity and to understand ourselves is given through encountering social world and trying to understand others.

"The essential thing about private experience is really not that each person possesses his own exemplar, but that nobody knows whether other people also have this or something else. The assumption would thus be possible—though unverifiable—that one section of mankind had one sensation of red and another section another" [2].

We can't see into each other's mind and see if we mean the same thing by the word "red" – sceptical philosophers are right in that, but we just hope we do. Being a part of the human form of life means to Wittgenstein to experience successes and failures of the human communication and being aware of both possibilities since there is no certainty in a metaphysical sense. The thought experiment of the private language shows our fragility towards sceptical-metaphysical type of arguments. As Wittgenstein points out, it is logically possible that everyone around me is lacking

consciousness and is zombie-like automata and we couldn't prove otherwise, but words like "lacking consciousness" would lose their meaning, become nonsensical then:

"But can't I imagine that the people around me are automata, lack consciousness, even though they behave in the same way as usual? —If I imagine it now—alone in my room—I see people with fixed looks (as in a trance) going about their business—the idea is perhaps a little uncanny. But just try to keep hold of this idea in the midst of your ordinary intercourse with others, in the street, say! Say to yourself, for example: "The children over there are mere automata; all their liveliness is mere automatism." And you will either find these words becoming quite meaningless; or you will produce in yourself some kind of uncanny feeling, or something of the sort" [2].

In other words, we aware of not having the "last" argument for defeating sceptical threat and that's the idea we live with for our whole life. But falling for sceptical thesis means to fall for meaninglessness of language, ourselves and the world. This awareness of fragility of the social is described by Stanley Cavell as "living one's scepticism" (from now on I intend to use the term "scepticism" in a way Cavell uses it):

"To say that there is a scepticism which is produced not by a doubt about whether we can know but by a disappointment over knowledge itself, and to say that this scepticism is lived in our knowledge of others, is to say that this disappointment has a history" [7].

What Cavell interpreting Wittgenstein is trying to say, during our life in a social space we are being constantly confronted by situation of disability to express ourselves or to understand others. The main heritage of Wittgenstein's thought is that we are always in search for more exact concepts or criteria for using words, in short for something which can be objectively stated as a rule providing a guarantee of successful communication. But there is no such a rule and there cannot be one. It's just us trying to understand each other and sometimes failing which is also a part of the process of communication and living our form of life. Those failures as an unavoidable part of our life is this disappointment Cavell is talking about when using the term "scepticism".

## Self and Others

In this section I will argue that the sense of unknowability of the worlds comes from two sources: from boundaries of one's self in the context of the social world and boundaries of us as human beings.

It might be tempting to think that unknowability of the social world, Wittgenstein and consequently Das or Geertz are talking about, is the unknowability of other cultures or other language speakers or just others (in other words its focus is outside of our ordinary lives). On contrary, it seems to us that it has nothing to do with the sense of one's own subjectivity or profound everyday certainties like the "Everyone has consciousness" assumption. It's quite simple to sympathize with this kind of anthropological reading. But it doesn't seem to be the case. Let me explain my argument.

As Das notes, there is no essential asymmetry between what I know about myself and what I know about the others [1]. In fact, there is a quite good chance we do not know much about ourselves in a same way we do not know anything about others. We just speak of the former and the latter in a different way.

The differences between me and others are in the way I speak of them, basically are grammatical differences. Wittgenstein shows this in the example of the electrified ring: "Imagine several people standing in a ring, and me among them. One of us, sometimes this one, sometimes that, is connected to the poles of an electrical machine without our being able to see this. I observe the faces of the others and try to see which of us has just been electrified. —Then I say: "Now I know who it is; for it's myself." In this sense I could also say: "Now I know who is getting the shocks; it is myself." This would be a rather queer way of speaking. —But if I make the supposition that I can feel the shock even when someone else is electrified, then the expression "Now I know who..." becomes quite unsuitable. It does not belong to this game" [2].

The game of talking of myself is rather different than talking of others. But still we see from the private language argument that it's the social character of language that establishes ways of using words for sensations. So when we claim that we don't know what others have in mind when they talk of something, we also claim that we don't know ourselves. The unknowability of the social world simply leads to the idea of the unknowability of oneself. In other words to be able to produce speech that makes sense we need to believe several fundamental assumptions like "Everyone has consciousness", "Everyone experiences emotions and they are similar to mine" etc. assumptions. So the idea of unknowability of the social world is always present backstage, but is not normally in its active mode.

The second source of the sense of scepticism comes from the boundaries of human form itself. The otherness, and consequently the sense of unknowability, has been

emerging from being confronted by something outside of one's subjectivity, as well as outside of our humanity. Let's focus on the latter one by bringing a Wittgenstein's example of animals' feeling:

One can imagine an animal angry, frightened, unhappy, happy, startled. But hopeful? And why not? A dog believes his master is at the door. But can he also believe his master will come the day after tomorrow? —And what can he not do here? —How do I do it? —How am I supposed to answer this? Can only those hope who can talk? Only those who have mastered the use of a language. That is to say, the phenomena of hope are modes of this complicated form of life. (If a concept refers to a character of human handwriting, it has no application to beings that do not write) [2].

Wittgenstein's point is that we are not certain about animals having same emotions as humans but it's not crucial for our language at all. The thing is we speak of human form of life (as well as act) in one way and we speak of animals in another. With the help of language, we draw a line between us and animals in a same way we draw line between myself and others. Obviously, Wittgenstein does not claim in the quoted paragraph that to feel hope one should have language skills in a way a zoo psychologist would think about the matter. Rather that language grammar tells us what kind of objects hope is, how we speak of it as of a mode of our form of life. So, in the end only humans hope.

Such an agreement in the language we use and the way we use it is an agreement in a form of life, Wittgenstein notes [2]. This note is usually understood as an agreement in the notion of shared ideas and beliefs and has been often adopted by anthropologists to emphasize the importance of an essence of rule following and social conventions and makes a form of life synonymous to a culture.

Das is contrasting this approach with a "more spiritual" reading of Stanley Cavell. As she argues, if everything Wittgenstein meant by the form of life is "to dismantle the idea of isolated individuals using language", then the concept of the form of life does not offer us much [4]. Cavell suggests his own distinction between what he calls ethnological and or horizontal sense of form of life and its vertical or biological sense. The former captures human diversity in an anthropological sense based on the shared beliefs and ideas and is "emphasizing form at the expense of life" [1].

The latter refers to the distinction captured in the grammar of language itself. Das calls it a vertical sense of form of life, which is an interpretation suggesting the existence of limit of "what or who is recognized as human within a social form and provides the conditions of the use of the criteria as

applied to others" [4]. In other words, vertical interpretation introduces a disputation not only over what constitutes forms, but more important, over what constitutes life. When we speak of animals lacking hope, we also ask ourselves what exactly we mean by this world. Suddenly criteria for meaning of words "life", "hope", "love" etc. are blurred. "The blurring between what is human and what is not human shades into the blurring over what is life and what is not life," writes Das [4].

All in all, otherness is referring to both unknowability of other individual people's minds and the boundary of the human form of life itself. Therefore, being confronted by the unknown also means experiencing boundaries of humanity and encountering with the non-humanity and non-life at the same time. It means to start asking questions like "What would a human do or say?" At the same time, vertical and horizontal interpretations are not exclusive. As Toril Moi notes, the concept of the form of life is broad enough to include both interpretations, both biological and cultural features [8]. That means that our sense of subjectivity is being activated by interacting with both non-human reality and also with other people who are different from us (and that is literally everyone).

So, if we go back to our discussion of lacking asymmetry between knowing me and others, the feeling of unknowability of the social world is the feeling of the unknowability of myself as a persona and as a human. To doubt our understanding of others means to doubt understanding of ourselves, since, as Wittgenstein suggest, there is no essential difference between them, just a difference in a way of speaking. In other words, when we doubt others, instead of taking them as a part of our natural social state, we primarily doubt the language we think of the worlds and therefore everything else, the very way of human thinking and perception of the world.

### Rumours: Nowhere and Everywhere

In the previous section I concluded that boundaries of one's self and one's humanity can unleash a "global" doubt about being able to understand meanings generally, understand others and ourselves. What triggers such a scepticism? According to Das the sense of the unknowability of the social world is a part of human sociality "as it is embedded within certain weaves of social life" [9]. As it follows from the previous section, the form of life presupposes an existence of a community of different people whose sense of subjectivity is based on encountering with others. The social world itself is an environment where we are caught into illusion that thoughts of others are hidden for us, but not for them. That's what Cavell calls "living one's scepticism" with an emphasize on the word "living". By this he means being aware of it but ignoring it in the everyday life context. So, the shadow of

threat of a sceptical argument is always hanging above our heads, but it's not a language game yet.

Let's go back to Wittgenstein and see what he has to say about this. Although Wittgenstein thinks, that scepticism isn't normally present in our ordinary life, he gives us an exception which can throw some light on our inquiry– an example of one being indifferent to someone else's pain [10]. Similarly, by one of contexts, where the sense of unknowability of our social world is embedded, Das means "the context of normal suffering" [4]. Thus, suffering of others is a field where the problem of other's minds and an illusion of asymmetry between knowing me and others becomes most visible. It becomes a triggering point of scepticism. Watching someone being indifferent to others' pain is the first step in embracing an illusion of the gap between my feelings and feelings of others. An illusion of asymmetry between knowing myself and someone else becomes a sort of seed for scepticism, doubting liability of words and its criteria.

Although the detailed mechanism of violence triggering scepticism is itself an interesting topic, in this paper I would rather like to concentrate my attention on the outputs of scepticism being triggered. The result of this overwhelming doubt of words is something Das defines as a panic rumour and describes in a following way: "There is a withdrawal of trust from words and a special vulnerability to the signifier in the working of rumour and the exile of word under scepticism" [1].

An extended Das's research on this topic is presented in her book "Words and Violence: Violence and the descent into the ordinary" [4]. In her research, the anthropologist applies the notion of the "form of life" and scepticism being a part of it and triggered by extreme cruelties and unhuman violence taken place during the Partition of India and Pakistan and Sikh's massacre followed by the assassination on Indira Gandhi. In her book she describes a detailed example of Hindus spreading rumours about conspiracy Sikhs prior to the massacre on Sikhs had happened. Different strands of rumours were meant to "create a sense of vulnerability among the Hindus through the creation of an imaginary world in which the whole social order was seen as if it was about to collapse through a massive conspiracy on the part of the Sikhs, even though it was the Sikhs on whom the violence was being unleashed" [4]. Those are just few examples of them:

"There was massive violence against the Hindus in Punjab. Trains full of dead bodies were arriving from Punjab" [4].

"Sikh militants were planning to poison Delhi's water supply" [4].

“Sikhs were celebrating everywhere. They were dancing in the streets, distributing sweets. One man related to me that a Sikh colleague in his office had brought a box of sweets and given it to his Hindu colleagues, saying that he was consoling them because their mother was dead” (Ibid.).

The listed rumours are describing a Sikh as a non-human, featuring “him with traits of madness and demonic possession, hence the assumption that he was not worthy of being treated as *another with a face*” [4]. And although Das doesn’t claim that panic rumours caused violent events in the first place, they certainly “authorized them” [4]. What makes rumours so powerful?.

Rumour according to Das occupies a region of language with the potential to make us experience events, not simply by pointing to them as to something external, but rather by producing them in the very act of telling [4]. In this sense words are not taken as a mere message but also as an experience bringing the sense of “being controlled by the words one speaks or hears or sees rather than of controlling them” [1]. Why is that?.

There are several characteristics, Das describes, which give them the power to destroy an ordinary mode of life and to unleash the scepticism. They are also characteristics that can help to identify “panic rumours” in the first place.

First, as Das points out, the peculiar nature of rumours is based on its lack of signature giving it the stamp of an “endangered collectivity” [4]. If analysed through the “language game” terminology, a rumour cannot be called a part of a language game. Apart of language games, rumour lacks any context, it is impossible to tether it to an individual agent. Being cut off the source of the information or story told, it also lacks any time and place framing. The story itself is often vague, so one cannot identify whether it happened yesterday or few years ago, in the end it fits every context it is being told in:

“The aspect of rumour that has struck me most is that the words that are uttered do not belong to anyone in particular. In some ways the visage of the other that acquires shape in my mind because I have struggled with the singularity of this particular person as the other, struggled with what it means that he or she has a separate existence—this is what leads me to accept that our togetherness is still made up of things I will never fully understand about this person” [4].

Rumour’s correspondence to reality is unrecognizable, which makes of it a privileged mode of communication and constructs panic as its corresponding affect in this altered world. In other words, instead of being controlled

by certainties and grounds of a form of life, it takes control of them. This is what Das means by its perlocutionary force. On the other hand, she suggests, it lacks its illocutionary effect since it happens to destroy not only source of the information, but also any trustworthiness of convention. Rumours’ perlocutionary force shows how fragile may be the social world i.e. our form of life that we inhabit. Since human form of life is based on non-private social language and trust its users attribute to meaning of words of each other, paranoiac absence of trust can destroy it. Panic rumours lead to dismantling of relations of trust and once a thought of certain vulnerability is gained, the world is engulfed by the doubt. In word of Das, the withdrawal of trust from normally functioning words constituted a special vulnerability to the signifier, leading one to ways of acting over which all control seemed to have been lost” [4].

So, the second feature of a panic rumour is its perlocutionary force, partly resulted by the previous characteristic. People are made to act in a certain way, its capacity to build solidarity, and the overwhelming urge it prompts in listeners to pass it on to others [1]:

When you hear a rumour, you need to pass it on. Its spreading force is an essential grammatical feature, Das concludes. When talking of something spreading, disease comes in one’s mind. It is often said that something is spreading like an infection or like a tumour. This comparison seems precise for Das. Rumour stops being a communication medium or channel, it becomes “communicable, infectious, causing things to happen almost if they had occurred by nature” (Ibid.).

To sum it up, a panic rumour is a language game lacking any possible context by which it can be framed and in spite of missing the most important pieces of information it is still being reproduced and passed on further actors in a very high speed. Das’s comparison panic rumours with an infection is fruitful, since we can only identify the disease by both symptoms and result of tests. Also, panic rumours similarly spread in all directions infecting all language games, not only those ones directly concerned with the topic of a rumour. Speakers become suspicious of words and meanings itself.

Similarly, as in a case of an infectious disease, a panic rumour can be identified by watching the way it is being spread. The most obvious example of a panic rumour is a so-called urban legend. For example, in their research of soviet urban legends “Opasnyje sovetskie veshi” (Dangerous soviet things) A. Archipova and A. Kirzyuk define urban legends as a source of moral panic (referring to Erich Goode’s and Nachman Ben-Yehuda’s original term), when through spreading of a rumour a whole social group of people just agree on the source of danger instead of fact checking and

looking for facts [11]. They put the following example:

“...in 1950-1952 there was a rise of anti-Semitism in USSR, which eventually led to the Doctors’ plot case. But a year or two before that, stories are told in the Soviet country that Jews extract blood from children for rejuvenation, poison the water in schools and inoculate diseases under the guise of vaccines against tuberculosis, because they want to kill our children. In some places there are calls for reprisals and even pogroms begin”.

As we see in this example, panic rumours are vague in their description of events: they don’t mention concrete names, places or time, so one cannot provide a proof they are true or false. The second feature is their perlocutionary power Das was talking about. The rumour is not only being spread, it calls to act. The researchers call this phenomenon “ostension itself”, when “a person tells an urban legend or another folklore story not with words, but with actions” [11].

Finally, as we can conclude from Das’s s examples, it is not necessary that a panic rumour is based on untruthful information. Its central story might easily be based on a real event. Truthfulness or falseness of a source of a panic rumour is not essential at all, since panic rumours don’t contain the context they were born from. On opposite, they get rid of the context so they can fit in any language game whatsoever. The same conclusion can be found in Archipova’s and Kirzyuk’s study:

“An urban legend chooses an incident, and it doesn’t matter if it actually happened or not. The main point is that it could have happened. Thanks to numerous retellings in a clichéd form, an incident (which took place or did not take place in reality) begins to be perceived as a typical and repeated event” [11].

To summarize, scepticism is an integral part of our social life. If it is unleashed by violence, it takes a form of a panic rumour, which lacks its context and has a great perlocutionary force to spread on and destroy all other existing language games.

But there is also another way to unleash scepticism and it doesn’t (necessarily) involve violence. As Wittgenstein suggests, a sceptical philosopher can do the job just as well. In the next part of the article I’ll explore an idea of similarity between panic rumours and philosophical doubts.

### **Panic Rumours and Philosophical Doubts: The Similarity Case**

In the previous part of the article I’ve underlined few important characteristics of a panic rumour. In this last part

I would like to focus my attention on characteristic panic rumours and sceptic doubts have in common and why they seem similar to me.

But first let’s take a step back and remind ourselves how scepticism is born out of our form of life. It seems that when we speak of human form of life, we speak of something that people of different cultures share. To imagine a language means according to Wittgenstein to imagine a form of life [2]. Although we all use different languages, the main idea remains the same: with the help of our language we all “speak our minds”, so to speak. In other words, we speak out something we keep inside. That leads us to the thought that the problem or rather the illusion of scepticism is universal due to the symbolic essence of the language itself.

A bright example of how scepticism is a part of an everyday life is found by Das in the classical E. Evans-Pritchard’s opus magnum *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic Among the Azande* [12]. The Azande’s aphorism “One cannot see into a man as into an open woven basket” is referring to their belief that one cannot be certain that anyone is free from the witchcraft. Uncertainty about other’s mind is directly connected to the uncertainty of language. Someone’s words can be interpreted according to whether one is thought to be dubbed a witch or not. Since uncertainty of someone’s witchcraft is always a case, “Azande are always on the look-out for the double meaning in their conversations” [12]. According to Das, here we see how scepticism is attached to the ordinary everyday life through the idea of people being victims of language that could reveal things about them of which they were themselves unaware. Unleashed by any tragedy event it can make people be extremely paranoid about every word said in ordinary contexts.

Getting rid of hard criteria and being uncertain about other minds in the case of the Azande members is linked to a certain alienation from the language that one speaks, as if the language revealed either more or less than the words spoken, Das suggests [1]. According to her, speakers are always in a slight doubt of being “fooled” by the words they speak. In her view the idea of scepticism (or “threat of unknown”) is constantly embedded in our everyday life and is waiting to be unleashed by certain triggers. After it has been triggered everyday world gets the structure of paranoia. My fear of the other is transformed into the notion that the other is fearsome [4]. Everything is the subject of a doubt and nothing is certainty.

Now, why are panic rumours and scepticism seem so close to each other? First, the idea of speakers being corrupted by language and its malfunctioning (in an ordinary sense) can be referred to the cases of both philosophical

doubts and panic rumours. The theme of annihilation of the world ruled by panic rumours, or of finding oneself within the scene of world-annihilating doubt, both can be easily found in ordinary everydayness full of “temptations and threats of scepticism as part of the lived reality” [4]. Both panic rumours and sceptical philosophical doubts are not necessarily tied to big events, rather the difference between the events and the ordinary is seen by Das in terms “of the failure of the grammar of the ordinary” (Ibid.). By failure she means putting something ordinary into question, which both panic rumours and sceptical doubts do. People of the Azande tribe who tend to interpret ordinary communication practices in a witchcraft mode are exactly the case of the grammar being corrupted. In a similar way Hindus who are under influence of panic rumours see Sikhs as enemies and are always seeking for a hidden meaning of words said in everyday situations.

I suggest that this failure of the grammar of the ordinary, which is failure to use and understand words in its ordinary sense, is something shared by both sceptical doubts and panic rumours. Both are not grounded nor rooted in certain context therefore are not respecting rules of the ordinary language games.

Philosophical doubting, as Malcolm suggests, occurs only in case when there are no grounds or reasons for doubt and there isn't a question whether so and so is true [13]. An absence of reasons for doubting means there is no “investigation” which would provide a proof to stop doubting. There is no mode of inquiry, which is appropriate to conduct, to become certain on regard of a philosophical issue. When the grammar has failed, there is no way to persuade Hindus or Azande that they are wrong. In addition, since there are no grounds for doubts, but doubting is still the case, there are no certainties either. In other words, such doubting creates the only one language game which can be described as “nothing is certain” and it destroys all other everyday language games at once. In this case a doubt in its ordinary sense is senseless and it reminds more of a paranoia state of mind when no one and nothing can be trusted to.

In the same manner rumour's lack of signature gave it the perlocutionary force that brought a new form – not a form of life but a form of death – into existence, Das says. In a certain sense both panic rumour and unreasonable doubting could be described as signals of confrontation with the boundaries of the form of life in its horizontal reading. Doubting the world exists and spreading of panic rumours are have one thing in common, they both lie on “a site where we abdicate our responsibility towards words unleashing them from our criteria”, as Cavell describes [1].

## Conclusion

In this paper I show how instead of “translating Wittgenstein's ideas into anthropology and taking it as the opportunity for merely a new set of terms”, Veena Das introduces “the tones and the sounds of Wittgenstein's words” in her own manner [1]. Although Das is drawing from Cavell's interpretation of Wittgenstein, I'm convinced that Wittgenstein's method is deeply rooted in her inquiry.

According to Das, experiencing boundaries of our form of life through scepticism is an essential part of our everydayness. Basing on her ethnographic research she shows how panic rumour can be regarded as an expression of grammatical failure of the ordinary or as a threat of scepticism becoming real. In this paper I suggest that there are strong similarities between philosophical doubt and panic rumour in their impossibility to be grounded in an everyday language game and their ability to fit in every language game. This piece of knowledge we've discovered can be certainly useful from the practical point of view. On the one hand we can apply this methodology of research in a historical analysis as in fact Veena Das did. Since she was not present during the massacre events in the community but witnessed the traces of the past events on the level of the ordinary, we can compare it to looking into archives of the everyday language and spotting the process of emergence and development of the panic rumour.

It can be also used in a more present and practical mode too. In modern days when fake news is daily present in (social) media, it's important to understand its nature in order to fight it. Since there is no “rational” way to defeat the scepticism, we have to deconstruct the problem, the way Wittgenstein (and his followers) did it. To be more concrete, if we looked on fake news as a kind of panic rumours annihilating the validity of any other language games like science arguments, it would be easier to educate people on how to identify them. It would be also more comprehensible why other language games can't hurt them, since their power is not based on the power of arguments, but on its power of parasitizing on failures of the language. Wittgenstein does not suggests fighting philosophical scepticism with even stronger arguments but analysing its premises and showing that there cannot be any arguments refuting it. The only way to “shew the fly the way out of the fly-bottle” is according to him accepting and understanding the nature of scepticism which means first to realize that we are in the bottle [2]. In a similar, instead of offering rational arguments against fake news or spending enormous money on refuting them, we need to concentrate on the structure of their narrative, analyse it and identify the trigger. Firstly, we need to stop fighting it with the same weapon and secondly, we need to

focus on the triggers fake news are pushing. Fear of other cultures, being misunderstood or unheard – all those are varieties of our “fear of unknowability of otherness”.

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