

# CULTURES OF CONSPIRACY (Autumn 2018)

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## **Course Description:**

Conspiracy theories are very popular throughout the world. Should we really take them seriously? Is a conspiracy theory just a conspiracy theory or can it be a prelude to political action? How do we differentiate a conspiracy theory from a real conspiracy? Are conspiracy theories methodologically sound? Why do we believe in conspiracy theories? Are they really different in various times and geographies, if so how? This course aims to familiarise the student with conspiracy theories and the growing academic literature on them. Researching conspiracy theories is an interdisciplinary endeavour requiring to dwell on disciplines such as history, politics, philosophy, sociology, psychology and anthropology. Thus, the aim of the course will be to understand the interdisciplinary nature of cultural studies through the theme of conspiracy theories. Another aim will be to find the ways in which a sense of methodological soundness, epistemic sophistication and critical thinking in social sciences can be achieved by researching conspiracy theories.

## **Grading System:**

Paper: 50%

Reading Assignments: 30%

Participation: 10%

Discussion Questions: 10%

### ***Paper:***

The term paper will be about any conspiracy topic you choose. It can either cover one theme or more making use of the different perspectives that have been covered in class. One option is to form two or more case studies using conspiracy narratives from Turkey or abroad and to make an in-depth comparative analysis of the case studies by referring to the discursive, psychological, historical, sociological, cultural and/or political approaches. Another option can be sticking to one perspective, one method and one case study only.

### ***Reading Assignments:***

There will be 2 reading assignments of 2-4 pages long, each written over one week. The papers will discuss what the student has understood from the readings of the specific week. The assignments should portray an attempt to review and locate that week's readings within the academic conspiracy theory context and literature as far as possible.

### ***Discussion Questions:***

For each week, students are expected to write 2 discussion questions to be discussed in class. The questions should combine all the readings assigned for that week.

### ***Participation:***

Students are expected to attend the class sessions, make the weekly readings, participate in class discussions and ask any questions they might have in mind

Schedule:

Introduction

**Week 1**

Introduction: Researching Conspiracy Theories

**Week 2**

Defining Conspiracy Theory: Terms and Perspectives

**D1, D2** (Chapter 3) & **C** (Chapter 1)

History

**Week 3**

A Short History of Conspiracy Theories: Major Texts and Theories

**J** (Chapters 9, 10 & 11), **G** & **SR1**

**Week 4**

From the “Illuminati” to *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* to the “New World Order”

**O, J** (Chapter 6) & **C** (Chapters 3 & 4)

Discourse, Rhetoric & Narrative

**Week 5**

A Conspiracy Discourse and a Conspiracy Lexicon

**F** (Chapter 4), **WEB2** & **SR2**

Philosophy of Science & Scientific Method

**Week 6**

What is a Conspiracy Theory?: A Philosophy of Science Perspective

**M, T** (89-99), **C** (Chapter 2), **A, WEB1**

**Week 7**

An Introduction to Critical Thinking: Logical Fallacies and ‘Crippled’ Epistemology

**D2** (Chapters 8 & 10), **WEB1, WEB3** & **R**

Psychology & Psychoanalysis

**Week 8**

What is Paranoia?: The Relevance of the ‘Paranoid Style’

**K, D2** (Introduction & Chapter 5), **Y** & **P**

**Week 9**

Evolutionary Psychology: Patternicity and Agenticity  
**D2** (Chapter 9 & Epilogue)

**Week 10**

Social Psychology of Conspiracy Theories and Its Limitations  
**D4, D3, Z, V & E**

Politics & Culture

**Week 11**

Political Extremism and The Fundamentalist Mindset  
**W1, W2, L, N & U**

**Week 12**

Conspiracy Theories in Turkey: A Conspiracy Frame of Mind?  
**I, Q & SR3**

**Week 13**

Comparing the Political/Cultural Contexts: The US, Europe, Middle East and Turkey  
**B, C** (Chapters 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 & 11), **S & H** (Introduction)

Conclusion

**Week 14**

What to do with Conspiracy Theories?: Debunking, Ignoring, Supporting and Other Strategies  
**X & F** (Afterword)

**Week 15**

Conspiracy Theory or a Conspiracy Mindset?  
Class Discussion and Evaluation of the Term

## ***Reading List***

### **Required Reading (Books & Articles)**

- A** Bale, Jeffrey M. (2007). "Political Paranoia v. Political Realism: On Distinguishing Between Bogus Conspiracy Theories and Genuine Conspiratorial Politics". *Patterns of Prejudice* Vol.41, No.1: 45-60.
- B** Bali, Rifat N. (2013). *Antisemitism and Conspiracy Theories in Turkey*. İstanbul: Libra.
- C** Barkun, Michael (2003). *A Culture of Conspiracy: Apocalyptic Visions in Contemporary America*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- D1** Brotherton, Robert (2013). "Towards a Definition of 'Conspiracy Theory'". *PSΨAG Quarterly*, 88, September: 9-14.
- D2** Brotherton, Rob (2015). *Suspicious Minds: Why We Believe Conspiracy Theories*. London: Bloomsbury Sigma.
- D3** Brotherton, Robert and French, Christopher C. (2014). "Belief in Conspiracy Theories and Susceptibility to the Conjunction Fallacy". *Applied Cognitive Psychology*, 28: 238-248.
- D4** Brotherton, Robert; French, Christopher C. and Pickering, Alan D. (2013). "Measuring Belief in Conspiracy Theories: The Generic Conspiracist Beliefs Scale". *Frontiers in Psychology*, 4(279): 1-15.
- E** Byford, Jovan (2014). "Beyond Belief: the Social Psychology of Conspiracy Theories and the Study of Ideology". Charles Antaki ve Susan Condor (eds.) (83-94) in *Rhetoric, Ideology and Social Psychology: Essays in Honour of Michael Billig. Explorations in Social Psychology*. London: Routledge.
- F** Fenster, Mark (2008). *Conspiracy Theories: Secrecy and Power In American Culture*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- G** Goldwag, Arthur (2009). *Cults, Conspiracies & Secret Societies*. New York: Vintage.
- H** Gray, Matthew (2010). *Conspiracy Theories in the Arab World: Sources and Politics*. Milton Park: Routledge.
- I** Gürpınar, Doğan (2013). "Historical Revisionism vs. Conspiracy Theories: Transformations of Turkish Historical Scholarship and Conspiracy Theories as a Constitutive Element in Transforming Turkish Nationalism". *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies*, 15(4): 412-433.
- J** Hodapp, Christopher and Von Kannon, Alice (2008). *Conspiracy Theories & Secret Societies For Dummies*. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley.
- K** Hofstadter, Richard (1964). "The Paranoid Style in American Politics". *Harper's Magazine*, <http://harpers.org/print/?pid=66800>.

**L** Jordan, David P. (2010). "Rumor, Fear, and Paranoia in the French Revolution". Charles B. Strozier, David M. Terman, James W. Jones & Katharine A. Boyd (eds.) (175-194) in *The Fundamentalist Mindset: Psychological Perspectives on Religion, Violence and History*. New York: Oxford University Press.

**M** Keeley, Brian L. (1999). "Of Conspiracy Theories". *The Journal of Philosophy*, 96(3): 109-126.

**N** Khosrokhavar, Farhad (2010). "The Psychology of Global Jihadists". Charles B. Strozier, David M. Terman, James W. Jones & Katharine A. Boyd (eds.) (139-155) in *The Fundamentalist Mindset: Psychological Perspectives on Religion, Violence and History*. New York: Oxford University Press.

**O** Landes, Richard and Katz, Steven T. (2012). "Introduction: The Protocols at the Dawn of the 21st Century". Richard Landes & Steven T. Katz (eds.) (1-22) in *The Paranoid Apocalypse: A Hundred-Year Retrospective on The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. New York: New York University Press.

**P** Muenster, Bettina and Lotto, David (2010). "The Social Psychology of Humiliation and Revenge: The Origins of the Fundamentalist Mindset". Charles B. Strozier, David M. Terman, James W. Jones & Katharine A. Boyd (eds.) (71-79) in *The Fundamentalist Mindset: Psychological Perspectives on Religion, Violence and History*. New York: Oxford University Press.

**Q** Nefes, Turkey Salim (2015). "Understanding Anti-Semitic Rhetoric in Turkey Through the Sèvres Syndrome". *Turkish Studies*, Vol. 16, No. 4, 572-587.

**R** Pelkmans, Michael and Machold, Rhys (2011). "Conspiracy Theories and Their Truth Trajectories". *Focaal: Journal of Global and Historical Anthropology*, 59: 66-80.

**S** Pipes, Daniel (1997). *Conspiracy: How the Paranoid Style Flourishes and Where It Comes From*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

**T** Popper, Karl R. (1962). *The Open Society and Its Enemies: Vol. 2 Hegel & Marx*. London: Routledge.

**U** Redles, David (2010). "Ordering Chaos: Nazi Millennialism and the Quest for Meaning". Charles B. Strozier, David M. Terman, James W. Jones & Katharine A. Boyd (eds.) (156-174) in *The Fundamentalist Mindset: Psychological Perspectives on Religion, Violence and History*. New York: Oxford University Press.

**V** Sapountzis, Antonis and Condor, Susan (2013). "Conspiracy Accounts as Intergroup Theories: Challenging Dominant Understandings of Social Power and Political Legitimacy". *Political Psychology*, Vol. 34, 5: 731-752.

**W1** Strozier, Charles B. (2010). "The Apocalyptic Other". Charles B. Strozier, David M. Terman, James W. Jones & Katharine A. Boyd (eds.) (62-70) in *The Fundamentalist Mindset: Psychological Perspectives on Religion, Violence and History*. New York: Oxford University Press.

**W2** Strozier, Charles B. (2010). "Opening the Seven Seals of Fundamentalism". Charles B. Strozier, David M. Terman, James W. Jones & Katharine A. Boyd (eds.) (104-119) in *The Fundamentalist Mindset: Psychological Perspectives on Religion, Violence and History*. New York: Oxford University Press.

**X** Sunstein, Cass R. and Vermeule, Adrian (2009). "Conspiracy Theories: Causes and Cures". *The Journal of Political Philosophy*, 17(2): 202-227.

**Y** Terman, David M. (2010). "Fundamentalism and the Paranoid Gestalt". Charles B. Strozier, David M. Terman, James W. Jones & Katharine A. Boyd (eds.) (47-61) in *The Fundamentalist Mindset: Psychological Perspectives on Religion, Violence and History*. New York: Oxford University Press.

**Z** Wood, Michael J.; Douglas, Karen M. and Sutton, Robbie M. (2012). "Dead and Alive: Beliefs in Contradictory Conspiracy Theories". *Social Psychological and Personality Science*, 3(6): 767-773.

### **Required Reading (Web)**

**WEB1** POLYP (2011). "Challenging the Politics of Paranoia". *New Internationalist*, March, 28-31. **(provided)**

**WEB2** "10 Characteristics of Conspiracy Theorists" (2009). *Urban75*. Updated 29 April, <http://www.urban75.org/info/conspiraloons.html>. **(provided)**

**WEB3** "A Practical Guide to Critical Thinking". *Johnny Reb's Free Thought Website*, [http://www.skeptic.ca/Guide\\_to\\_Critical\\_Thinking.pdf](http://www.skeptic.ca/Guide_to_Critical_Thinking.pdf). **(provided)**

### **Suggested Reading (Turkish)**

**SR1** Castillon, Juan C. (2007). *Dünyanın Efendileri: Bir Komplo Teorileri Tarihi*. (Çev.) Sakıp Murat Yalçın. İstanbul: Koridor. **(provided on demand)**

**SR2** Karaosmanoğlu, Kerem (2009). "Bir Komplo Söyleminden Parçalar: Komplo Zihniyeti, Sıradan Faşizm ve *New Age*", *Kültür ve İletişim*, Vol. 12, Issue 1, 95-126. **(provided)**

**SR3** Önderman, Murat (2007). *Türkiye'de Paranoid Ethos*. İstanbul: Filiz. **(not provided, check from bookstores)**

### **Supplementary/Reference Reading for the Term**

**B** **(not provided, check from Libra Yayıncılık)**

**J** **(provided)**

**G** **(not provided, check from Amazon)**