

CONSPIRACY THEORY IN POLITICAL THOUGHT

by

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A Thesis

Submitted to the

Graduate Faculty

of

George Mason University

in Partial Fulfillment of

The Requirements for the Degree

of

Master of Arts

Political Science

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Date: _____ Fall Semester 2017
George Mason University
Fairfax, VA

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Fall Semester 2017
George Mason University
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Professor Matthew Scherer, Professor Char R. Miller, Professor Jesse Kirkpatrick for participating in my thesis committee and their invaluable comments during the research process. Without their support, I would not have been able to write my study in this extend. I reserve special thanks for Professor Andrew Hughes Hallett for his insightful feedback and suggestions which sharpened my arguments and enhanced the logical flow of my thoughts. Finally, I would like also to thank the administrative staff at the Schar School of Policy and Government, especially Nicholas Stroup, Associate Director of Student Services for excellent help with practical issues during my thesis.

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ABSTRACT

CONSPIRACY THEORY IN POLITICAL THOUGHT

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This thesis analyzes the theoretical bases, argumentations, logical developments of conspiracy theory from epistemological, politically-oriented, cultural and critical approaches. The majority of scholarly literature considers conspiracy theory as an irrational conception that is irrelevant or even contrary to the Enlightenment rationality, but this research finds the opposite. After discussing conspiracy theory from different aspects, whether in the theoretical or practical levels, this thesis concludes that the theoretical flaws of conspiracy theory are attributed to inaccurate premises and assumptions lie at the heart of the Enlightenment project itself. What pushes conspiracy theory into the margin of Enlightenment is not its lack of rationality but, rather, its contradictory orientation towards reasonability understood as the ability to compromise with other rational parties to reach an overlapping consensus.

INTRODUCTION

This study investigates the conceptual content of conspiracy theory by examining its cognitive validity, argumentative procedure, logical consistency and theoretical foundations. Through employing different approaches, this thesis sheds light on various aspects and trajectories of conspiracy theory in terms of the interlacing of their philosophical and ideological components, general conceptions, justifications and notional applications. The major object is to provide adequate accounts of the main theoretical foundations and developments of conspiracy theory for better understanding of its inner structure. *Conspiracy Theory in Political Thought* is an abstract study which predominantly focuses on thoughts, ideologies and philosophies that form the fundamentals of conspiracy theory. Thus, this thesis does not address the thematic patterns, styles, types and narratives of conspiracy theory, and has no intent to make use specifically of the methods of sociology, anthropology, psychology and other related disciplines to study conspiracy theory.

Conspiracy Theory in Political Thought offers answers to important questions concerning different levels of conspiracy theory. At the internal level, sundry opinions, debates and arguments on the definition of ‘conspiracy theory’ are presented and evaluated, not only to fully understand this term, but also to realize how scholars gradually have developed their perceptions of it. This study, at a broader level, provides multiple answers

to questions about the origin of conspiracy theory as it relates the latter to its theoretical contexts and philosophical backgrounds. At the most comprehensive level, various discussions and insights are presented throughout this research to explain the emergence and the persistence of conspiracy theory in the modern era and how such theory has located itself within the discourses of different ideologies, cultures and movements.

Similar to other modern sociological phenomena, conspiracy theory is open to different interpretations in different contexts and perspectives. In this thesis, conspiracy theory is neither considered as merely an unproven proposition about a claimed and/or unwarranted conspiracy nor a paranoid, pathological explanation of an event or situation. Rather than limiting conspiracy theory to its external credibility or a singular characteristic of its essence, such as paranoia, this research uses more expansive perspectives of conspiracy theory in order to be inclusive in the sense of embracing different orientations and approaches. Epistemological, politically-oriented, cultural and critical approaches reveal different aspects of conspiracy theory, each according to its own nature. In a general sense, and regardless of these differences, conspiracy theory in this study is projected as a rational way of thinking that is driven from Enlightenment and characterized by its definitive features, especially skepticism, rationality and idealism. Conspiracy theory evidently is not an exotic phenomenon in the modern world. In contrast, although unauthorized and marginalized, conspiracy theory is a legitimate product of the Enlightenment rationality from which it inherits its inaccurate philosophical premises and inadequate evidence. As its intellectual incubator, namely, Enlightenment, conspiracy

theory is a rational endeavor to comprehend the manners, logic and rationale that rule the world by relying on objectivity and critical stances.

Conspiracy theorists are often considered as self-deceivers because of their maintaining adherence to conspiratorial thinking, and being unable to recognize the contradiction and the flaws in their thinking. Likewise, it might be useful to acknowledge the possibility that the rest of the humanitarian theorists since the emergence of Enlightenment are self-deceived by their own well-established convictions of the Enlightenment rationality, and being unable to recognize the contradiction and the flaws in their thinking. The only major difference between the general trends of Enlightenment and conspiracy theory is reasonability. Unlike the latter, the former has the flexibility to compromise with other rational approaches in order to establish common understandings about reality rather than demonstrating intransigence to impose their own understanding of certain events and issues. The greater the support base, the closer conspiracy theory becomes to reasonable approaches. Eventually, this theory turns to be not only rational to its theorists, but reasonable to the public wherever it flourishes and dominates. From this viewpoint, a question arises: can Enlightenment itself be considered as a ubiquitous conspiracy theory since it has been adopted by most cultures? For centuries, the dominating rational trends of Western and Eastern cultures established reasonability based on which scientific explanations of natural phenomena were excluded. Reasonability is not sufficient in itself to be the standard that determines the value and the appropriateness of Enlightenment and conspiracy theory.

As this study illustrates, there is no convincing argument has, so far, been given by scholars to present conclusive evidence on the falsification of conspiracy theory. The logical flaws of conspiracy theory mirror the misconceptions and the false premises of the Kantian principles of Enlightenment and the contradictions that the latter has produced through its subsequent thinkers. Basically, correcting the flaws of conspiracy theory requires correcting the misconceptions of Enlightenment.

This study suggests that conspiracy theory is a strong candidate to be used as a theoretical criterion by which the Enlightenment rationality can be evaluated. Yet, this thesis only proposes such approach and has no direct effort to study any aspect of Enlightenment through conspiracy theory because such project exceeds the capacity of this research. Rather, this conception of the nature of conspiracy theory constitutes only the conceptual background of this thesis as it studies the philosophical foundations, theoretical argumentations and fundamental concepts and strategies of conspiracy theory.

Besides helping to evaluate the Enlightenment rationality, *Conspiracy Theory in Political Thought* derives its importance from investigating different discourses of conspiracy theory throughout the last three centuries and their major political implications. From a theoretical point of view, this investigation shows the main conceptual flaws of this theory and their philosophical origins. Identifying these flaws has practical importance because it assists to encounter conspiracy theories when necessary. Since conspiracy theory is a rational way of thinking, it always tries to be reasonable; it endeavors to publicize its views against the formal explanations. The reasonability of conspiracy theory is not the outcome of compromising with other trends of thinking, but, in contrast, increasing the

scope of its support by insisting on its views and excluding other ideas and perspectives. When a society adopts such reasonability, conspiracy theory, thus, becomes the commonly accept explanation. As a result, it becomes more difficult for humanity to find common ground based on which it can communicate, build trust and overcome stereotypes and cultural differences. The reasonability of Enlightenment might include a lot of fallacies, but it is much more flexible to accept new ideas and different human values. On the other hand, conspiracy theory does not even promise of allowing to obtain such openness.

Conspiracy Theory in Political Thought consists of three chapters with an introduction and conclusion. The first chapter “The Epistemological Approach Of Conspiracy Theory” aims to analyze the conceptual structure of conspiracy theory and the perspectives regarding its theoretical premises, definitions and argumentative strategies. This chapter has three sections. Section I deals with the theoretical connection between political theory and conspiracy theory, especially in terms of influence and mutual characteristics in conceptual trajectories and methodology. In Section II, the focus is on exploring sundry epistemological explanations of conspiracy theory. Shedding light on the genealogical, contextual, functional and structural explanations of this theory provides indispensable insights to understand conspiracy theory from different viewpoints. Section III reviews the theoretical bases of conspiracy theory, highlighting in this respect the contradictory nature of conspiracy theory in the political theorists' perspectives. In addition, this section studies the argumentative strategies of conspiracy theory which take constructive and reactionary trajectories.

The second chapter of this thesis, “The Political-Oriented Approach of Political Theory” evaluates the theoretical underpinnings of the most common political applications of conspiracy theory. This chapter contains three sections. Section I surveys a number of famous and most influencing conspiracy theories made by Right-wing intellectuals and activists since the French Revolution. Meanwhile, the section examines the theoretical bases of these conspiracy theories and the applicability of the former to the latter. Section II addresses the relationship between Communism and conspiracy theory. Investigating the accusations against Communists of spreading conspiracy theories shows no concrete evidence to support such claims. This section attempts to find out why these accusations have being made. Furthermore, Section II suggest that Communism has not developed its own conspiracy theories because its dialectical materialism includes a comprehensive description of the universe and its developments that has enabled it to dispense with conspiracy theory. Section III studies conspiracy theory in the Islamic discourse by examining the thoughts of four prominent Islamic intellectuals and theologians in this regard. Due to the secular nature of conspiracy theory, this section concentrates on knowing whether the Islamic discourse presents coherent and convincing arguments that are intended to be consistent with their understandings of Islamic principles.

The third chapter “The Cultural and Critical Approaches of Conspiracy Theory” describes several cultural and critical approaches that revolve around defining the concepts and functions of conspiracy theory. Regarding the cultural approach, two main directions or forms are identified: considering conspiracy theory as a paranoid symptom or knowledge form. Based on discussions in this chapter and throughout the thesis, the

perspective of paranoid symptom falls short of being a sufficient explanation. With regard to the critical approach, it offers more detailed explanations of conspiracy theory based on definite philosophical grounds compared to those of the cultural approach. This chapter, in this respect, gives a close look at the Slovenian intellectual and psychoanalyst Slavoj Žižek's notions on conspiracy theory since his theoretical insights present the most significant example of the critical approach. Although including several logical mistakes, Žižek's remarkable ideas successfully associate the flaws of conspiracy theory with those of the Enlightenment rationality. For Žižek, conspiracy theory is a telltale sign indicating a serious prejudice within the conceptual scheme of modern epistemological thinking.

CHAPTER I
THE EPISTEMOLOGICAL APPROACH OF CONSPIRACY THEORY

What is Conspiracy Theory?

This chapter provides an extended theoretical context within which several definitions of conspiracy theory are presented and evaluated. Until this discussion takes place, and to avoid any confusion, an initial definition of conspiracy theory is offered in this introduction as a starting point. This initial definition is adopted from David Coady who proposes a provisional characterization of conspiracy theory as “simply a conspiratorial explanation, and that an explanation is it postulates a group of agents working together in secret, often, though perhaps not always, for a sinister purpose” (2006a, 2). In addition, conspiracy theory tends to present an explanation that usually contradicts the official explanation of a discrete event or set of events. Compared to believing in ordinary schemes, plots and conspiracies that frequently occur among political actors, groups, parties, entities and governments throughout history, the subject under study, as Matthew R. X. Dentith says, is “a theory about a conspiracy: conspiracy theories posit that some conspiracy explains the occurrence of an event” (23). Generally, a theory is more sophisticated and complex than a belief. As far as our subject matter is concerned, while the belief of schemes and conspiracies revolves around a specific event or set of

events, conspiracy theory covers a wider range of event or set of events in a larger scope of time. Believing in plots and schemes is focused on particular cases based on certain assumptions in the midst of specific circumstances. Such belief often has no attention to challenge the official narrative as a whole or accuse an agent or entity of attempting to make radical changes in nations' cultures or identities. Instead, the goal of schemes, plots and conspiracies is no more than a political or strategic one. This belief is common throughout history and has some credibility in the process of explaining events because, simply, schemes, plots and conspiracies occur as part of usual political intrigues and maneuvers.

On the other hand, conspiracy theory has a quite different trajectory. Conspiracies are not seen as political or strategic moves of known competitors, such as hostile foreign governments, in order to achieve certain near-term objectives. Rather, they appear as part of deeds conducted by alleged conspirators whether known or unknown for ideological or religious incentives as well as political calculations and agendas. Instead of accusing foreign governments per se, conspiracy theory tends to accuse suspicious or secret groups such as Freemasonry, religious sects, ideological movements or aliens of aiming to undermine entire regimes, values and styles of life of a nation or the entire world. Most importantly, conspiracy theory is a modern phenomenon emerged as one of the outcomes of the Enlightenment rationality. As this chapter and the third chapter argue, this way of thinking does not result from psychological aberration as some scholars assume. In contrast, conspiracy theories, as Rob Brotherton puts it, “resonate with some of our brain's built-in biases and shortcuts, and tap into some of our deepest desires, fears, and

assumptions about the world and the people in it” (17). Conspiracy theory is entirely compatible with the major characteristics of Enlightenment's universalizing conception of knowledge and learning including reasoning and skepticism. Thus, it is far more logical to categorize conspiracy theorists as rational debaters than pathological, paranoid and troubled-minded mass murderers.

SECTION I
THE THEORETICAL CONNECTION BETWEEN POLITICAL THEORY AND
CONSPIRACY THEORY

This section aims to answer the question: what is the theoretical connection between political theory and conspiracy theory especially in terms of influence and mutual characteristics in conceptual trajectories and methodology? Answering this question has the potential to determine whether conspiracy theory is supported by explicit theoretical foundations, and reveals to what degree political theory is aware of conspiracy theory whether in examining epistemologically its claims or reviewing its principles of rationality in light of its alternative system of rationalization. Even though conspiracy theory is widely considered in academia as an outcome of irrational thinking, it is still a way of thinking that has its own logic and rationality.

Literature Review

As presented in the next paragraphs, the majority of political scientists and scholars who are interested in studying conspiracy theory have not given enough attention to its theoretical relationship to political theory. Scholars who review the previous efforts to

study the epistemological dimension of conspiracy theory and its theoretical connection with political theory agree about their rareness. Furthermore, the discussions of these scholars, namely Matthew R. X. Dentith, Emma Jane and Chris Fleming apparently reveal the limits and shortsightedness of these efforts.

In his book, *The Philosophy of Conspiracy Theories*, Matthew R. X. Dentith complains of the lack of adequate philosophical interest in conspiracy theory, indicating that such interest is both new and rare (15). Although Dentith thinks that this lack of interest is strange, he does not try to explain it. Rather, Dentith mentions a few relatively new studies in this regard. Unfortunately, these studies, such as Karl Popper's book *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, Charles Pigden's article "Popper Revisited, Or What Is Wrong With Conspiracy Theories?" and Brian L. Keeley's article "Of Conspiracy Theories," are rarely related to the subject at hand. These studies, as Dentith admits in his comments on some of them, hardly touch on the relationship between philosophy and conspiracy theory, and scarcely associated with philosophical discourse in terms of their depth, context, scope and reference. These studies, rather, are scattered opinions that briefly discuss conspiracy theory.

Dentith's notion on the lack of philosophical interest in conspiracy theory is echoed by other writers, namely, Emma Jane and Chris Fleming who think that David "Coady is one of the few analytic philosophers – or indeed, philosophers of any kind – to discuss in detail conspiracy theory in its epistemological dimensions" (Jane and Fleming 115) However, Jane and Fleming focus only on one thought of Coady regarding conspiracy theory, that is, "coincidence theory." Unfortunately, the latter is presented by Coady to be

the opposite of conspiracy theory; Unlike conspiracy theorists, coincidence theorists are those who fail to connect certain events with each other to recognize a conspiracy when it actually occurs. Therefore, they “fail to see the significance in even the most striking correlations” (Coady, 2012, 127). This idea of coincidence theory is a typical example of Coady's thoughts on conspiracy theory; they are preliminary observations without a philosophical context and specific approach based on a clear vision. Besides Coady, Jane and Fleming very briefly discuss several viewpoints of a few thinkers regarding conspiracy theory, such as Michel Foucault and Arthur Goldwag. Yet, neither these viewpoints nor Jane's and Fleming comments on them are connected to conspiracy theory, followed an explicit trajectory or developed a clear argument.

One can conclude that the studies that claim to concentrate on the epistemological aspect of conspiracy theory do not offer profound notions depend on which this thesis can benefit in its endeavor to develop a specific approach or conception. Ironically, although being few and brief, the insights that are provided by unspecialized studies are more useful in helping to develop an advanced perspective on the subject under study. Such insights are included in the following pages in which historical, conceptual and methodological dimensions of the theoretical connection between political theory and conspiracy theory are presented.

Analysis

In the historical dimension, the connection has been made between the emergence of conspiracy theory and political theory as a causal relationship in which the former could not be occurred without the modern political theorists, especially Niccolò Machiavelli. According to the Romanian political scientist, Cătălin Avramescu,

[T]he modern conspiracy theory of society received its impetus from Machiavelli, who deprived his political theory of all indispensable emphases on religious and moral aspects of politics, and who was least concerned with the *ought to be* as superior and prior to the *is*. "Whereas classical political theory rested on, and was derived from, moral theory, Machiavelli emancipated political theory from moral theory [...]. Machiavelli provided a new and viable framework for the conspiracy theory of society. (63)

Avramescu emphasizes that through *verità effettuale* "effectual truth," Machiavelli has changed modern political thought and political reasoning since truth is no longer an abstract value but it rather "coincides with successful practice" (63). Machiavelli here marks a split between two worlds; the first is ruled by religious doctrines where the Divine plan has encompassed all beings and natural forces carry out His will. The second world is established on secular concepts based on which people can use everything including religion to achieve their goals. In this secular world, long-term hidden plots have become conceivable.

The term "the conspiracy theory of society" mentioned in Avramescu's article dates back to 1972 when Karl Popper wrote a short article titled by this term through which he

refers to a folk belief that is “very widespread, and has very little truth in it” (13). Popper's article explains why Avramescu describes this conspiracy theory as a modern theory even though it is an old phenomenon in its essence. Popper, who seems to have a significant impact on Avramescu, thinks that conspiracy theory is merely a version of the Olympian gods' conspiracies in the ancient Greek mythology and literature. He elucidates that Homer stresses that wars are only a reflection of different conspiracies on Olympus. Popper points out that when the world of religion disappears and either gods or God ruled, the “place is then filled by various powerful men and groups – sinister pressure groups, who are to be blamed for having planned the great depression and all the evils from which we suffer” (13). Popper' comparison is not accurate; despite some similarities, there are drastic differences between the Greeks' and conspiracy theorists' perspectives. Greeks did not think that gods had secret long-range conspiracies to control the world but, as it appears in *Iliad*, gods and goddesses are involved in the human warfare and choose different sides. During their participation in the war, some of these gods and goddesses are even wounded by mortals such as Aphrodite, the Greek goddess of love, pleasure and beauty and the daughter of Zeus (138) and Ares, the Greek god of war (156).

Conspiracy theory is a modern phenomenon that has no comparable or equivalent in the ancient world since it is an outcome of modern conditions that have emerged after the Middle Ages. Machiavelli's book, *The Prince*, in this regard, is one of important milestone of pushing the transformation in Europe forward. It is not only that “Machiavelli's realism represents a significant shift in political theory from what is widely believed to be, to what actually is known to be” (Gutfreund 206), but also signifies a radical

change of values and concepts as the world transforming from relying on religious beliefs to secular principles.

Machiavelli does mention in his books that conspiracies occurred throughout history (1975 [1531], 470-91) and might occur whether internally or externally (2003 [1532], 99). Nevertheless, Machiavelli deals with conspiracies here as plots planned by rivals in specific events to achieve certain goals without any linkage to conspiracism — the “malign force which emanates from the fiendishly seductive demagoguery of powerful leaders, and which the masses are hoodwinked into believing” (Knight 2000, 7). Machiavelli thinks that ‘the prince’ can encounter conspirators who are nothing but players on the political stage hatching intrigues against him by taking advantage of possessing “the majesty of the Principality, the laws, his friends and estate to protect him” (2003 [1532], 100). Although indirectly and partly setting the stage to conspiracy theories to be plausible, Machiavelli lived in time when such theories were inconceivable.

Machiavelli represents the political and moral expression of Renaissance (1300-1500), among sundry manifestations, such as religion, philosophy and technical innovations. This period, along with its impact on the subsequent two centuries, witnessed the shift from religious-based interpretations to empirical and observational interpretations. As the religious reformists have given the individuals a role in reading and interpreting the Bible and allowed individual churches the right to govern themselves, Christopher Columbus (1451 –1506) and Ferdinand Magellan (1480 – 1521) changed our fixed conception of the world. Meanwhile, Nicolaus Copernicus (1473–1543), Galileo Galilei (1564–1642) and later Isaac Newton (1643 –1727) not only corrected our ideas about the

solar system, but also have shifted our understanding from the Ptolemaic Cosmology and the supernatural Christianity to a rational one. By removing humans from the physical center of the universe, Copernicus "had initiated a revolution, and human beings would never be able to see themselves or trust their perceptions in the same way again" (Armstrong 68).

Methodology

Science, philosophy, Protestantism and discoveries after the Middle Ages rapidly urged people to rethink of their old perspectives on their world, religion, morals and politics. The ongoing challenging facts that encountered the fixed doctrines, created skepticism not only towards the world and religion but also towards the human identity and the human ability to reach the essential characteristics of the world. From that point in history, skepticism has been manifested in several fields of knowledge, and found a spacious place in philosophy where it has had roots since the Greek era. However, ancient skepticism is quite different compared to the latest version. According to Hegel, modern skepticism lacks the intellectual integrity because it, unlike the oldest version, does not question immediate conscious experience and takes it, instead, as a self-evident fact. Hegel thinks that modern skeptics propose "that we must consider sensuous Being, what is given to us by sensuous consciousness, to be true; all else must be doubted" (1894 [1837], 331). Hegel, here, sheds light on a fundamental characteristic of modern skepticism; that is, its

concentration on the external world while neglecting and excluding self from doubting. Modern skepticism is impacted by Renaissance's and Enlightenment's ambitions to obtain knowledge and discover the world depend on scientific methods and continuous efforts to examine better ways to reach goals. Skepticism in the modern age is a practical and functional process through which scholars endorse rational and pragmatic operations in order to solve a problem, improve a situation or achieve a certain purpose.

Doubting, therefore, is an indisputable part of the process of reasoning, and it was unusual in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries for skeptics to turn around and question reasoning itself or the recently rediscovered ability of human being to acquire knowledge. It is no coincidence that when modern philosophy finds a remarkable beginning with the Cartesian doubt; one should be aware in this context that Descartes' famous motto, "Cogito, ergo sum" excludes the self, I, from doubting since René "Descartes could not doubt his own existence as a thinking self because in order to doubt he had to think and in order to think he had to exist" (Olson 49). Some other thinkers, such as Philip Wash, presumes that "I" in Cartesian "Cogito, ergo sum" is established as "the specific consequences of that doubt"(Wash 38), but one might argue that "I" is proposed as a self-evident appears in the form of the autonomous entity whose self-awareness has the ability to think independently in a logical way through which its existence is verified. Such process is a good example of modern empiricism because doubting is always controlled and managed in order to serve appointed goals in a practical context. In short, skepticism and reasoning in modern world are two faces of the same coin, that is, the orientation to challenge old concepts, facts and meanings in seeking to find new results that might give

a better understanding and explanation of challenged topics. In the coming pages, I am going to discuss the relationship between conspiracy theory and different kinds of rationality in the writings of several scholars in order to provide a more coherent understanding of the theoretical nature of conspiracy theory, as presented by them.

Conspiracy Theory and Rationality

1. Pragmatic Rationality

This reliance on skepticism to produce reasonable conclusions is the field where conspiracy theory and political theory, along with other scientific approaches, find common ground. Unlike conspiracy theory, political theory is part of philosophy and political science, and consequently, one might find it believable to consider it among the scientific approaches that have undergone the skepticism as a rational process to clearly perceive the phenomena of the world. However, even though that “conspiracy appears to be the antithesis of formal, rigorous, scientific inquiry” (Pagán 8), it attempts to convince its audience by (mis)using the same scientific methods of other fields of knowledge. In his short study, "Conspiracy Theory and Rationality," Lee Basham defines conspiracy theory as “[a] causal explanation of events that appeals to the intentional attempt or success at the

deception of those involved in, witnessing, investigating or otherwise affected by those events, on the part of a group of individuals cooperating for the creation or perpetuation of such deception” (53). Then, he recognizes a number of flaws embedded in the logic of conspiracy theory, namely: prior probability, errant date, the triangle of crime: [desire of a criminal to commit a crime; target of the criminal's desire; and the opportunity for the crime to be committed and the prediction of abuse, neglect and misinformation (74). Basham also points out that conspiracy theory contradicts with what he calls it the pragmatic rationality. Such contradiction occurs when conspiracy theorists jeopardize "our character of living" by recruiting more people to the epistemic and political futility of their theories,” (82). Nevertheless, Basham explicitly states that conspiracy theory is epistemologically rational. Hence, he declares that:

They are conducting a research project, pushing the boundaries of our epistemic powers. As part of a community of exploration, they legitimately adopt a stance in order to enable themselves to continue to map-out the possibilities. This is the norm in all research communities. Good researchers require *zeal*. And this takes the form of a provisional, revisable but very real and even passionate state of mind that is difficult, if at all, to distinguish from *belief*. As long as significant new evidence is being brought to light and credible alternatives are being identified, conspiracy theorists are embodying the best spirit of rational inquiry...in their investigations into our society and its vulnerabilities to manipulation,

conspiracy theorists are, if we attend to their discoveries and make appropriate corrections, creating fine work for a better world. (80)

In another study entitled “Malevolent Global Conspiracy,” Basham mentions four primary objections to the rational acceptance of global conspiracy theory, namely, unfalsifiability, uncontrollability, an appeal to the trustworthiness of public institution of information and the ever-present accusation of paranoia. Yet, he thinks that “[n]one of these objections dispel either the possibility or the likelihood of a malevolent global conspiracy. They fail to show these theories are rationally unacceptable” (95). Basham claims that all of the four primary objections are unable to build a strong logical case against the rationality of conspiracy theory. For example, he states that raising the issue of falsifiability is logically appropriate when linked to natural science because adopting such standard in social science demoralizes the credibility of all hidden information, regardless of their reliability (96). If information are disregarded because of their secrecy, individuals, groups and governments cannot prepare to deal with imminent or expects dangers or investigate plots and scandals and, therefore, intelligence services would seem a big waste of money and efforts.

2. Normative Rationality

Due to its essential connexion with conspiracy theory, rationality can be analyzed in several ways. In this respect, Matthew R. X. Dentith distinguishes, in his book *The Philosophy of Conspiracy Theories*, between two ways of studying the rationality of belief

in conspiracy — i.e. justifying rational skepticism about conspiracy theory and rationalizing certain aspects of it (8). Without skepticism and reliance on rational bases of investigating, it is unlikely to have conspiracy theory from any kind.

The word ‘theory’ in “conspiracy theory” summarizes the argument about the relationship between skepticism and reasoning. Theory, according to N. D. Arora, S. S. Awasthy is “a guide to practice, adds much to what is merely description, clarifies hypothesis, and as a part of theory, explains an issue which meets the requirements of both reason and vision.” (41). Conspiracy theory, thus, contains a directed method through which an enquiry is conducted to explain a puzzle or solve confusion. Even though conspiracy theory usually lacks strong evidence to support and justify its claims and conclusions, its logical flaws and defective arguments do not undermine its methodological characteristic as a theory. Otherwise, other fields of knowledge including political theory would logically collapse as scientific approaches along with conspiracy theory. Political theories find themselves obliged to defend the rational bases of their field in the face of objections that question the justification of describing political theory as theoretical since it does not rely on empirical content for its validity. Addressing these objections, Norman P. Barry pinpoints that

[P]olitical scientists have not been conspicuously successful in the production of general theories. Curiously enough, the most successful theories in politics that have appeared in recent decades have not come from the behaviouralists at all (and indeed they can hardly be called empirical) but from economists. (ix)

Recently, with exception of political theory, the fields of political science, that are, comparative politics, international relations, public administration and public law have increased their reliance on empiricism to sound more scientific. Yet, normativity continues to be a reliable approach for these fields, and the only approach for political theory due to its philosophical nature. At this point, political theory and conspiracy theory are related in terms of their dependence on normative standards regardless of the latter's attempts in many cases to support its claims by using empirical data. Both political theory and conspiracy theory are theories even though of their lack of empiricism.

3. Reasonable Rationality

Immanuel Kant's account on rationality has raised more questions than it has answered. In his article, "An Answer to the Question: 'What is Enlightenment?'" (1784), Kant relies on Enlightenment to demolish self-incurred immaturity, with a strong belief that "a public can only achieve enlightenment slowly" and "all that is needed is freedom" (55). Rationality, which is embedded in every single person's cognitive practices, has become the cornerstone to achieve progress in an environment where civil freedom provides "enough room to expand to its fullest extent" (59). Enlightenment has laid the theoretical foundation for modern democracy in which individual autonomy, equality, rights and liberty are the condition of attaining commonwealth. Enlightenment's principles, especially rationality, has been challenged by intellectuals, such as Nietzsche who finds

them “very naive thing; as if everyone knew without further ado what mode of action would benefit the whole of mankind” (38). Such encountering generates ongoing controversies about the relationship between democracy and rationality.

To address Nietzsche's criticism against Kantian claim, and to theorize legitimacy and stability within a liberal society, John Rawls in his book *Political Liberalism* presents his concept of “reasonableness” as a comprehensive political setting that provides a common ground for citizens based on which they communicate, exchange ideas and participate in public affairs. In other words, “Rawls encounters the problem of reconciling the practicing liberal with the Hobbesian assumptions; if the human is, by nature, a self-interested rational maximizer, how can the concern for community of the liberal citizen come about?” (Kofmel 13) Instead of individual rationalities, Rawls relies on a community of reasonable citizens where each person has his/her own comprehensive doctrines but at the same time

Persons see that the burdens of judgment set limits on what can be reasonably justified to others, and so they endorse some form of liberty of conscience and freedom of thought. It is unreasonable for us to use political power, should we possess it, or share it with others, to repress comprehensive views that are not unreasonable. (Rawls 61)

According to Rawls, the citizens' awareness of the limitation of their political power over other citizens paves the way for the possibility of “reasonable pluralism,” that is, the overlapping consensus in which a plurality of reasonable takes place though irreconcilable, religious, moral or theoretical doctrines. With reasonable pluralism, a democratic society

possesses its stability. The overlapping consensus endorses the political conception of justice, i.e., the solution suggested by Rawls to the challenge of legitimacy in a liberal society. Hence, Rawls offers an interpretation to the fundamental ideas implied in that society's public political culture in which citizens are free and equal, and society is fair system of cooperation. This political conception (justice as fairness) guarantees for every citizen adequate means to make effective use of his/her freedom. Unlike politics where the overlapping consensus limits people's freedom in the individual level, the civil rights in Rawls's society are complete and comprehensive.

In light on this differentiation between rationality and reasonableness, conspiracy theory can be considered as a rational way of thinking that usually fails to be reasonable. Even when a large number of people believe in a conspiracy theory, its rationality does not provide sufficient overlapping consensus upon which reasonable pluralism can be established within a local community or internationally. Of course, conspiracy theorists can claim that while arguing for the existence of a conspiracy, they still believe and endorse reasonable pluralism. In fact, they always try to appear as reasonable to convince the public of their rhetoric. However, conspiracy theorists, especially in modern societies, find it almost impossible to locate within the mainstream of the overlapping consensus. That is why conspiracy theories operate only in the margin of such societies. In less advanced societies, oppression, restrictions on freedom of expression, repression on the press and illiteracy cripple the possibilities of reaching an overlapping consensus whose reasonability is strong enough to resist conspiracism. Conspiracy theory, as a way of thinking, essentially lacks the capacity for self-reflection, flexibility to adjust its position to meet halfway with

other narratives and the ability to develop its arguments to include new situations, data, events and ideas. In my perspective, conspiracy theory by its nature is a narrow-minded viewpoint that drives its strength from its narrowmindedness. Once it departs from its exclusiveness and accepts compromising with other ways of rational thinking, conspiracy theory loses all of its momentum and dissolves by itself, leaving the stage to more rational theories whose arguments are able to meet the requirements of reasonableness.

Conclusion

Along with other aspects of this modern world, conspiracy theory has been marked by the historical, conceptual and methodological characteristics of the intellectual transformations since the end of the Middle Ages. A close look at the theoretical connection between conspiracy theory and political theory shows that conspiracy theory uses rational thinking that is impacted by doubt and the reasoning process, and relies also on acceptable methodical standards to approve its arguments. Refusing rationality in the rhetoric of conspiracy theory might be taken as a defense of modern rationality from its own self. Nevertheless, conspiracy theory in essence lacks the necessary elements of reasonableness without which it barely can support any constructive and inclusive argument.

SECTION II

THE EPISTEMOLOGICAL EXPLANATIONS OF CONSPIRACY THEORY

In this section, the focus of attention is on the epistemological explanations and propositions of the phenomenon of conspiracy theory. More specifically, this section attempts to identify and explore the political theorists' most prominent explanations of conspiracy theory in terms of its logic, the main reasons for its spread and the satisfactory theoretical approach it offers to many people. Reviewing and examining the epistemological explanations for this phenomenon help understand the nature of conspiracy theory, the degree of seriousness existed among the political theorists when they deal with conspiracy theory, and the depth, cogency and logical reasoning of their propositions in this regard. Knowing the strengths and weaknesses of these propositions allows scholars to improve the epistemological view on conspiracy theory and eventually paves the way to a better understanding of academic political thinking itself, seen from the perspective of conspiracy theory which has been proposed as an alternative interpretation to the conventional understanding of political activities. As this section will demonstrate, political theorists, in general, do not, in general, afford sufficient epistemological explanations regarding conspiracy theory. Instead, they usually provide several scattered efforts without benefiting from each other's arguments and findings because they do not address conspiracy theory with an appropriate degree of seriousness or at least without a clear analytic framework. As this paper aims to draw a general picture of the

epistemological explanations to conspiracy theory, it also, at its end, forms a general view of the epistemological account of conspiracy theory considering these explanations.

The explanations offered by political scientists based on epistemological perspectives can be divided into four categories: the genealogical, contextual, functional, and structural explanations. In the coming pages, I will explore the main arguments, logic, and findings of these explanations in order to form a general perception in this regard.

Genealogical Explanation

In his article, “Why Has Critique Run out of Steam? From Matters of Fact to Matters of Concern,” Bruno Latour thinks that the nature and logic of conspiracy theory has the same background of those of skeptical approaches with one difference; the former lacks the “teachable version of social critique” (228). Beside this difference, the explanation presented by conspiracy theory to political phenomena is similar to other explanations offered by other academic views since “the structure of the explanation, in the first movement of disbelief and, then, in the wheeling of causal explanations coming out of the deep dark below” (229). In this context, Latour observes that the motives of explanation and the way of thinking are almost identical in both cases. Hence, he acknowledges that

Conspiracy theories are an absurd deformation of our own arguments, but, like weapons smuggled through a fuzzy border to the wrong party, these

are our weapons nonetheless. In spite of all the deformations, it is easy to recognize, still burnt in the steel, our trademark: Made in Criticalland (230)

Latour's remarks echo the observations mentioned in the previous section about the skeptical nature of conspiracy theory which is directed to seek answers in a way that is used by other rational methods in our modern era.

Yet, Latour goes further in his notions on conspiracy theory by linking it with his thought of the fact position and the fairy position by which he distinguishes two approaches used in studying different kinds of concepts and things. For Latour, the fact position is “used over and over again by many social scientists who associate criticism with antifetishism. The role of the critic is then to show that what the naïve believers are doing with objects is simply a projection of their wishes onto a material entity that does nothing at all by itself” (237). On the other hand, the fairy position convinces people that they cannot be redeemed from being vulnerable to misjudgments due to forces one has no ability to recognize (238). Latour points out that social critics use both positions inconsistently and manipulatively to serve their own premises and purposes. He demonstrates that the social critics use both positions in their discourses regardless of any logical contradictions that go usually unrecognized because "there is never any crossover between the two lists of objects in the fact position and the fairy position" (241). According to Latour, conspiracy theory comes as an outcome of this crossover since millions of people being taught in collages in the last several years this critical way of thinking that satisfies in its inconsistencies and double standards everyone by changing the frames to make everybody

is right all the time. Therefore, conspiracy theorists find a spacious place for themselves among the logical flaws in social critique.

Latour, then, expresses his worries “to detect, in those mad mixtures of knee-jerk disbelief, punctilious demands for proofs, and free use of powerful explanation from the social neverland, many of the weapons of social critique" (230). Conspiracy theory, for Latour, is a manifestation of the weakness of social critique and its needs for empiricism and significant scientific standers to eradicate lack of neutrality and arbitrary standards. Otherwise, conspiracy theory will not only continue to exist, but also can be used in different purposes by critics who oppose both the fact position and the fairy position since all of them (conspiracy theory and these two positions) suffer from serious flaws but with consideration to the special defects “or deformations” in the logic of conspiracy theory.

From a broader perspective, Latour's notion on conspiracy theory is strongly associated with his argument against Kantian thought on “matters of fact” which revolves around his understanding to causality. Thinking that Kantian “matters of fact” is merely implausible pure objective observation of things, Latour proposes his idea of “matters of concern” as an interesting subjective way to deal with facts and to draw more social attention to them and make them interested and populated. In this context, conspiracy theory is perceived as negative consequences of Kant's depriving the scientific approach from its concerning aspect. This subjectivism does not mean that Latour urges for getting away “from facts but closer to them, not fighting empiricism but, on the contrary, renewing empiricism” (231). Due to Kant's depriving the scientific approach of its human passion, analysts have had strong inclinations towards conspiracy theory as an alternative way

through which they can engage with excitement and enthusiasm. Consequently, it is unlikely to separate conspiracy thinking from public sphere norms.

In Latour's viewpoint, the emergence of conspiracy theory signifies the failure of Enlightenment to understand the nature of human beings, especially their need for linking their passion to their cognitive research. Even though Latour's argument includes controversial issues, his implied attribution of conspiracy theory to Kantian doctrines is associated with the remarks mentioned in the previous section about the linked emergence of modernity, including Enlightenment, and conspiracy theory.

The Contextual Explanation

Jodi Dean's article "Declarations of Independence" takes a quite different perspective on identifying the nature of conspiracy theory and the reasons behind its existence. Dean thinks that conspiracy theory, among a spectrum of ways of thinking, is an outcome of the overwhelming tendency of contemporary politics towards disclosing everything for its own sake regardless of the consequences or the benefits of this disclosure (290). Based on this view, Latour's thought on conspiracy theory might be considered as part of this tendency which relies on the public desire to know. Rather than the intellectual who seeks for an inclusive approach of knowledge to demolish conspiracy theory, Latour appears here as a dogmatic figure who indirectly helps to set the stage for conspiracy theory by his calls for destroying the necessary political distance between publicity and privacy.

Unlike Latour, Dean does not believe that giving the public a better access to knowledge, secrets and all different kinds of information can ensure the elimination of conspiracy theory. In contrast, such inclusive approach usually leads to increasing the spread of conspiracy theory due to the concept of "the paradox of the public." Dean defines this concept as "the deep connection between conspiracy theory and norms of publicity" (288). Hence, Dean stresses that the concepts of conspiracy theory and publicity belong to the same rationality that contradicts secrecy and concealment under the pressure of the practice of publicity since they, like conspiracy theorists, endeavor to bring 'to public attention' an object that the public can know, discuss, and judge" (288). Nevertheless, this rationality in Dean's view, is not quite rational because conspiracy theory and publicity cannot coexist in any logical way of thinking. In other words, publicity, by its own nature, eradicates conspiracy theory and conspiracy theory, by its own nature, requires secrecy to flourish rather than publicity. However, instead of this this logical mechanism, Dean thinks that another mechanism takes place:

Ironically, the more information that is brought into the light of the public, the more that is disclosed for public consumption, the more that the people, the masses, seem to displace the public. At least that's what critics imply when they deride the vehicles of publicity as well as its audience for their irrationality, prurience, bad taste, and fall from the norms and standards of the public sphere. An effect of the paradox of the public, then, is that the concept of publicity creates the excesses that must be disavowed in the very name of the public. It produces conspiracy theory. (288)

When the public delivers all the information, the masses displaces the publicity in order to obtain more information. Skepticism of our time imposes the idea of secrecy to keep going, and when nothing left to hide, it assumes that there is more hidden information somewhere.

The Functional Explanation

If Jodi Dean were to advance her argument a little further, and explicitly state that the public relies on secrecy to survive and avoid being replaced by the masses, her perspective might fall more under the functional explanation of conspiracy theory. By declaring that the publicity produces conspiracy theory to protect the public, it becomes clear that conspiracy theory, in light of this argument, seems to be an indispensable product that the masses must be distracted with and entertained. Conspiracy theorists, thus, are not the real creators of the conspiracy theory but, rather, the entire system that requires it. In other words, conspiracy theorists are only agents who do not know that they are merely tools that the public used to distribute conspiracy theory. Based on the above, one can conclude that Dean's account implies that the public is the real conspiracy theorist and secrecy is the real conspiracy theory while the ordinary conspiracy theorists and their conspiracies stand only a part of this real theory.

However, Dean's argument takes a sharp turn when he concentrates on Seymour Lipset and Earl Raab's ideas related with conspiracy theory in their book, *The Politics of Unreason: Right Wing Extremism in America, 1790-1970*. Henceforth, Dean's comments,

in his article, move towards the functional explanation of conspiracy theory as he reviews and successfully highlights Lipset and Raab's key points on conspiracy theory. As a result, Dean pinpoints that “[c]onspiracy theory is central to the story of American pluralism. It plays an integral role in producing the reliable center, the public, the "we" recognized and accepted by mainstream American political science” (292). The functional explanation of conspiracy theory frankly appears here for the first time in Dean's perspective according to which conspiracy theory is defined as a function that helps to create “the American pluralism.” The idea of pluralism in Dean's argument comes from Lipset and Raab's book in which they attempt to describe the history of far-right movements based on a sociological methodology.

For Lipset and Raab, pluralism as a version of inclusive political process through bargaining and compromising stands against extremism or monism understood as anti-pluralistic and “critical aspect of extremism because of certain premises that underline the concept of open market” (6). Pluralism is the representation of the Western democratic states while monism is the representation of totalitarian regimes, such as the communist ruling authorities and the Nazi Germany (13). Furthermore, pluralism and monism also take place within a state, namely, in Lipset and Raab's case, the United States. Hence, they distinguish between two political behaviors: politics as a pluralistic process of negotiation “through which conflicting interests come to live with each other” (12) and political moralism as an anti-politics and anti-pluralistic perspective according to which “political process is seen only as a struggle between good and bad intention” (12). In this respect, conspiracy theory is considered as a tool used by extremist politics to serve through its

comprehensive nature the purposes of monism, especially when it is employed to explain events in different periods of time and regions in a manner that supports the extremists' ideology. Lipset and Raab point out that extremist politics do not only employ conspiracy theory for its comprehensiveness of time and space but also for its comprehensiveness of design and decisiveness. The importance of design stems from the fact that the extremists do not only use conspiracy theory to show the political collusion throughout history in order to achieve their own ends, but also that “this collusion is *the* explanatory factor in understanding history” (15).

According to Lipset and Raab, comprehensiveness, as a distinctive feature that insures a theory to be comprehensive in time, space and design, is the first element of conspiracy theory. The second is the manipulation of the many by the few. The authors believe that the moralistic nature of extremism indispensably creates an atmosphere in which people feel manipulated by the few or an evil elite instead of believing in a free society or exercising free will (15). Due to the feeling of being manipulated, there is a need for redeeming the people who “are seen as soft and as seduced by the opiates of welfare and propaganda” (15). People, in light of this second element of conspiracy theory, have no hope for liberation from such manipulation without radical solutions that lead to eradicating democracy, mass media and other aspects of pluralism. Lipset and Raab indicate that the idea of manipulators necessarily requires the idea of secrecy. Thus, what appears on the surface is unreal while what lies beneath is the truth hidden by the manipulators. The public are ignorant and blind since the information they receive either wrong, incomplete, or misleading.

Lipset and Raab emphasize that conspiracy theory does not only serve the purpose of a particular wing of extremism but also is designed to

[L]egitimate the closing down of the ideational market place — that is, providing a rationale for accomplishing the very thing the conspiracy theory is presumably directed against: the manipulation of the many by the few. It is a central property of extremism of monism, but it is not the exclusive property of right-wing extremism. Left-wing extremism has habitually invoked the conspiracy theory out of its own political needs and its own historical moralism. And there is another quality of the conspiracy theory which both extremist poles typically share: an underlying belief in the perfectibility of man. This brings us back full circle to the moralistic base of the conspiracy theory. If there is only one "right" way, if people are capable of it, then if they stray from it, the cause must be evil dereliction of some kind on somebody's part. (17)

The authors do not tell us whether there is any difference between the left-wing and the right-wing in terms of the impact of their ideological beliefs on forming their conspiracy theory. It is known that each wing of the extremists has different strategies, priorities, and lists of conspirators. In their article, "Mutual Suspicion at the Political Extremes: How Ideology Predicts Belief in Conspiracy Theories," Jan-Willem van Prooijen and André P.M. Krouwel prove that the left-wing and the right-wing differ from one another substantially according to the topics of conspiracy theory, such as financial crises and climate change. Prooijen and Krouwel point out that ideology plays a significant role in directing the

accusations of conducting a conspiracy towards a certain group or institution. Since banks are associated with capitalism; the extreme left has more negative stereotypes about banks compared to the extreme right. On the other hand, the authors' statistic results show that “[t]he political right endorsed climate conspiracy theories more strongly than the political left” (90). Nevertheless, there are some cases when both wings accuse one party of masterminding a conspiracy. For example, Alan Partington, Alison Duguid and Charlotte Taylor find “references to far-right beliefs that clandestine Jewish plots brought down Germany and the Nazis and to nostalgic communists accusing the Jews of destroying the Soviet” (297).

Lipset and Raab might neglect the difference between extreme left and right because they mostly concern with conspiracy theory as a function used to undermine the open market society and reshape it to be submissive to a totalitarian regime regardless of its ideology, but in their case, it happens to be the extreme right. This is the reason why their concentration on the elements of conspiracy theory, comprehensiveness and the manipulation of the many by the few is not aimed to explain the structure of them but how they have been operated together to, as Dean concludes on Lipset and Raab's argument, to evince “a skepticism toward the credulous audience posing as the pluralists' public. Challenging those claims, rules, and revelations that produce this rather pious 'we,' conspiracy thinking posits the political subject uncertain, at risk, and mistrustful” (294).

Lipset and Raab provide noticeable ideas regarding conspiracy theory and figure out that conspiracy theory is a self-contradictory proposition because it enables a few theorists to control the majority in order to fight against the few who control the majority.

Although Lipset and Raab's argument does not assume that there is indirectly a conspiracy behind every conspiracy theory masterminded by extremists, they allude that every conspiracy theory can be seen as a conspiracy. Therefore, conspiracy theory is doomed by its own logic.

The Structural Explanation

Brain L. Keeley attempts in his article, “Of Conspiracy Theories,” to diagnose why conspiracy theory is both popular and epistemologically unwarranted. To achieve this task, Keeley offers an abstract explanation that focuses on the structure of conspiracy theory. In order to do so, Keeley first defines conspiracy theory as “a proposed explanation of some historical event (or events) in terms of the significant causal agency of a relatively small group of persons—the conspirators— acting in secret” (51). From this definition, Keeley deduces that “a conspiracy theory deserves the appellation 'theory,' because it proffers an *explanation* of the event in question. It proposes reasons why the event occurred” (51). In addition, Keeley thinks that this definition sheds light on the nature of the conspirators' participation in conducting a conspiracy. He believes that the definition suggests that instead of considering conspirators very powerful, they need only to play an essential role in “setting events in motion” while acting in secret (51). The conspirators, based on this definition, must be few in number but not limited to one person because “a conspiracy of one is not conspiracy at all” (51). Keeley distinguishes between warranted conspiracy

theory and unwarranted conspiracy theory (UCT) by signifying five characteristics regarding to the latter:

1- A UCT is an explanation that runs counter to some received, official, or "obvious" account.

[...]

2- The true intentions behind the conspiracy are invariably nefarious.

[...]

3- UCTs typically seek to tie together seemingly unrelated events.

[...]

4- As noted, the truths behind events explained by conspiracy theories are typically well-guarded secrets, even if the ultimate perpetrators are sometimes well-known public figures.

[...]

5- The chief tool of the conspiracy theorist is what I shall call errant data. Errant data come in two classes: (a) unaccounted-for data and (b) contradictory data (51-2).

Keeley concludes that the most important virtues of unwarranted conspiracy theory is its unified explanation “or explanatory reach” since this virtue popularizes conspiracy theory. However, the unified explanation of (UCT) is exhibited in a way that undermines its strength. To provide a unified explanation, conspiracy theorists rely on errant data that the official office usually ignores. More importantly, they use this ignorance to justify their conspiracy theories. For them, the officials “must be intentionally ignoring it. The best

explanation is some kind of conspiracy, an international attempt to hide the truth of the matter from the public eye” (54). Depending heavily on skepticism and the official ignorance of errant data makes conspiracy theory flexible to shift any argument and evidence into its favorable. In Keeley's words, “conspiracy theories are the only theories for which evidence against them is actually construed as evidence in favor of them” (54). This Logical fallacy is what makes some of conspiracy theories unwarranted regardless of its popularity.

At this point, Keeley explicitly differentiates between the reliance alone on errant data, that is, the main logical problem of unwarranted conspiracy theory, and unfalsifiability. He thinks that one cannot use unfalsifiability to argue against conspiracy theory since it advocates for hidden powerful agents who “steer our investigation away from the truth of the matter” (55).

Keeley provides a satisfactory description to conspiracy theory from an epistemological viewpoint. His analysis of the structure of conspiracy theory linked with his explanation to its popularity and logical fallacy sheds a valuable light on the mechanism of conspiracy theory. With Keeley's remarks on the difference between unfalsifiability and errant data regarding conspiracy theory help to recognize the flaws of conspiracy theory within its own logic.

Conclusion

Reviewing the genealogical, contextual, functional, and structural explanations of conspiracy theory from an epistemological angle illustrates various aspects of conspiracy theory as well as how political scientists try to observe the reasons behind its emergence, development and its structure, logic and flaws. Epistemologically, conspiracy theory raises a lot of issues related with rationality, skepticism, criticism of Enlightenment, the objectivity of science, the impact of secrecy and publicity on political thinking and the extremists' manipulation of the public dissatisfaction. Explaining several aspects of conspiracy theory through an epistemological approach demonstrates that conspiracy theory as an alternative way of thinking can reflect a number of controversial issues and debates concerning political theory and political science. Although the efforts made for this topic are not commensurate with its importance, what is reviewed in this section reveals profound thoughts and discussions that help enhance knowledge about conspiracy theory and some intricate subjects of political theory. Conspiracy theory can be understood and explained in many and even opposite ways. Yet, based on the explanations explored in this section, conspiracy theory, epistemologically, is tightly bound with modern rationality and a wide range of contemporary issues related with it.

SECTION III

THE THEORETICAL BASES AND THE ARGUMENTATIVE STRATEGIES OF CONSPIRACY THEORY

There is a strong inclination among the political theorists who profoundly study conspiracy theory to agree, in general, with defining it as “a proposed explanation of some historical event (or events) in terms of the significant causal agency of a relatively small group of persons —the conspirators—acting in secret” (Keeley 51) if we take into consideration that this “proposed explanation must conflict with an “official” explanation of the same historical event” (Coady 2006b, 117). From an epistemological point of view, one can define conspiracy theory as a rational attempt, motivated by skepticism, to resolve a puzzle or ambiguous event in order to replace unsatisfactory official exegeses with an alternative explanation that provides a better understanding of the matter at hand. To do that, the analyst will have to rely on a number of theoretical bases and argumentative strategies. The task of this section is to explore and examine, in the writing of several political theorists and scientists, these theoretical bases and argumentative strategies of conspiracy theory, and, then, try to find their common characteristics.

By doing so, this section will pave the way for further studies that concentrate on studying the connections between theoretical bases and the argumentative strategies of conspiracy theory in a wide range of writings that include the political and critical implications in this regard. The arguments and issues raised in this section are examples of an extended study in which an advanced academic efforts and profound political and

ideological writings, including rightists', leftists' and Islamists' texts, that revolve around conspiracy theory.

Studying closely the theoretical background and operational strategies of conspiracy theory is extremely important because it shows, for the first time in the field of political theory, the logical and argumentative mechanism of conspiracy theory as it seeks to convince the public of its claims. Furthermore, by providing such dimension, scholars can easily associate these theoretical background and strategies with their epistemological contexts to determine whether conspiracy theory obtains logical consistency (or not) as it addresses different subjects. The nature of conspiracy theory, thus, can be recognized in depth through this new comprehensive view, as well as its similarities and differences with other conventional political theories.

In terms of methodology, this section is divided into two portions. The first focuses on the theoretical background of conspiracy theory. Although important, the epistemological aspects of conspiracy theory rarely become a subject of thoughtful studies. Consequently, identifying such efforts and evaluate them in this section is quite possible. The second portion deals with practical studies chosen from an anthology containing thoughtful studies that cover different practical aspects of conspiracy theory. Such anthologies are a few especially if one attempts to study a profound one that provides various conspiracy theories from sundry countries and cultures. Because *Transparency and Conspiracy: Ethnographies of Suspicion in the New World Order* includes all the qualities mentioned above, I select it to be the sample of my section after I exclude some articles when either does not provide a study case, or they come from a region already covered by

another article in this anthology. Even though the chosen articles do not reflect all the arguments made by political theorists regarding conspiracy theory, they illustrate some of the general argumentative characteristics of conspiracy theory, its main theoretical mechanism and its epistemological concepts. Considering the nature of the debates in these articles, I categorize them into two groups: the first deals with the articles that highlight the constructive role of conspiracy theory while the second discusses the articles that revolve around the reactionary role of conspiracy theory.

The Contradictions of Conspiracy Theory

As this section illustrates, political theorists identify sets of theoretical bases and the argumentative strategies of conspiracy theory that are different from each other, to the point of contradiction. The contradictory nature of conspiracy theory in the political theorists' perspective is widely known, such as the discussion over whether secrecy or publicity is the motive that triggers conspiracy theories. Yet, only a few political scholars mention this contradiction. One of those scholars is Juha Räikkä who notices that

On the one hand, belief 'in a conspiracy may lead to fear or sorrow' and cause pessimism and cynicism, as conspirators are by definition seen as bad [...]. On the other hand, the view that we live in an ordered universe in which large-scale conspiracies are common may give us hope that the world is not as absurd and chaotic as it sometimes seems. (77)

Räikkä, also, distinguishes between political conspiracy theorizing which “may be a valuable cultural phenomenon” and political conspiracy theories that might “have moral costs” (77). The differentiation between the positivity of conspiracy theorizing and the negativity of conspiracy theories is not limited to conspiracy theory, but, extending to all cases where there is theorizing and theory. Theorizing by itself “is an active disposition of the mind. Theorizing is a dynamic relationship that exists between the individual and his or her environment.” On the other hand, “[t]heory is the content, action, and the product of our thought” (Allen 12). In this context, Richard Swedberg emphasizes on the role of creativity and imagination on the process of theorizing compared to the inactiveness of the theory. Hence, Swedberg clarifies that

While theorizing, then, can be playful and full of movement, theory signifies the freezing of a set of thoughts. Theory is frozen into written language or a symbolic language such as mathematics. While theorizing never ends, theory is stuck forever in its formulation. (15)

However, although not unique, the conspiracy theorizing, once isolated from conspiracy theories, gives political scientists and other social scholars miscellaneous ways of recognizing political phenomena. The duality between the conspiracy theorizing and conspiracy theories is important, but, what is more important, is the duality of conspiracy theory in terms of its effectiveness, as mentioned above by Räikkä when he differentiates between the two opposite reactions to conspiracy theory: fear or sorrow; pessimism and cynicism. This duality reflects the contradiction within the very logic of conspiracy theory through which “incompatible discourses and conspiracy theories are fully able to coexist,

and even to feed on each other” (Bjørge 2019). Unlike other conventional scientific theories, conspiracy theories do not follow a unified and predictable pattern. Consistency is required only for each conspiracy theory by its own, and none of them has been set to be identical, in its logical structures, to the rest of conspiracy theories. By having no logical constraints, symmetric limitations, or manifesto commitments, conspiracy theories have had no boundary to deliver opposite explanations of different events. That does not mean that conspiracy theories do not share overriding features, such as employing doubting to challenge the official narrative by presenting a new explanation of events. Basically, it means that their explanation do not follow a formula or according to a consensus method agreed upon by the majority of conspiracy theories.

Looking closely to the nature of the opposite effectiveness of believing in conspiracy theory shows that the latter relies in general on a moral-political orientation, that is, idealism. In other words, conspiracy theory varies in its explanations and effectiveness due to its contradictory logical nature, especially in its dependence on idealism and realism to interpret and response to what seem, in its perspective, as suspicious events. Yet, one can find in the writings of political theorists several connections made between the fundamental elements of conspiracy theory arguments and its epistemological concepts. These connections suggest that each conspiracy theory contains logical consistency at the same level as academic theories.

In light of the political theorists' insights and remarks in this regard, this section explores several accounts among political theorists whose works are closely related to what is discussed in this section. My hypothesis is that it is more likely to give a coherent

explanation of the conceptual background of conspiracy theories when looking at them as theories that have a strong propensity towards idealism than depending on any other way of thinking. Even with the acknowledgment that the arguments and the tendencies of conspiracy theories are varied, the latter usually take two roles: constructive and reactionary. Political intellectuals attribute a lot of conspiracy theories to the desire to build an ideal world where justice, transparency and human rights prevail over impunity, opacity and persecution. Conspiracy theorists refuse narratives that attempt to assimilate all aspects of an event into an official account that serves the authorities' purposes. Rather, conspiracy theorists present an alternative narrative that undermines the official explanation and replaces it based on its 'honest intention' and 'disinterested purpose'.

Based on the nature of the coming arguments concerning this issue, I divide them into two units according to their approaches, strategies, and logical bases. The first approach builds upon a constructive vision of conspiracy theories' role in the world against certain groups' interests and plans. This vision uses argumentative strategies to justify criticizing political foundations without concrete evidence for the sake of establishing an ideal system. The second approach deals with conspiracy theory as a reactionary, and spontaneous mechanism through which, as political scholars recognize, a group of people tend to believe in a particular conspiracy theory to defend themselves and their style of life from uncertainty emerged during a shifting operation from old to new system.

1. Constructive Role

Daniel Hellinger associates in his article, “Paranoia, Conspiracy, and Hegemony in American Politics,” the revelation and populist stories of conspiracy theory with an enhancement of morality and certainty in a world of unethicalness and ambiguity. Hellinger refuses psychopathology perspectives that address conspiracy theory as paranoia, or “a mass response of ordinary people to impersonal forces that they cannot control and do not understand” (208). Instead, he defines conspiracy as a

[S]ubjective group behavior involving three analytically distinct but interrelated characteristics: secrecy; vulnerability to defeat by exposure; and one or a combination of illegality, deception, betrayal of legitimate purposes of an authorized activity, and a contradiction of generally accepted moral codes of behavior. (209)

Hellinger, then, views several articles that observe the popularity of conspiracies in the last decades among the American people in relation with its impact on elites including the U.S. government. He concludes that popularity, seen in films and television has “forced elites to reopen episodes that they would rather remain closed” (221).

Along with the impact of popularity, globalization, as perceived by a number of writers, empowers the accusations of conspiracy theory against elites, especially international regimes who sometimes secretly cooperate with each other, regardless of the supposed rivalry among some of them. Hellinger concludes that conspiracy theories might be an indispensable way to draw attention to vicious elites who might have been otherwise

ignored “within an interpretative community” (227), and they gain credibility from the suspicion that arises “because the further globalization proceeds, the more the promise of democracy seems to recede” (227). Hellinger ends his article with a conception of conspiracy theory as a force that puts a useful pressure on “elites who prefer to confer and operate out of the glare of transparent daylight, in the opaque twilight of deep politics” (227). Conspiracy theory here is a right that can be used to protect and enhance democracy to establish a better world.

The argument of Hellinger lacks logical elements and contradicts with its noble purposes. To put it more clearly, Hellinger focuses only on the practicality of conspiracy theories to interrupt pragmatic elites in order to establish a more democratic and transparent political system. Such approach seems more anarchic and hypocritical than any rational idea since it uses a theoretical background and idealism as justification for a mixture of dogmatism and populism to reach practical political goals. In addition, if one shifts Hellinger's point about using conspiracy theory against elites in its opposite direction and agrees, for the sake of the argument, with Miles Copeland about the CIA's role in disestablishing the relationship between people across borders to gain political advantages in particular cases (184-5). Rather than directed against elites, conspiracy theories, in this perspective, are conducted by the elites against the public to weaken them, and eventually, control them easily.

The main logical flaw in Hellinger's pragmatic strategies is that it is built on its idealist goals instead of leading to them. Hellinger's perspective of conspiracy theory does not recognize the danger of its double-edged nature in the public. The idealist intention of

Hellinger leads to counterproductive results when put into practice because “[t]he conspiracy-theory concept is deceptive. It seems to refer merely to speculation about a secret plot. But when it is applied to elite political crimes, it destroys context, background, and perspective. It is the conceptual equivalent of looking at an elephant through a microscope” (DeHaven-Smith 27).

Although Susan Harding and Kathleen Stewart's article, “Anxieties of Influence: Conspiracy Theory and Therapeutic Culture in Millennial America” takes an opposite perspective towards the role of paranoia in conspiracy theory, it agrees with Hellinger's outlook on the constructiveness of conspiracy theory. In Harding and Stewart's article, conspiracy theory is conceived as an outcome of the modern world in which neurasthenia has encompassed every aspect of life due to the means of modernity themselves (258). For the authors, conspiracy theory does not only belong to the symptoms of neurasthenia but also to the therapeutic culture that seeks to haul itself form such psychological burden. Comparing conspiracy theory to neurasthenia, Harding and Stewart recognize that they both articulate “symptoms and cures in an anxious link between mysterious hidden forces and the redemptive healing force of agency” (259). Conspiracy theory, in its nature, according to suggest Harding and Stewart, is a paranoid phenomenon regardless of being distinguished from neurasthenia by its concentration on the effectiveness of revealing the truth that opens the public eyes on the miserable consequences of hidden forces' and players' deeds that led to the creation of our consumerist civilization. The constructiveness of conspiracy theory is derived from "fusion paranoia," a term borrowed from Michael Kelly to refer to the sensibility of conspiracy that

[T]racks signs and surges of power, surveils banal surfaces to discover hidden threats and promises pieces together obscure, disparate details in search of the key to an ultimate puzzle and the moment when the imaginary finally matches the real. It dreams up eccentric paths of return to a pristine past, a redemptive human agency, and a world ordered from on high as if a blueprint of a law, a code, or an urtext could be directly, magically imprinted on matter and society, claiming to heal the wound imprinted by the long-standing sense of disjuncture between the American dream and an always already degraded reality. It is, like neurasthenia, a discourse animated at once by fear and desire. (260)

Conspiracy theory here is not limited only to situated cases but must be understood as an intelligent response to a large, accumulated and complex number of circumstances related with the core of the modern Western civilization. This world of paranoia has released a wide range of anxieties and fears among of which conspiracy theory that signifies at the same time hope for a better world as much as it reflects concerns and discomforts.

Subsequently, conspiracy theory bridges the psychological disorders of modernity and the therapeutic culture by its “overarching structure of feeling that articulates conflicting political efforts and disparate publics in a multivocalic national space of conjuncture” (260). For Harding and Stewart, conspiracy theory is not an effort to disclose a concealed plot but it is seen from a broader perspective as social and cultural criticism addressing national politics and social issues, such as inequality. Conspiracy theory acquires its therapeutic capacity from its “themes of ultimacy and redemption built into

it—as dreams, abysmal realities, or intensely polarized unconscious structures” (263). But how can conspiracy theory belong to two contradicting fields: the psychological disorders of our society and the therapeutic culture? The answer is to be found in the nature of conspiracy theory; it rather is established on the foundation of our civilization itself. This civilization is tensely complicated in such a way that includes at the same time its illnesses and cures. In other words, the Western civilization does not need to import its remedy from outside since it has its trauma, logics of stress, injustice, redemption and self-made agency coexist all the time. Conspiracy theory emerges from this hybrid atmosphere to refer to both: the disorders as its basis and therapeutic culture as its goal.

As far as the fundamental elements of conspiracy theories arguments is concerned, Harding and Stewart observe that

Particular cultures, groups, and publics articulate the anxiety of influence in different ways and to varying degrees. They invariably recycle and revise preexisting story lines and tropes, often contribute minor innovations to the larger field of conspiratorial thinking, and sometimes realize stunning breakthroughs, boldly going forth to make connections that no one has made before. (265)

Since conspiracy theory, here, is understood as a paradoxical phenomenon in its nature, it is more likely to attributes that to its contradictory theoretical bases on which it rests its arguments. The latter, thus, turn to be repetitive, narrative and recyclable. Most importantly, this argument is made by no conspiracy theorist. As conspiracy theory causes fear, worries and despair among the publics, it finds its argument for healing based on hope

and redemption in unprompted ways formed by the public itself. Therefore, the relationship between the fundamental elements of conspiracy theory's arguments and its epistemological concepts, in light of Harding and Stewart's perspective, lies in the dualist orientation of conspiracy theory. Fear leads to curiosity and incarceration generates redemption and vice versa. As conspiracy theory carries the possibility of stunning breakthroughs, it also posits the possibility of logically entangling itself in a vicious circle.

Consequently, Harding and Stewart's perspective of conspiracy theory is unfalsifiable and untestable. In addition, looking at the healing process as a collective effort of a certain culture or group excludes the most essential element of psychological remedy, that is, interactionism among individuals. According to Hoon Song,

[T]o speak of the therapeutic, we need an interactionally situated subject that resists, disavows, mimes, and projects in an answer to what I called earlier the enigma of being. To speak of conspiracy theory, that is, we need the hystericized subject-modality that is caught in the impasse of being. (123)

Such approach, of course, hardly finds its implication in conspiracy theory due to its populist features. Rather, the point here is that the same observation can be derived from the relationship between conspiracy theory and the therapeutic practice. Conspiracy theory undoubtedly reveals fear and anxieties among the public and it can be helpful in releasing these feelings as well as different kinds of concerns and anguishes, but one might overestimate its role by making it function in a therapeutic capacity. The two examples presented by Harding and Stewart about the therapeutic role of conspiracy theory are

inconsistent with their theoretical approaches. These examples are limited to tiny communities and there were particular people in both cases played a significant role to direct the hauling process rather than collective mechanism, as Harding and Stewart point out in their abstract. When one looks to conspiracy theories that have spread across a country or a big society, such as 9/11 conspiracy and the JFK assassination, s/he might conclude that they mostly undermine trust between the communities and their government and promote anxieties instead of giving comfort from any kind.

2. Reactionary Role

Unlike the first approach, this vision does not rely on a logical justification of a certain action, nor does it use complicated tactics to build an argument in order to achieve specific goals. Instead, it consists of a spontaneous reaction to a challenging change imposed or about to be imposed on a group of people during a critical time period when a traditional style of life is to be shifted to a new one with which this group of people are not familiar. The idealized characteristics of this defensive mechanism stem from its reliance on looking to reality through certain mental perspectives taken from different sources, such as religions, myths and tradition.

In their anthology, *Transparency and Conspiracy: Ethnographies of Suspicion in the New World Order*, Harry G. West and Todd Sanders collect several articles that mostly revolve around the defensive mechanism. This volume starts with Laurel Kendall's essay,

“Gods Markets and the IMF in the Korean Spirit World,” in which she studies a conspiracy theory that took place in South Korea as a reaction of uncertainty spread among the public during enforcing new financial reforms determined by the International Monetary Fund during the 1990s. Kendall notices that many South Koreans deeply doubted their government's new policy because they had thought that IMF was not the actual player in these reforms which had made their lives more difficult when they first enforced but contained domestic and foreign concealed players who operated behind the scene not only to control the nation as whole, but even each person individually.

To counter this challenge, as Kendall observes, a lot of South Koreans, including well-educated people resorted to their religion and spirituality to ease their fear and concerns. Kendall indicates that “[t]he image of a silent and powerless spirit world in the face of this thing called the IMF was a fair reflection of what many Koreans were feeling in the spring of 1998” (57). This spiritual restoration, however, is not only negative by its nature but also insufficient because the condition of “the IMF” was sometimes seen as beyond the reach of shamanic instrumentality” (39). Shamans failed to fulfill their promises to their clients who had suffered from severe economic crises. Nevertheless, the public attitude towards religion during the 1990s remained ambivalent which reflected how the Koreans looked to IMF. For Koreans, the latter at that time was something that might cause harm or lead to fortune. Although spirituality did not have any solution to IMF's consequences,

[C]onfrontations with gods and ancestors in playful and sometimes poignant rituals permit, if not a transparent aperture on the forces that

drive Korean modernity, some critical lenses through which participants view the living out of modernity's consequences as they engage a capricious market. (39)

Kendall's observations show that Koreans did not completely despair of spirituality as a defense mechanism in front of the uncertainty of IMF. The parallel relationship between IMF and spirituality is one of the unique characteristics of Korean modernity in which middle-class people and their shamans prospered together; and, in times of depression, fell back together.

Misty Bastian observes, in her article "Diabolic Realities': Narratives of Conspiracy, Transparency and 'Ritual Murder' in the Nigerian Popular Print and Electronic media," how the Nigerian used conspiracy theories to defend themselves from what seemed to them as a threat coming from the IMF's reforms. Unlike Koreans, Nigerians who are motivated in a certain part of the country by their myths took actions collectively by reacting brutally to a violent accident that was linked to the social and economic changes followed the IMF's intervention. The media and ordinary Nigerians blamed the elite for "political assassinations, official and unofficial conspiracies among the powerful, and, finally, to ritual murders" (79). The Poor of Owerri, the capital of Imo State in Nigeria, doubted both the elites who took advantages from the IMF's reforms and the Nigerian government who had links with social forces and did not want to reveal the facts about organized crimes and death squads but preferred to hide them behind a veil of transparency. Meanwhile, as Bastian points out, the state tightened its grip on the poor rather than the

higher classes. The poor, consequentially, became more defensive and skeptical, and found no choice but to take action. Hence, Bastian concludes that

In a world where conspiratorial imaginings (and possibly conspiratorial actions) are pandemic, infecting our social relations with distrust and anxiety, there is something refreshing in a case where people understood themselves to have momentarily confronted a terrible truth—and to have ripped it out by its branches, even if not by its roots. In Otokoto, *ndi owerre* refused to sit, transfixed, in their living rooms as the spectacle played on their television screens. They went instead into the public spaces that had served their ancestors well, and they acted out a public, communal gesture of disgust. Otokoto was not a “fragmented” of postmodern irony but a movement, however brief and fragmented, toward reestablishing a sense of *local* Owerri values and a local Owerri place at the heart of the globalized, surveilled, and modernized city. Such movements are well worth knowing about, wherever they occur. (85)

In both cases, in South Korea and Nigeria, fear, uncertainty and skepticism during a time of change pushed people who had suffered from economic decline to fall back on their heritage in order to find support, a sense of trust and singularity in a world of doubt and globalization. Although insufficient, heritage gives people a feeling of secure that is used usually as a defensive measure against conspiracy theories.

In her article, “Stalin and the Blue Elephant: Paranoia and Complicity in Postcommunist Metahistories,” Caroline Humphrey observes specific contemporary

narratives among an indigenous group named Buryats in Russia and China regarding their repression under the Soviet Union era, especially, the confiscation and destruction of the Buddhist Temple in Russia in the 1930s. Buryats, as Humphrey suggests, unintentionally mixed their traditional beliefs, namely, reincarnation, with communist historical narratives in a collective paranoid defensive thinking in which, certain political figures appear as a re-embodiment of Buddhist legends. Joseph Stalin, in this context, is seen as a reincarnation of the mythic Blue Elephant who had been neglected after building a great temple, and vowed before its death to take revenge by destroying Buddhism three times in its subsequent lives.

Identifying Stalin with the Blue Elephant, according to Humphrey, is built upon the idea of the individual accountability even though it exonerates in its irrational perspective the Soviet leader from his infamous deeds against them. Humphrey explains the Buryats' narrative by pointing out that

People say that although Stalin damaged Buddhism as a result of making a 'wrong' vow when he was distressed and offended, he also liked Buddhism because in his previous birth (as the Blue Elephant) he had respected it and spent his whole life serving it. This is why Stalin gave permission for two monasteries to be re-opened in the 1940s, and it means that Stalin, as the Blue Elephant, was satisfied with the realisation of his vow. In this whole explanation, Stalin as an 'individual', as the communist leader executing intentional policy, is generally not

conceptualised at all. Instead, he appears like a phantom of destiny, fated to destroy what he 'really' loved. (189).

Humphrey argues that the influence of the communist hegemonic discourse has deeply affected how people interpret the Buddhist stories of reincarnation. This influence is demonstrated by replacing the traditional reincarnation whose causes belong to “a means of magical reinforcement of cultural types of leadership” (182) with personal responsibilities given to Soviet leaders. Due to their feelings of religious guilt, Buryats have become more hesitant to count on individual accountability, and simply blame Stalin for his atrocities against them. Moreover, she states that putting Stalin in the reincarnation context illustrates a paranoid way of thinking that “generated, unconscious quandaries, the creation thereby of a ‘slanted’ or supernatural reality, the view that to which this reality is determined and does not occur by chance, and therefore that this reality can and must be interpreted” (184).

Buryats in the Soviet era found themselves marginalized because Russian nationalism, the political atmosphere and ethnic otherness among other reasons pushed them away from the mainstream. As a result, they faced mistrust along with a brutal punishment and the paranoid structure of the Communist Party discourse. Buryats' reaction is producing “a particular kind of poetically metaphoric narrative. This is paranoid by virtue of its being self-enclosed, displaced from the self, and felt to be true and, therefore, not susceptible to disproof” (197). Humphrey concludes that

Buddhist guise the anxious preoccupations of the Stalinists. That account proposed the transparent objectivity of the historical process. Yet, at the

same time, it presupposed the existence of conspiracies and hidden enemies, the dark forces against which the light of progress was to prevail.

(197)

Buryats had no choice but turn to allegory to secretly encounter the Soviet regime and employ conspiratorial thinking to defend themselves against the authoritarianism of the communist rule. according to Humphrey.

‘The existence of conspiracies,’ if there is any, is deeply embedded within the Buddhist culture of Buryats in which their concept of reincarnation embraces what Humphrey mentioned above about the struggle between light and dark forces. One can find a shred of conspiracism not in any hidden confrontation between Buryats and communists but within Buryats' culture and religion themselves. The Blue Elephant seems to be a lesson to remain vigilant to the consequences of your actions. The conspiracy here is the ignorance of self-responsibility of unpleasant circumstances. The conspiracy theorists in this respect are the story tellers who remind the young generations to keep their eyes open on their own sins rather than focusing on the crimes of the tyrants. By doing so, people would act better and monitor their actions more decently. Politically, this attitude, although negative, intensifies the moral struggle between Buddhism and Communism, including Buryats who help Soviet regime to persecute their own people. In other words, the more the Communists committed immoral and criminal acts, the more decent and honest Buryats should behave. The dark force is not Stalin but downplaying the guilt by thinking that its only Stalin's fault. The defensive mechanism here is turned to oneself. It shows Stalin innocent to overemphasize the self-responsibility in order to avoid becoming a victim of self-

deception, anger and hatred that made the Communists so brutal and fanatical. Unlike Humphrey's viewpoint, this perspective explains why the Blue Elephant legend does not change its rhetoric after the Soviet era. It is not about Stalin per se, but about eternal ethical issues.

Conclusion

From epistemological point of view, the theoretical background of conspiracy theory, as this section shows, is idealist in terms of its reliance on already settled concepts to face an unsolicited reality. Whether using a deliberate individual pragmatic argument or spontaneous collective defensive strategies, conspiracy theories in both violent and peaceful cases have not succeeded in connecting between the fundamental element of their arguments and their epistemological concept, idealism. However, as this section demonstrates, the pragmatic vision has several logical flaws. Due its impulsive nature, the defensive mechanism does not include any solid logical correlation between its epistemological background and its arguments. Regardless of its rationality, conspiracy theory lacks a substantive and coherent theoretical structure. The next chapter of this thesis is going to explore these issues while examining more advanced texts in this respect, namely, the writings of the rightists', leftists' and Islamists' intellectuals who tend to use the rhetoric of conspiracy theory to serve their political agendas.

CHAPTER II

THE POLITICALLY-ORIENTED APPROACH OF CONSPIRACY THEORY

This chapter examines the theoretical backgrounds and justifications of conspiracy theory that have been used or claimed to be used by three major movements in the last three centuries in different parts of the world. Since the ideologies and premises of these movements vary, different sources and discussions employed in each section of this chapter for proper addressing of their key points. The first Section is dedicated to discuss several influencing conspiracy theories made by Right-wing intellectuals. The second Section surveys the relationship between Communism and conspiracy theory. This section suggests that Communism has not invented its own conspiracy theories because its dialectical materialism includes a comprehensive description of the universe and its developments that has enabled it to dispense with conspiracy theory. The third Section revolves around conspiracy theory in the Islamic discourse. It discusses the thoughts of four prominent Islamic intellectuals and theologians in this respect. Since conspiracy theory is a secular way of thinking, this section focuses on knowing whether the Islamic discourse presents coherent and convincing arguments whose premises are intended to be consistent with their understandings of Islamic principles.

SECTION I:
CONSPIRACY THEORY IN THE RIGHT-WING DISCOURSE

This section attempts to explore the Right-wing conspiracy theory in terms of its theoretical basis and different rational justifications for linking particular conspiracy theories to certain groups and establishments, such as the Illuminati, the Catholic Church and the Freemasons. Due to the fact that the Right-wing conspiracy theory revolves around secularism and the Catholic Church, the initial hypothesis, here, is that religious interpretations play an essential role in forming these theories. Yet, unlike the Islamists conspiracy theorists' discourse, as we will see in the third section of this chapter, secularism, according to the Right-wing conspiracy theories, is neither in alliance with Christianity nor an manifestation of its crisis but a mixture of ideologies, orientations, unfamiliar philosophies and alien cultures that share the attitude of imposing religious authority over private and public lives.

What is attempted to be achieved by this section is to explore the theoretical backgrounds of the Right-wing discourse on conspiracy theory and the general characteristics of its argumentation. To do so, the current section, first, reviews the academic literature on this topic in order to identify the trajectories that gave rise to several ideological and political trends and (mis)interpretations. Second, through these trajectories,

this section traces the fundamental issues around which the arguments of the Right-wing conspiracy theory. Third, this section illustrates sundry similarities between the Right-wing principles and some thoughts of German philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, suggesting by that a potential theoretical foundation for the Right-wing and their conspiracy theory as well as a profound understanding to the nature of the intellectual climate that led to the emergence of the Right-wing. Lastly, the current section examines the relationship between the principles of the Right-wing and the general characteristics of its conspiracy theory by shedding a light on several conspiracy theories and identifying their major key points, the essential implications and their development.

Literature Review

Almost all of the scholars who address the literature of the Right-wing conspiracy theories address it from the perspective of historians who generally describe the circumstances of their inception and the purpose for which they have created and used. In spite of that, some of them shed useful light on the nature of the relationship between the Right-wing and conspiracy theory and the pivotal milestones in the developments of the conspiracy theory among the Right-wing movements and propagandists. In this context, the scholars by large give special attention to the French Revolution as a distinguished landmark in the emergence of the Right-wing conspiracy theory and its spread through Europe and the United States. As J. Byford concludes from various observations, the

French Revolution marks the inception of modern conspiracy theory whose roots “are often traced to a variant of the mythology of secret societies which developed at the end of the eighteenth century, in the immediate aftermath of the French Revolution (Hofstadter, 1967, Lipset and Raab, 1978, Billig, 1978, Cohn, 1967, Roberts, 1974)” (40). The French Revolution, in this context, derives its importance from being the most significant outcome of the progress of the Enlightenment rationalism in the eighteenth century France, and more generally, as the consequence of the enlightened thoughts fostered by the Reformation. Essentially, the French Revolution “was founded on the notion of timeless truths given to the faculty of reason with which all men are endowed. It preached a peaceful universalism and a rational humanitarianism” (Berlin 298-9). With some exceptions, the academic studies tend to consider the French Revolution as a turning point at which new circumstances have arisen and altered the political landscape of the European continent and the West in general in a way that led to the birth of conspiracy theory for the first time.

The majority of the scholars suggest that conspiracy theories did not exist before the French Revolution and what took place before were merely accusations about conspiracies mostly in Europe. In this regard, Daniel Pipes points out that “[t]he petty conspiracy theory is ageless, going back to the earliest forms of social life, existing in all places. The world conspiracy theory, in contrast, has a history, emerging from the distinctive history of Europe and dating back two and a half centuries, to the Enlightenment” (44). Yet, some scholars do not distinguish the difference between the two, and prefer to push this date further back, stating that “[t]he death of Henri II in 1559 marked the emergence of conspiracy theories on both sides of the confessional divide as Huguenot

and Catholic factions vied for control at Court, In the polemical flood that followed the tumult of Amboise, each faction accused the other of wanting to usurp the throne...” (Racaut 105). This accusation is not a sufficient ground for saying that it marks the inception of conspiracy theory in the West. Instead, such accusation is common among rival groups and factions throughout history, and has no important intellectual or practical advantage by itself to be considered as a fundamental turning point in this matter.

What makes the French Revolution unique in this respect is its representation of the Enlightenment liberalism, rationality and its tremendous impulse to transform the existing political and social structure. Among many scholars, the commonly held view is that the conservatives and reactionaries threatened by the advent of the French Revolution. According to Kenan Malik, “[t]he social and political upheaval caused by the Revolution created a backlash against the Enlightenment within sections of the bourgeoisie” (58). Theodore Ziolkowski adds that “political reactionaries, who regarded industrial technology, Enlightenment rationalism, and the political ideals of the French Revolution as interrelated aspects of the same ‘dark force’ destroying Germany's traditional values” (8). In such time fraught with unprecedented fear, tension, ambiguity and doubts, Catholic propagandists fostered an image of Protestants as treacherous and dangerous agitators and fierce enemies of the good and true. Ziolkowski, hence, indicates that

[M]any in the late eighteenth century blamed the French Revolution on the Illuminati, who were believed to have fomented it as a vehicle to achieve their Enlightenment goals. The endurance and continuity of

conspiracy theory is further suggested by the widespread imitations evident within the secret societies themselves. (8)

One can say, therefore, that the Right-wing conspiracy theory is one of the consequences of the French Revolution but it does not stop there to generate conspiratorial narrative about this Revolution. It, rather, extends to include different movements and issues that emerges since then.

Some might argue that conspiracy theory existed before the French Revolution, and its manifestations can easily be found throughout history. As being stated previously in this thesis, plots and conspiracies have been formed in every age including the post-French Revolution era. Yet, the belief of plots and conspiracies before 1789 cannot be considered as conspiracy theories because such belief usually is limited to specific events, dealt with local subjects and, most importantly, lacked the rational framework based on which these plots and conspiracies generate their comprehensive narrative about broad account of the world.

In this respect, Geoffrey Cubitt considers conspiracies before the French Revolutions as merely conspiracy myths. According to Cubitt, the conspiracy myth “tells the story of one conspiracy as if it were the only one, as if conspiracy were the monopoly and the distinguishing behavioural characteristic of a group, perpetually opposed to the rest of society and driven by some abnormally insatiable passion” (14). Conspiracy theory, on the other hand, is an “intentionalist account” since it concentrates its efforts to explain events “as the product of intentions” (14) that rely on systematic causes rather than personal

or groups' purposes. The principle of the causes, points out Gordon Wood, is a modern one; and linked these causes with modern science and its paradigm of mechanistic causality “in which the enlightened analysis of all behavior and events now had to take place” (413). Intentionalism and the paradigm of mechanistic causality have not only opened the way for international conspiracy theories to be formed but also generate conspiracism as “the idea that history is primarily shaped by secret conspiracies” (Berlet 122). Conspiracy theories, freely can include a wide range of events worldwide throughout the history of the planet. They address also complex issues and events around which they spread suspicions and concerns that relate to more profound subjects, such as the destiny of a nation or the entire humanity.

As Chip Berlet and Matthew Nemiroff Lyons mention, modern Freemasonry were established in England in the eighteenth century and moved to Britain's northern colonies to become soon the subject of conspiracy theories of the Catholic Church and traditional oligarchies in Europe. Berlet and Lyons put this Anti-Masonry phenomenon “as part of a reactionary backlash against Enlightenment and the French Revolution. The authors find out that the source of the allegation of a conspiracy theory regarding Freemasonry is the “British author John Robison, a professor of Natural Philosophy at the University of Edinburgh, who wrote a 1798 book, *Proofs of a Conspiracy*” (51). John Robison who “was enormously influential in America, from the Federalist writers of the early republic to the anti-Masonic movement of the nineteenth century” (Knight 2003, 777) initiated extensive studies specialized on conspiracy theory by his book *Proofs of a Conspiracy Against All the Religions and Governments of Europe: Carried on in the Secret Meetings of Free*

Masons, Illuminati, and Reading Societies from which “Americans first learned of Illuminism in 1797” (Hofstadter 10).

In addition to modern Freemasonry, Communism has also been accused of being a dreadful sign of the Enlightenment rationality and its associated forms in political, intellectual and social movements and discourses. In his book *The Courage of Hopelessness: Chronicles of a Year of Acting Dangerously*, Slavoj Žižek articulates this point in the context of the principles of the Right-wing:

From the conservative Catholic standpoint, communism is the ultimate consequence of the nihilism of modern subjectivity, whose first flag-bearers are Cartesian philosophy and Protestantism; and the ultimate source of modern subjectivity is ... yes, the misreading of Aristotle by medieval Muslim commentators like Avicenna and Averroes. (Such a view has some foundation: as in the case of the Haiti revolution, Islam can play an unexpected progressive role) .(84)

Žižek implies that the foundation of the Right-wing, and consequently, its conspiracy theory, is religious, especially if one accepts his idea of its hostility towards the Muslim interpretation of Aristotle. There is no doubt that religion plays a distinctive role in explaining many aspects regarding the emergence, the theoretical foundation and the general characterizations of the Right-wing conspiracy theory. Instead, a close look at this conspiracy theory shows that its nature is far complex to be amenable for a unilateral factor. In addition to religion, secularism as a context, particularly liberal values, such as

individuality and independence, provided a necessary basis and logical set up for the right-wing conspiracy theory. The following part of this section will focus on this secular-religious debate on this issue.

Religion and Secularism

The belief that religion is the cause of the emergence and development of the Right-wing conspiracy theory has a lot of evidence to back it up. Scholars stress that both Catholics and Protestants share the same hostile attitude towards secularism. In this regard, Milan Zafirovski states that the Right-wing values whether Catholics or Protestants deeply contradict with Enlightenment and its principles. He adds that

While religious conservatives from medieval Catholics to post-medieval Protestants to US neo-conservatives, are hostile or skeptical to the Kantian and all Enlightenment, the latter produced the key principle of cultural liberalism. ... Hence, the Enlightenment was a countervailing force and transcendence not only of traditional, medieval-based Catholicism, as usually assumed, but also nascent, post-medieval Protestantism, especially radical Calvinism and its offspring, theocratic Puritanism. (535-6)

This hostile attitude towards secularism and other religions has been backed by the Christian theology. Taking this into account, Peter Knight points out that “[a]mong Christian motifs with powerful conspiracist resonance were the concepts of original sin, of the Fall of Man, and the supposedly continual temporal struggle between forces of good and evil, of Christ and of Antichrist” (2003, 80). Knight goes further and considers this motive as the base on which the anti-Semitic conspiracy theory rests because the “traditional Christian public theology that incorporated a deeply ambivalent and frequently adversarial attitude towards Jews and Judaism” (80). This anti-Semitic conspiracy theory is deeply rooted in the West and usually linked with other conspiracy theories instead of replacing them.

In this context, Michael Billig notes that one of the features of Western European extreme Right-wing groups is their adherence to antisemitism. He adds that although these groups, such as the Centrum Party, focused in the 1980s in Holland on campaigning on anti-immigrant platforms, the party ... retained an antisemitic ideology” (108). The insistence on accusing the Jews of plotting conspiracies against the West can be evidence that the Right-wing rely on principles - namely religion - rather than changing their positions in line with the change in their surrounding conditions and circumstances. Besides Holland, Norway and Netherlands have witnessed the same phenomenon. According to Tore Bjorgo, the anti-immigrant activists of these two countries integrate the anti-Semitic conspiracy “with their own notion of resistance against foreign invaders and local traitors” (208). The Norwegian and Danish anti-immigrant activists, as Bjorgo indicates, present an image of the Islamic threat that “parallels some aspects of the Jewish

conspiracy theory, but it is far from a carbon copy. Whereas anti-Semites hold that communism, capitalism and even liberalism were created as parts of the Great Zionist Conspiracy, the Islamic conspiracy theorists are more modest in their claims” (208-9). Based on the above and other arguments of several Western conspiracy theorists who will be discussed in this section, religion is the cornerstone of the Right-wing and their conspiracy theories to which they associate everything that troubles them including economic systems. Widespread anti-capitalist attitudes, as Alan Kahan observes, “help make anti-Semitism acceptable” (247).

Nevertheless, the relationship between religion and the Right-wing is more complicated than it seems to be from aforementioned claims. The long history of hostility between Catholics and Protestants manifests itself in a form of making accusations against each another. The Catholic Church and Protestantism faced different challenges in the wake of liberalism and they responded in different ways due to different faith traditions. When Compared with Protestantism, The Catholic Church has faced more severe pressure from liberals including being accused of conspiracies. Vincent Viaene illustrates the hostile attitudes against the Catholic Church in the mid of the nineteenth century by indicating that

The shrinking of liberal-Catholicism was part of a more general turn in Catholic culture. With secularisation on the rise and liberalism actively encouraging it, the revivalist outlook became more nervous and more defensive. As mental and political paradigms started gravitating against the Church, there was a symptomatic shift of conspiracy theories from Left to Right. Catholics felt beleaguered by a partly elusive “rationalist”

campaign , which was jeopardising the gains of previous decades; it must surely be orchestrated by secret societies. (573)

Even in France where the Liberal Catholic movement emerged in the nineteenth century, it was stressed that Protestantism was far more congenial to democracy than Catholicism. In this respect, Phyllis Stock-Morton mentions that the French philosopher Charles Bernard Renouvier believes that “Catholicism was not suited to a republic; political liberty, he noted, had been realized best in Protestant countries, because the reformed religion fostered the concept of individual duty and responsibility” (87). Renouvier goes further by encouraging “free-thinkers and indifferent Catholics to further the cause of secularism by becoming Protestants” (87). In contrary, the Protestant countries have not undergone such conflict between religion and liberalism. In this context, the ‘Protestant United States’ - as several Right-wing conspiracy theorists called it presents a unique experience since it “has no tradition from before the age of progress” (64), according to the Canadian philosopher George Grant who concludes from the above that the American “‘right-wing’ and ‘left-wing’ are just different species of liberalism” (64). Subsequently, Catholicism and the Catholic Church in particular have been accused of plotting conspiracies to demolish liberty and democracy in the ‘Protestant’ countries including the United States, as will be seen in this section. But why do Catholicism and Protestantism theoretically differentiate in their approaches towards liberalism and what are the direct consequences of this differentiation on the development of the Right-wing conspiracy theory?

Answering these questions is part of a broader discussion on the relationship between Enlightenment and religion. However, as far as the Right-wing is concerned in

this section, the Hegelian account on Enlightenment, liberalism, Catholicism and Protestantism is strongly related to several fundamental issues based on which the wing has established its theoretical and political orientations. Even though the Right-wing conspiracy theorists do not entirely and intentionally build their rhetoric on Hegel, a certain interpretation of some of his writings provides a theoretical framework of their claims. In his book *Hegel's 'Philosophy of Right': A Reader's Guide*, David Edward Rose notices that Hegel's criticism on his contemporary, philosopher Jakob Friedrich Fries had been read by the Right-wing in a conservative way to serve their agenda. According to Rose, “[s]uch a reactionary reading of Hegel gave rise to many right-wing supporters who saw his philosophy, and the political element especially, as the grounds for halting reform and returning to reactionary policies” (144). The coming paragraphs will be devoted to exploring several points of similarity between Hegel and the Right-wing doctrines that form the propositions of conspiracy theory.

Hegel and the Right-wing

There are four major reasons to explain the similarity one may find between certain aspects of Hegel's writings and the Right-wing principles: the malleability of Hegel's influence, his understanding of the absolute, his attitudes towards religion and his criticism on Enlightenment. The malleability of Hegel's influence comes from the fact that his philosophy, due to its protean nature, is open to enormous interpretations. The ambiguous

of Hegel's style has encouraged different groups to alter it to fit their beliefs, because he “made his works so hard to understand that his readers could see in them whatever they wanted to find, leaving his writings unusually open to diverse appropriations” (Stern xiv). Hegel's abstruse style affected, on the first place, his direct followers, who soon after his death, as Antti P. Balk observes, “divided into two wings, one marching right, the other left—both Fascism and Communism have their philosophical roots in Hegelianism” (585). Balk adds that “the politically orthodox right-wing Hegelians could ...still remain religious. But opposite conclusions were also possible and equally common: the rebellious left-wing Hegelians ... considered religious sentiments as products of imagination ...as the “opiate of the people,” as Marx would soon put it” (585-6). The tendency of the Hegelian right-wing to reconcile with religion endorses the Right-wing theoretically. Therefore, one should examine Hegel's thoughts on religion, especially regarding the relationship between religion and absolutism, the usefulness of religion and the difference between Catholicism and Protestantism.

Among others, Hegel has been considered by scholars, such as Wesley J. Wildman, as “[o]ne of the most interesting Western ventures in the psychotheo-logical tradition of religious philosophy is the German idealism ... [whose] ... starting point ... was Kant” (281). As Wildman points out, Kant introspectively analyzes how perception and cognition work in such way that “makes discoveries about, and adumbrates limitations on, the capacities of human reason, with associated critiques of psychology, ontology, and theology (corresponding to self, world, and God” (281). Nevertheless, Kant does not adequately identify the perspective from which he makes his analysis, which prompted

Hegel and other thinkers to find this perspective. Wildman thinks that the Hegel's answer to the Kantian perspective is the concept of the Absolute since "[t]he Absolute is not beyond or opposed to the world but it is the world—the "what" of the world as well as its "how" and "why." Its most intense expression is human rational consciousness and its richest expression is world history itself" (281). Hegel looks to the Absolute as the subject that identifies and creates the meanings of everything throughout time and space. In his words, "[s]ince history is the process whereby the spirit assumes the shape of events and of immediate natural actuality, the stages of its development are present as immediate natural principles" (1991 [1820], 448). But the Absolute itself cannot be identified or determined since "every determinateness of *essence* and *concrete existence*, or of *being* in general as well as of *reflection*, has dissolved itself into it" (2010 [1812], 466). Rather, the "absolute itself is the absolute unity of *being* 'the external' and *essence* 'the internal' (2010 [1812], 466-7). Hegel uses the same terms and concepts to examine different thoughts on God.

Unlike the human being, who is conceived by Hegel "as germ, an immediate, something external which has not yet given itself negative self-reference," God cannot be understood totally in one method. In Hegel's perspective, "as thought, as first thought, God is only the pure being, or also essence, the abstract absolute; but not God as absolute spirit, which alone is the true nature of God" (2010 [1812], 463). Even though Hegel does not consider the Absolute as God, several of his comments make them conceptually close to each other, especially when he states that "the Absolute, God, is the measure of all things, is not a stronger statement of pantheism than the definition, "the Absolute, God, is being,"

but is infinitely truer” (2010 [1812], 285). In short, Hegel perceives both the Absolute and God in the same dynamic way that embraces the entire universe and might encourage many to assume that they are the same.

The validity of this assumption increases when we know that similar to the concept of the Absolute, the concept of God is only to “be found in the culmination of the entire Hegelian system” (Lauer 12). Whether the Absolute and God are identical or alike, the concept of God now finds a foothold in philosophy after Kant who is accused of excluding God from philosophy even though he “had concerns that go beyond those of contemporary cognitive science, of course. In particular, he wanted to show the limits of each kind of knowledge, in order to make room for faith” (Brook 97). Regardless of the debate over to what degree the Hegelian concept of God is consistent with the Christian God, many think that the two are connected and even assume that the Hegelian threefold dialectic of thesis, antithesis and synthesis “was entirely coherent with the a Christian understanding of the Trinity” (Philips 79). The Hegelian dialectic has a significant meaning for the Right-wing theoretically because it “contributed to the growing awareness of, and appreciation for, history ... as a dynamic process of struggle, conflict, and risk as it moved toward a greater or higher end” (Toon 51). Given the above, the rapprochement between this dialectic and the Trinity can be seen as a scientific proof of the Christian doctrine of the intentionality and the purpose of God's creation while science itself does not suggest any purpose for life.

Hegel's idea of history is also homogeneous to the conspiracy theorists' comprehensive conceptions of history that impose certain meaning of events whether in a long period of time or in the entire history. Furthermore, the Absolute provides to

conspiracy theory the philosophical support for the existence subject that constantly involves with the universe and its events and gives them a certain meaning. Through this Absolute, the concept of God also can be argued for and defended from the Kantian pure reason as well as the natural principles. It is important to reemphasize here that Hegel's above-mentioned thoughts constitute neither Christian doctrines, Right-wing's principles, nor any theoretical element of their conspiracy theory. Rather, these thoughts have the possibility of being interpreted and misinterpreted in a way made explicit by a number of the Right-wing writers including some of Hegel's own followers.

In his less abstract thoughts on religion, Hegel becomes more suggestive in terms of giving a philosophical endorsement to Christianity, especially Protestantism. He appreciates the latter's advance in thought “as to realize the absolute culmination of Self-Consciousness” (1857, [1837] 463). Furthermore, Hegel thinks that Protestantism “enjoys, with respect to the moral and legal relations of the real world, a tranquil confidence in the [Honorable] Disposition of men” (1857, [1837] 463-4). He also believes that unlike Catholicism, Protestantism supports the sentiment that “constituting one and the same thing with Religion, is the fountain of all the equitable arrangements that prevail with regard to private right and the constitution of the State” (1857, [1837] 464). In other words, Protestantism supports the idea of the state and its independence while Catholicism stands against it because it wants the Church authority to control the states as well as individuals and their rights. Hence, Hegel illustrates that “[i]n the Lutheran Church the subjective feeling and the conviction of the individual is regarded as equally necessary with the objective side of Truth. Truth with Lutherans is not a finished and completed thing; the

subject himself must be imbued with Truth” (1857, [1837] 433). Protestantism does not only give its followers the right to search for ‘Truth’ but also makes this search part of their faith and identity. However, individual freedom is not limitless but goes along with the respect of the sovereignty of the state according to Hegel who indicates that “[i]n the *Protestant world* there is no sacred, no religious conscience in a state of separation from, or perhaps even hostility to Secular Right.” (1857, [1837] 433, 568). Unlike the hostile relationship between the Catholic Church and the state, Protestantism reconciles the two in Hegel's view. This reconciliation is consistent with the Hegelian thought on the Absolute since religion and the state for Hegel, as William Maker notes, are both domains of spirit” (66). In this context, Maker states that “Hegel also insists that the state be generally acknowledged as the higher and final authority” (65). Based on the above, one tends to agree with Robert Bernasconi in his statement that “the historical relation between secular and spiritual is ultimately posed in institutional form, and it is in this respect that Hegel locates the superiority of Protestantism over Catholicism” (323-4). It is necessary to draw attention here to the fact that the majority of conspiracy theorists share the same view of Hegel's about this point, as it will be illustrated in the coming pages.

Hegel disagrees with Enlightenment in several issues, especially and as far as it concerns this study, its critique of faith. Hegel thinks that Enlightenment fails to distinguish between faith and pure insight because it “makes the object of religion something entirely different from what it essentially is” (Hegel 563, 1998 [1807]). The difference between faith and pure insight for Hegel is, as Julia Simon Paul Franco correctly puts it, that the former

[R]epresents a form of thought that is not self-conscious, because it focuses on the transcendent qualities of the deity” while the latter on the presuppositions of Enlightenment thinking in this regard is “a self-conscious form of thought because its critiques of religious faith depend upon the rational capacities of the subject. (132)

Using pure insight, remarks Hegel, makes Enlightenment unable to fully understand faith as a thinking pure consciousness. This limitation of view occurs because “[p]ure insight regards religion as basing itself on contingent, historical matters of fact, whose evidence is inferior to that of the newspapers, and which has passed through many distorting media, e.g. inadequate translations. (563, 1998 [1807]). Instead of looking to faith from the Enlightenment perspective, Hegel flips the direction and evaluates the latter based on the former.

From this angle, Hegel deduces that “Enlightenment is foolish; faith regards it as not knowing what it is saying, and as not understanding the real facts when it talks about priestly deception and deluding the people. (335, 1998 [1807]). This negative attitude towards Enlightenment due to its stance of religion converges with the Right-wing conspiracy theory who rejects “the rationalist philosophies of the Enlightenment that bases its commitment to ethical behavior on the innate goodness of human beings, rather than on the commands of a deity” (Berlet and Quigley 32). Even though Hegel's position on Enlightenment is more complicated than it appears in this study, the aspect of his thought presented here shows the potentiality of using reasonable argumentations to question the Enlightenment rationality.

Hegel's critical position on Enlightenment extends to include its major embodiment, the French Revolution. However, Hegel's initial stand towards 1789 Revolution is very positive as he states it a few years after its outbreak. "This revolution," clarifies Hegel, "gives birth to absolute freedom, and with this freedom the previously alienated Spirit has completely returned into itself, has abandoned this region of culture and passes on to another region, the region of *the moral consciousness*" (Hegel 296, 1998 [1807]). Later, Hegel believes that the French Revolution and its absolute freedom came to end when France plunged into chaos and tyranny in the Reign of Terror - the period from September 1793 to July 1794 when thousands of French citizens murdered as brutal measures were taken against alleged enemies of this Revolution. Furthermore, Hegel distinguishes between the ideas of Enlightenment and its manifestation, the French Revolution, in terms of their locations. The former, Hegel states, takes place in a Protestant country, Germany while the latter waged in a Catholic country, France. Hegel frankly thinks that religion is the key point here.

Compared to the Catholicism, "it was the *Protestant World* itself which advanced so far in Thought as to realize the absolute culmination of Self-Consciousness" (554, 1910. [1807]). In addition, "Protestantism enjoys, with respect to the moral and legal relations of the real world, a tranquil confidence in the [Honorable] Disposition of men—a sentiment which ... constituting one and the same thing with Religion" (554, 1910. [1807]). More importantly, Hegel thinks that Protestantism has guaranteed "private right and constitution of the State" in Germany where "the *eclaircissement* was conducted in the interest of theology." France, on the other hand, has lacked such rights and, therefore, "it immediately

took up a position of hostility to the Church” (555, 1910. [1807]). Hegel concludes that due to Protestantism, the secular relations in Germany “had already undergone a change for the better; those pernicious ecclesiastical institutes of celibacy, voluntary pauperism, and laziness, had been already done away with” (555, 1910. [1807]). Unlike Catholicism, Protestantism has not necessitated a conflict with the state and the secularism, in its world where “there was no deadweight of enormous wealth attached to the Church, and no constraint put upon Morality—a constraint which is the source and occasion of vices; there was not that unspeakably hurtful form of iniquity which arises from the interference of spiritual power with secular law” (555, 1910. [1807]). In contrast, liberalism had a chance to flourish in France the rest of the Roman World, “but Religious slavery held that world in the fetters of political servitude” (563, 1910. [1807]).

To conclude, for Hegel, Catholicism contradicts with secularism, liberalism, the private rights and imposes serious challenges on the state to operate properly, and consequently leads to generates conflicts, revolutions and tyranny as people intent to separate the state and church. In addition, Hegel's thoughts on faith, Enlightenment and the French Revolution can be interpreted to support the Right-wing conspiracy theory due to their theoretical convergence. To illustrate this similarity in conspiracy theory, the rest of this section presents briefly the arguments of several Right-wing conspiracy theorists from the eighteenth century to our current time to in order to picture different aspects and agendas of this theory as it develops in these centuries.

The Eighteenth Century

Even though that some scholars consider it “naïve to assume that the conspiracy theory has a fixed point of origin that could be unequivocally traced to a particular book or to the thinking of a specific individual or individuals” (Byford 41), others do not hesitate, as presented earlier in this section, to name John Robison as the source of conspiracy theory. Robison's book *Proofs of a Conspiracy Against All the Religions and Governments of Europe: Carried on in the Secret Meetings of Free Masons, Illuminati, and Reading Societies* (1797). As the title of his book suggests, Robison warns against the free Masons who aim to destroy liberty, order and religions of Europe. Robison identifies the conspiracist as “the Order of ILLUMINATI, founded in 1775, by Dr. Adam Weishaupt, professor of Canon law in the university of Ingolstadt, and abolished in 1786 by the Elector of Bavaria, but revived immediately after, under another name, and in a different form, all over Germany” (15). This ‘Association’ does not work alone; he claims that it has connections “with many occurrences and schisms in the Christian church; I saw that the Jesuits had several times interfered in it” (8). The Masons, claims Robison, are protected by an extremely important element of conspiracy theory, namely, secrecy. (31). By accusing the Jesuits, Robison blames the Catholic Church since they belong to the Catholic Church as one of its congregation. Besides the Jesuits, Robison explicitly accuses the most active leaders of French Revolution of being part of this ‘Association’ whose principles are their base on which they “conducted their first movements ... and by means of its instructions and assistance, *formerly requested and obtained*” (12-3). As Richard

Hofstadter correctly notes, Robison considers the French Revolution “as a libertine, anti-Christian movement, given to the corruption of women, the cultivation of sensual pleasures, and the violation of property rights. Its members had plans for making a tea that caused abortion” (11).

Robison admits that he makes his accusations based on personal observations about “all the different systems of Free Masonry” through “a course of fifty years, under the specious pretext of enlightening the world by the torch of philosophy” (12). He relies on his narrative to events accompanied by rumors, accusations and individual testimonies without historical records or concrete evidence. Furthermore, there is no theoretical frame or logical argumentation that might support his statement. Rather, “Robison seems to have made his work as factual as he could, but when he came to estimating the moral character and the political influence of Illuminism, he made the characteristic paranoid leap into fantasy” (Hofstadter 11). For example, Robison refers to a story told by the anti-Masonic Abbot and author Jacques-François Lefranc about unidentified friend of his who “found Masonic documents that were "dangerous to the state, that he sent an account of them to the Archbishop of Paris before the Revolution” (294). All of Robison's examples aim to endorse his unilateral interpretation of a very complex and important event in the human history i.e. The French Revolution. In this regard, Robison declares that “all the principles of the Revolution, by which the public mind was as it were set on fire, were nothing but enthusiastic amplifications of the commonplace cant of Free Masonry” (298). This oversimplified and generalized way of thinking along with manipulation of facts is not only typical but one of the essential elements of conspiracy theory.

Only two years after the publication of Robison's book, the French writer Abbé Augustin Barruel uses the same accusations to harshly attack the French Revolution and the Free Masons as well, but with one difference; he was a Jesuit. Being a member of the Jesuit Society, and agreeing with Robison's accusations against the French Revolution undermine part of latter's argument that the Jesuits are members of the Free Masons who stood behind the uprising of the Revolution. Barruel's attempt to find other parties to blame for the French Revolution, such as the enlightened forces or the Free Masons, does not only practically prove the falsehood of the Jesuit conspiracy theory but also weakens the positions of the conspiracy theorists who opposed the French Revolution in general. Because of their intense hostility to this secular Revolution, these conspiracy theorists make accusations lightly against it.

In his four-volume book *Mémoires pour servir à l'histoire du Jacobinisme* (published in English under the title *Memoirs Illustrating the History of Jacobinism* in 1799), Barruel claims that there is a triple conspiracy conducted by Freemasons and Illuminati, (enlightened groups) to overthrow Christianity. In the introduction of his Memoirs, Barruel explicitly states his view as following:

The result of our research, corroborated by proofs drawn from the records of the Jacobins, and of their first masters, had been, that this sect with its conspiracies is in itself no other than the coalition of a triple sect, of a triple conspiracy, in which, long before the revolution, the overthrow of the altar, the ruin of the throne, and the dissolution of all civil society had been debated and resolved on. (xxi)

The conspiracy against Christianity did not start with the French Revolution, writes Barruel, but many years before when “men who styled themselves Philosophers conspired against the God of the Gospel, against Christianity, without distinction of worship, whether Protestant or Catholic, Anglican or Presbyterian” (xxii). It is a comprehensive conspiracy against Christianity plotted by secular groups, such as the Jacobins (a French radical democratic club), regardless of its sects and orientations, and therefore, all Christians must get together to face it. To approve their conspiracy, Barruel points out that Voltaire, D'Alembert and Frederick exchanged letters to confide “to each other the different works they are writing against Christianity, their hopes of success and their arts to ensure it” (132). He also considers the principle of equality in the Free Masons discourse as a dangerous and secret doctrine that tends to destroy the social status quo. (276-83). Even if we accept his perspectives on the liberal intellectuals' writings and the Mason equality as facts, it is very hard to be convinced that the existence of these facts necessarily indicates participating in a conspiracy.

While accusing the Free Masons of being part of a conspiracy that caused the French Revolution, Barruel who was writing his book from his exile in England found himself obliged to face a dilemma: since there are freemasons in England, why do they not conduct a conspiracy against the state as their French counterparts has just done? Barruel's answer is very simple. Rather than using violence against the state, the British freemasons adopt “gratitude ... and I should be seen exclaiming in the very streets of London, that England was lost; that it could not escape the French Revolution, if its Free- mason Lodges were similar to those of which I am about to treat” (273). Like Robison, Barruel does not

provide specific evidence or persuasive argument to convince his readers. From their perspectives, the world seems oversimplified where complex social and economic conditions disappear in favor of the power of secret groups encountering the religious establishment in Europe.

In this context, Jovan Byford observes, “[t]he conspiracy that Barruel and Robison imagined was timeless, and it had the destruction of Christianity and the social order as its ultimate aim ... This also meant that every event, past, present or future could be explained (retrospectively or otherwise) Conspiracy” (41-2). Barruel's and Robison's books are written in the wake of the French Revolutions as a direct response to its values and consequences. These two books are written to serve propaganda purposes since they are produced to raise public endorsement against Enlightenment and all of its manifestations.

The Nineteenth Century

The characteristics of the Right-wing conspiracy theory of the eighteenth century, in general, extended to the next century without noticeable changes. In this context, Aaron John Gulyas indicates that “[d]uring the 1830s and 1840s in the United States, suspicion of secret societies, particularly the masonic orders, led to the development of the AntiMasonic political party” (27). In addition to the topics, the method of persuasion and argumentation continued in the same way of the eighteenth century but with one extremely significant difference. As the storm that accompanied and followed the French Revolution

eased up, liberal writers started to form conspiracy theories against conservatives and religious institutions especially the Catholic establishment. But to what degree do the liberal conspiracy theorists remain liberals as they build a theory that accuses certain religious groups of plotting secret schemes to hurt others? The coming paragraphs try to answer this question.

One of the most important conspiracy theorists in the eighteenth century is Samuel Finley Breese Morse whose book *Foreign Conspiracy Against the Liberties of the United States* (1834) was called ‘the nativist manifesto’ (Potter 255). Morse was well-known sculptor and painter as well as the inventor of the telegraph. He was a political figure also and “a leader in the anti-Catholic and anti-immigration movement of the mid-19th century” (Wallis and George 309). Morse's book, therefore, stands as a good example of conspiracy theory in the nineteenth century.

Like Robison and Barruel, Morse relies on personal information to build his conspiracy theory. For example, he announces that he obtains his knowledge about conspiracies

[W]hile residing in Italy in the years 1830 — 31, from conversations with nobles and gentlemen of different countries, with the officers of various foreign governments, visiting and resident in the Roman and Austrian states, and with priests and other ecclesiastics of the Roman faith. (10)

Sometimes he received information from American travellers (11) and Protestant German embassies, in Rome (11). Morse's information lead him to identify two struggling

powers in the world: arbitrary and freedom, and he firmly believes that the United States has won the struggle and now it lives “the safety, the happiness, the superior excellence of a republican government, a government proceeding from the people as the true source of power; enjoying in overflowing abundance the rich blessings of such a government” (14). Nevertheless, the rest of the world still a battlefield where there is a “war of against liberty” (18) waged by a Holy Alliance, that is, a "union of Christian princes" (18) to demolish liberty in Europe and the United States whose “silent but powerful and increasing influence of our institutions on Europe” (19) threat the existence of the Holy Alliance.

In Morse's time, the Austrian Empire formed in the central Europe and inherited the Holly Roman Empire. The Austrian Empire was built on the Roman Catholic doctrines and controlled by absolute monarchy. Austria appears to him as the opposite to the ‘protestant republic of the United States’, as he names it sometimes in his book. Echoing Hegel, Morse adds that there is “important difference between Popery and Protestantism, in their bearing upon the liberties of the country. No one of the Protestant sects owns any head out of this country, or is governed in any of its concerns by any men or set of men in a foreign land” (46). Morse's conspiracy theory is built on an abstract logical deduction instead of factual data and reliable historical facts. His theory is established only on his assumption that since Austria's regime is opposite to that of the United States, and it is inevitable that Austria should conspire in destroying the American way of life. Morse is completely convinced by his assumption to the point at which he supposes that the American people had already reached the same conclusion. According to Morse, “[s]urely American Protestants, freemen, have discernment enough to discover be neath them the

cloven foot of this subtle foreign heresy, and will not wait for a more extensive, disastrous, and overwhelming political interference” (89). There is no need for actual evidence to show the papal conspiracy theory against the United States since “[t]his war is the war of principles; it is on the open field of free discussion ; and the victory is to be won by the exercise of moral energy, by the force of Religious and Political Truth” (99). On the other hand, the enemy of the United States represents the opposite values. “Ignorance,” states Morse, is the mother of papal devotion. Ignorance is the legitimate prey of Popery” (102).

It is obvious that Morse does not use rational procedures as he develops his conspiracy theory whether in terms of providing factual evidence and reliable sources to prove the existence of this conspiracy or in terms of presenting realistic motives and intentions that link the Papacy and the Austrian Empire to his alleged conspiracy theory. However, Morse's and other conspiracy theorists' approaches are still overall rational, taking into consideration their attempt to rationalize discourses in order to convince the readers of their opinions.

The Twentieth Century

While Morse's patriotism seems to be part of a general phenomenon applicable to the nineteenth century Right-wing movements who felt, as Richard Hofstadter notices “that they posed for causes and personal types that were still in possession of their country-that they were fending off threats to a still well-established way of life in which they played an

important part” (23), a change towards the opposite direction took over in the twentieth century. Hofstadter attributes this radical change to growing skepticism of the government's policies because of the roles of intellectuals and cosmopolitans who have changed the American values and due to

The old competitive capitalism has been gradually undermined by socialist and communist schemers; the old national security and independence have been destroyed by treasonous plots, having as their most powerful agents not merely outsiders and foreigners but major statesmen seated at the very centers of American power. Their predecessors discovered foreign conspiracies; the modern radical right finds that conspiracy also embraces betrayal at home. (23-4).

U.S. Senator Joseph McCarthy, “who led the infamous witch-hunt for communist infiltrators in American public institutions” (Pride 188) after WWII presents an obvious example of this phenomenon. McCarthy strongly opposed the Marshall Plan that aimed to economically rebuild Western Europe. McCarthy pictured this plan as a betrayal of American interests and “an evil hoax on the generosity, good will and carelessness of the American people” (1953, 290). The U.S. government's Marshall plan seemed to Senator McCarthy as one of serial misdeeds made by will and intention to weaken the United States after WWII. McCarthy believed that the United States had become a target for a treasonous conspiracy whose aim was “that we shall be contained and frustrated and finally fall victim to Soviet intrigue from within and Russian military might from without” (1952, 95-6).

The twentieth century also saw a continuation of the conspiracy theories that built on earlier attitudes and subjects of the nineteenth century. Edith Starr Miller, for example, repeats in her book *Occult Theocracy*, the old accusations against Freemasons and the Illuminati as she attempts to “expose some of the means and methods used by a secret world, one might almost say an underworld, to penetrate, dominate and destroy not only the so-called upper classes, but also the better portion of all classes” (8). Miller thinks that

1. The destruction of Christianity and of all Monarchical Governments;
2. The destruction of nations as such in favour of universal internationalism.
3. The discouragement of patriotic and loyal effort branded as narrow minded prejudice, incompatible with the tenets of goodwill to all men and the cry of "Universal Brotherhood";
4. The abolition of family ties and of marriage by means of systematic corruption;
5. The suppression of the rights of inheritance and property. (185)

Nevertheless, the majority of the conspiracy theories in the twentieth century deals with the more current issues, such as the threat of communism, using skeptical approaches towards the governments. In addition, according to Aaron John Gulyas, the conspiracy theories “that would emerge in the post–World War II world would be more all-encompassing, tying together a variety of organizations and movements in the process, portraying vast coalitions of the sinister as being arrayed against the forces of freedom and morality” (32).

In this skeptical atmosphere, Garry Allen and Larry Abraham claim in their book *None Dare Call it Conspiracy* that there is a comprehensive conspiracy to spread poverty, ignorance and disease in the world plotted by of “a clique of self-perpetuating conspirators whom we shall call Insiders” (19). The authors refuse previous conspiracy theories against particular groups, such as the Jewish, Catholic or Masons because these “people do not help to expose the conspiracy, but sadly play into the hands of those who want the public to believe that all conspiratorialists are screwballs” (13). Rather, Allen and Abraham focus on elites banking families of financing whom they accuse of spreading Communism secretly and using politics that make governments depend on their debts. For them, “‘Communism’ is not a movement of the downtrodden masses but is a movement created, manipulated and used by power-seeking billionaires in order to gain control over the world” (39). One of the aims of this conspiracy is to undermine the United States through President Richard Nixon since it is only logical that *the Insiders* will try to apply the *coup de grace* against America through a Republican President simply because most people cannot believe that a Republican could be “soft on Communism” (149). Allen and Abraham's main assumption of the alleged capitalists' and Republicans conspiracy to spread Communism in America to destroy it rests only on one claim attributed to Professor Carroll Quigley in his book *Tragedy and Hope*. Although Quigley does speak about a secret financial group that works with left-wings agenda based on personal observations, he emphasizes that this group is aimed to “to work to maintain the peace; to help backward, colonial, and underdeveloped areas to advance toward stability, law and order, and prosperity” (954). This organization uses Communism to achieve its agenda worldwide but

he points out that “once the anger and suspicion of the American people were aroused, as they were by 1950, it was a fairly simple matter to get rid of the Red sympathizers” (954). Allen and Abraham take *Tragedy and Hope* out of its context to use it as a credible academic base of their unusual assumption. *None Dare Call it Conspiracy* marks the beginning of the paranoid period of the conspiracy theory of the Right-wing where one finds that conspiracy theories completely lose their balance and accuse their own establishments and ideologies because of overwhelming skepticism that they face since the second half of the twentieth century.

Conclusion

Religion is the foundation of the Right-wing conspiracy theory as well as the Right-wing itself. Conspiracy theory is a reaction to the Christian intellectuals' fear especially Protestants, of the French Revolution and its unprecedented consequences because they saw it as a raging threat to their establishments. Being frightened of the momentum of Enlightenment, the Right-wing conspiracy theorists adopted unverified assumptions and accusations against several groups including Catholics. As the circumstances change since the aftermath of the French Revolution, the conspiracy theories of the Right-wing has extended its accusations to include new political players, such as Marxism without justified background. Ironically, the Right-wing conspiracy theorists who lack theoretical bases to endorse their claims have been unaware of some of Hegel's thoughts that might have

supported their claims because they both take the same positions against some conceptual aspects of Enlightenment and its practical implications.

SECTION II: CONSPIRACY THEORY IN THE MARXIST DISCOURSE

This section seeks to probe the Marxist account on conspiracy theory. To do so, the focus is centered on examining the theoretical bases of the Marxist theory that might determine its approach towards conspiracy theory and the development of these theoretical bases in this regard. Throughout its evolution, the Marxist ideological and political perspective of conspiracy theory have been strongly linked to its eighteenth century philosophical doctrines. The two main questions to be addressed in this section are: (1) what are the Marxist views on conspiracy theory? (2) what are the theoretical and political justifications of these views?

Since the first decades of the last century, many have linked the belief in conspiracy theory to Marxism. The reason behind this belief is the hostile political agenda of Marxism in particular and the Left in general against the capitalist states and the Rights policies. Communists have blamed the advocates of capitalism, imperialism and free market among others for the outbreak of wars, financial dysfunctions and social conflicts and poverty. According to the Marxist viewpoint, the capital, always sets the roles in politics, economy and social contract in order to guarantee the preconditions for the interests of the upper classes. From this ground, it has been assumed that Marxism believes in a conspiracy theory in which the capitalists are the conspirators against the poor. My

hypothesis, nevertheless, stands in the opposite direction; Marxism does not only refuse conspiracy theory but it also epistemologically and politically contradicts with it. However, this contradiction takes different forms based on diverse readings to the Marxist theoretical background.

In seeking to prove this hypothesis, a close reading is presented in the first part of this section to several of Karl Marx's texts that might be related with the discussion on conspiracy theory along with the theoretical backgrounds of these texts. Then, the focus will turn to Lenin's texts on this respect to determine whether they are different or identical to Marx's views. Studying Lenin's thoughts here is important because it shows to which degree his revolutionary principle, namely Leninism, affect the Marxist thinking regarding conspiracy theory. Meanwhile, several academic notions about the Marxist account on conspiracy theory are viewed in the coming pages to help enrich the discussion in this respect.

This section attempts to present a reading that balances between the theoretical and political but it finds itself leaning more towards the former. The reason behind that is that the nature of discussion examined here is more philosophical than political. In general, Marx does not concern about politics per se. Rather, he concentrates his efforts on discovering the general roles that control essential elements of life whether in the material world in the case of the former or in a cognitive level in the case of the latter. Yet, in the Marxist atmosphere, the line between what is philosophical and what is political is usually thin due to the ideological merit of the Marxist approach.

1- Marx's View

As mentioned above, Marxism has been accused of adopting conspiracy theory. Sundry writers point out that the notions of Karl Marx himself explicitly form a conspiracy theory that claimed to unfold the meaning of the course of history as a whole. Among those is Norman Levine who thinks that “The Marxist "conspiracy theory" is wrong because it seeks to explain the behavior of the majority of capitalists as a class” (72). Other writers firmly disagree with this opinion and try to explain why this `connection` between Marxism and conspiracy theory has been assumed. As Robert Freedman assures, Marx “did not subscribe to a conspiracy theory. His system required no scapegoats. Capitalist and laborer alike were locked together in a symbiotic relationship, fulfilling their historic function of creating ever increasing wealth at the cost of ever-increasing misery for the working class” (xi). Others go further, attempting to understand the reasons behind this ‘false’ relationship between Marxism and promoting conspiracy theory.

In this context, Gerald Allan Cohen attributes this relationship to the Marxist inclination to blame the capital of the world disorder and the repetitive Marxist complains of being marginalized and persecuted have played a role in this respect. Hence, Cohen points out that:

When Marxists venture functional explanations of ideological and superstructural phenomena, they are often accused of espousing a ‘conspiracy theory of history’. A Marxist says "it is no accident that" left-

wing commentators receive little space in major American newspapers, or that British trade union leaders end their careers in the House of Lords.

(289)

Cohen, then, addresses the accusation itself. As Levine himself mentions (72), Cohen uses the functional explanation here to defend Marxism from promoting conspiracy theory. In this context, Cohen highlights that Marxism attributes the classes conflicts to competition as a process rather than people as individual agents. Thus, “[t]he coercion of competition can be countered only by the coercion of society, in the shape of its political guardian, the relatively responsive capitalist state” (Cohen 294-5). Therefore, the competition directly imposes its eligibility requirements on all players including capitalists and generally the upper class and forces them to act according to its demands regardless of their level of awareness of these requirements.

D. McQuarie and T. Amburgey echo Cohen's account on acquitting Marxism from conspiracy theory by downplaying the individual role and drawing attention to the Marxist concentration on competition but with giving more credits here to the class as a whole. Hence, McQuarie and Amburgey declare that “[t]his is not to imply a conspiracy theory. Marx is explicit concerning the competition between individual members of the class, but the particular interests of a ruling class member are secondary here to the interests of the class as a whole” (210). The class, here, seems to tend to defend its interests, and develops strategies, policies, traditions and culture to abide and flourish. Instead of depending on conspiracy theory, this innate inclination towards the group's protection explains capitalists' behaviors economically, socially and politically.

Karl Popper, in this context, agrees with Cohen, McQuarrie and Amburgey in their refusal of any connection between the Marxist thought and conspiracy theory. Hence, he notices that

[I]t was asserted that Karl Marx had revealed the tremendous importance of the capitalist conspiracy for the understanding of society. In my reply I said that I should have mentioned my indebtedness to Marx, who was one of the first critics of the conspiracy theory, and one of the first to analyse the unintended consequences of the voluntary actions of people acting in certain social situations. Marx said quite definitely and clearly that the capitalist is as much caught in the network of the social situation (or the 'social system') as is the worker'; that the capitalist cannot help acting in the way he does: he is as unfree as the worker, and the results of his actions are largely unintended. But the truly scientific (though in my opinion too deterministic) approach of Marx has been forgotten by his latter-day followers, the Vulgar Marxists, who have put forward a popular conspiracy theory of society which is no better than the myth of the Learned Elders of Zion. (2006, 14)

But how does exactly the 'Vulgar Marxists' think, according to Popper? One can find the answer in his book *The Open Society and its Enemies* in which he explicitly states that “[t]he average Vulgar Marxist believes that Marxism lays bare the sinister secrets of social life by revealing the hidden motives of greed and lust for material gain which actuate the powers behind the scenes of history powers” (311). For Popper, the 'Vulgar Marxists', are

responsible of creating wars and disorders including unemployment, hunger and depression (311).

The coming pages of this section carefully examine Marx's texts on the factors that determine and guide the capitalists' economic behaviors. Then, one should take a close look at Vladimir Lenin's account in this regard. As he puts many of Marx's thoughts into practice, Lenin might appear as one of 'the Vulgar Marxists' and, therefore, his ideas in this respect must be accurately reviewed.

Individuals, according to Marx, are unable to rise above their historical principles to serve their personal goals. In contrast, they work as agents or “personifications of economic categories, embodiments of particular class- relations and class- interests” (Marx 15). Karl Marx's “stand-point, from which the evolution of the economic formation of society is viewed as a process of natural history, can less than any other make the individual responsible for relations whose creature he socially remains, however much he may subjectively raise himself above them” (15). Later in *Capital*, Marx explains in more details how historical and economic conditions direct individuals to “enter into definite relations, which are independent of their will, namely relations of production appropriate to a given stage in the development of their material forces of production” (211). For Marx, the mode of production constitutes the general process of social intellectual, and political life. People, based on this perspective, cannot exceed the limits that have been set by the laws of the mode of production according to which different classes are distinguished. Consequently, individuals are not able to make a universal conspiracy theory since they have been nothing but responsive to the classes' needs and requirements. On this point, Marx stipulates that

It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness. At a certain stage of development, the material productive forces of society come into conflict with the existing relations of production or — this merely expresses the same thing in legal terms — with the property relations within the framework of which they have operated hitherto. From forms of development of the productive forces these relations turn into their fetters. Then begins an era of social revolution. The changes in the economic foundation lead sooner or later to the transformation of the whole immense superstructure. In studying such transformations it is always necessary to distinguish between the material transformation of the economic conditions of production, which can be determined with the precision of natural science, and the legal, political, religious, artistic or philosophic — in short, ideological forms in which men become conscious of this conflict and fight it out. (211)

Furthermore, due to the effects of the mode of production, the classes are in profound interactional processing in which all classes are included. Yet, the outcome is not equally shared. Since the capitalist converts some of his capital into labour-power, he “augments the value of his entire capital. He kills two birds with one stone. He profits, not only by what he receives from, but by what he gives to, the labourer” (626). The economic process is already established in the benefit of the capitalists with no need for conspiracy theories.

Theory Conspiracy and Materialism Dialectical

Karl Marx's understanding of the ongoing interacting process that rules all aspects of human life is impacted by the Hegelian doctrines, especially the concept of dialectical idealism. Marx, in the beginning of *Capital*, acknowledges the Hegelian influence on him. He considers himself “the pupil of that mighty thinker, and even here and there, in the chapter on the theory of value, coquetted with the modes of expression peculiar to him” (25). However, Marx explicitly expresses fundamental differences with Hegel's dialectical thought. Marx stresses that the Hegelian dialectical idealism suffers a number of flaws that prevents him “from being the first to present its general form of working in a comprehensive and conscious manner. With him it is standing on its head. It must be turned right side up again, if you would discover the rational kernel within the mystical shell” (25). The flaws of Hegel, in this regard, are results of his idealism as Marx declares in clear terms in his book, *Critique of Hegel's 'Philosophy Of Right'* by stating that “Hegel’s chief mistake consists in the fact that he conceives of the contradiction in appearance as being a unity in essence, i.e. in the idea; whereas it certainly has something more profound for its essence, namely, an essential contradiction” (91). Marx thinks in *Capital* that the Hegelian dialectical thought is extremely wrong to the degree at which he needs to take the opposite direction so he can fix its fundamental flaw by making this dialectical thought stand on its feet (materiality) instead of its head (spirituality). In order to do so, Marx suggests that

To Hegel, the life process of the human brain, i.e., the process of thinking, which, under the name of “the Idea,” he even transforms

into an independent subject, is the demiurgos of the real world, and the real world is only the external, phenomenal form of “the Idea.” With me, on the contrary, the ideal is nothing else than the material world reflected by the human mind, and translated into forms of thought. (25)

In light of this viewpoint, everything is ruled by economic necessities and there is no escape from their requirements, limitations and impacts. Conspiracy theory by no means can satisfy the theoretical conditions of Marx's world. Either the dialectal materialism or conspiracy theory can be considered as the explanatory factor of history and they can by no means coexist since they both claim the ability to explain events that occur over a long period. In this context, Karl Popper emphasizes that psychological phenomena are interpreted by Marx as symptoms of the corrupting impact of the social system. For example, depression and hunger “in the midst of plenty, not the result of a cunning conspiracy on the part of ‘big business’, but the unwanted social consequences of actions, directed towards different results, by agents who are caught in the network of the social system” (2011, 312). Popper also correctly notices that in Marx' view, all human figures including ones who play a significant roles in history are nothing but puppets, whose participations are tied by economic conditions and historical forces “over which they have no control” (2011, 312).

According to Marx, since our will and awareness are controlled by our economic conditions, we are unable to make universal conspiracy theories through which they can direct events and control different circumstances and politics. With a broader perspective,

one can even look at the dialectical materialism as a universal conspiracy made by competition over sources and modes of production. Conspiracies, in small ranges, can take place, of course, within the process of the dialectical materialism but cannot in any way surpass it or control it.

2- Lenin's View

Since Marx's theoretical concepts strongly stand against conspiracy theory, one might assume that the latter has been linked to Marxism because of the discourses of its revolutionaries who frequently criticize the capitalist West and imperial powers, and blame them for poverty and wars. The most important revolutionary figure in Marxism is Vladimir Lenin who formed his own vision of Marxism under the name of 'Marxism-Leninism'. Similar to Marx before him, Lenin is accused of being a conspiracy theorist. Based on Leslie Herzberger's perspective,

Lenin's theory of Marxism is a conspiracy theory of history. In Lenin's interpretation of history, bourgeois capitalism is malignant to the core. The rest for Lenin was merely window-dressing, for consumption by fools, those possessing a lesser, "false consciousness," which meant the overall majority of the people. The workers, according to Lenin, are not truly aware and do not truly know the reality of class conflict and power; they needed to be taught and guided. (2006, 65-6)

One hardly finds any specific characteristics of conspiracy theory in Herzberger's passage. It is very unlikely to convince anyone that the thought that economy always goes in favor of capitalists necessarily requires believing in a conspiracy theory made by bourgeois capitalism against the workers.

Herzberger, also, uses Lenin's attacks against capitalism because of its alleged role of causing WWI in order to tie him with conspiracy theory by stating that

According to Lenin's conspiracy theory of bourgeois politics in war and peace, the dispossessed will be slaughtering each other and thereby doing the dirty work of the power structure. The workers should use their power to undermine their objective enemies, the national and the international bourgeoisie, by not fighting in World War I. (2007, 98)

Again, there is no strong convincing connection between such accusation and conspiracy theory in Lenin's texts within their entire context. Examining Lenin's speeches, comments and letters shows no evidence of conspiracy theory whether when he deals with domestic or international affairs.

The absence of evidence for framing Lenin as a conspiracy theorist does not necessarily mean that he does not belong to the Marxists who motivate their comrades and followers to make schemes against their enemies. At the same time, suggesting or even making these schemes does not make Lenin or any other person a conspiracy theorist but a strategist and conspirator. In his slogans of Social- Democracy, Lenin puts major guidelines for communists in their hostile activities against their rivals:

First, all-embracing propaganda, involving the army and the theatre of hostilities as well, for the socialist revolution and the need to use weapons, not against their brothers, the wage slaves in other countries, but against the reactionary and bourgeois governments and parties of all countries; the urgent necessity of organising illegal nuclei and groups in the armies of all nations, to conduct such propaganda in all languages; a merciless struggle against the chauvinism and “patriotism” of the philistines and bourgeoisie of all countries without exception. In the struggle against the leaders of the present International, who have betrayed socialism, it is imperative to appeal to the revolutionary consciousness of the working masses, who bear the entire burden of the war and are in most cases hostile to opportunism and chauvinism.

Secondly, as an immediate slogan, propaganda for republics in (Germany, Poland, Russia, and other countries, and for the transforming of all the separate states of Europe into a republican United States of Europe. (18)

Such guidelines and the strategic thinking behind it does not associate with a conspiracy theorist's mind but the opposite; believing in conspiracy theory makes it extremely hard to make revolutionary plans to change the destiny of a nation. Marx, Lenin and other leading communist figures strongly stand against capitalism not because its dominance suggests a conspiracy theory in which a small group of people seize control of the state. Rather, as Simpson Connor points out, “Marxist theorists define this as the accumulation of capital involving the extraction of surplus and therefore requiring the reproduction of capitalist

relations - in short, the exploitation of groups of people to create profit” (57). Yet, even though Lenin thinks within Marx's dialectical materialism, his approach to achieve communism is different than that of the creator of Marxism. In this regard, Fred Schulze declares that, “[w]hile Marx predicted socialism as the final result of industrial development under capitalism, Lenin reversed this order, placing the socialist revolution first, and industrial development second” (66). To achieve Marxism's goals through Lenin's perspective, there is more need for strategist planing, violence and revolutionary activities to hasten the arrival of communism. Thus, compared to Marx's approach, the Lenin's method tends to embrace conspiracies conducted by communists.

Nevertheless, the Marxist discourse, as a whole, does not preoccupied with conspiracy theory. When conspiracies are mentioned in the Marxists' writings, such as those of Trotsky, they only mean plots that often occur throughout history to achieve political purposes without, of course, being considered as inclusive to embrace a wide course of events and actions. When Trotsky addresses conspiracy, he does so within his discussion to the elements of the operational tools of revolutionary actions. In this respect, he points out that ,

It is very necessary to understand the relations between insurrection and conspiracy, both as they oppose and as they supplement each other. It is especially so, because the very use of the word conspiracy, even in Marxian literature, contains a superficial contradiction due to the fact that it sometimes implies an independent undertaking initiated by the

minority, at others a preparation by the minority of a majority
insurrection. (741, 2008 [1932])

In his autobiography, Trotsky devotes a chapter to narrate 'The Conspiracy of the Epigones' which is merely a specific plot associated with other schemes, such as "[t]he conspiracy of silence on the part of the Russian press" (2007 [1930] 252).

Conclusion

Similar to religion, the Marxist ideology, as this section illustrates, has its own theoretical bases to interpret the world. Therefore, Marxist ideology necessarily contradicts with conspiracy theory even though the political upheaval sometimes pushes some Marxist revolutionaries and politicians to resort to conspiracy theory.

III SECTION

DISCOURSE ISLAMIST THE IN THEORY CONSPIRACY

Several writers link conspiracy theory in the Muslim World with Islamism. In this respect, Walter Laqueur points out that “[t]he main ideological contribution of Islamism has been in the field of conspiracy theory” (200). For Brian Farmer, “[t]he world of the Islamic terrorists is a world of misinformation and conspiracy theory, where the Islamists view their existence as one in which the forces of evil are constantly plotting against Islam” (71). From his part, Tarek Heggy states that “if we had to identify the most devoted adherents of the conspiracy theory, there is little doubt that this dubious distinction belongs to the Islamists” (104). According to Majid Mohammadi, the main brands of Islamism “have a very deep belief in a conspiracy theory that a small group of powerful men in the West are running the world” (33). Conspiracy theory, however, is not limited to Islamists; it has widely widespread among Muslims to the point at which “the demonstrable popularity of conspiracy theories in the Muslim world has led some to present Middle Eastern cultures as a hotbed of anachronistic, backward irrationality, superstition and prejudice” (Byford, 23). As far as this section is concerned, the focus is on the theoretical bases of conspiracy theory on the fundamental writings of the most prominent Islamist thinkers who have had considerable influence on public social and political behavior. These thinkers provide the theoretical justifications for millions of their followers to adopt the rhetoric of conspiracy theory in order to serve their political purposes.

However, as some scholars mention, “the secular Arab discourse shares this conspiratorial mindset with Salafi fundamentalists” (Aistrophe, 89), the secular rhetoric lacks the theoretical argumentation presented in the Islamist texts. This section, therefore, revolves only around the writings of Islamist thinkers regarding conspiracy theory. Since the religious discourse by its nature and logic contradicts with conspiracy theory, as mentioned in the first chapter, the hypothesis here is that there is no strong religious justification for any argument in favor of conspiracy theory. Subsequently, Islamist thinkers might find it very challenging to theologizing conspiracy theory and harmonizing it with their political agenda. In order to examine this hypothesis, this section investigates the main theoretical characteristics of conspiracy theory in the texts of four key contemporary Islamist thinkers, namely: Hassan al-Banna, (1906 - 1949), Sayyid Qutb (1906 - 1966), Abu Al-'Ala al-Mawdudi (1903-1979) and Ruhollah Khomeini (1900-1989). This section starts with al-Banna because many scholars characterize him as the father of contemporary Islamism since “many of the positions and arguments associated with Islamists such as Qutb, Maududi, and Khomeini are a systematic articulation of a worldview already evident in the model of leadership and sociomoral reform Banna left behind” (Koch 49). In my discussion of these figures' ideas, I concentrate on knowing whether they present coherent and convincing arguments whose premises are intended to be consistent with their understandings of Islamic principles.

Hassan al-Banna

All of Hassan al-Banna's efforts, including his foundation of the Muslim Brotherhood (1928), can be viewed as a reaction to the colonial encroachment and the abolition of the Ottoman Caliphate in 1924. The loss of the caliphate troubled al-Banna because “[a]lthough the caliph at that time had little power and was largely only symbolic, al-Banna viewed the development as a ‘declaration of war against all shapes of Islam’ and feared that similar events could occur in his homeland of Egypt and throughout the rest of the Islamic world” (83). Peter Mandaville among other scholars downplays the importance of establishing an Islamic state as a priority for al-Banna and emphasizes that, instead, al-Banna

[S]ought to reform the existing state through ... ‘social Islam.’ ... On the issue of the caliphate, Banna's position was that that ultimately such an institution was desirable, although he was perfectly comfortable with the idea of pursuing an Islamic social order within the framework of the nationalist state. (77)

This notion is accurate but only when describing al-Banna's short-term strategy because the latter thinks that multiparty politics of the Muslim world can only weaken and undermine the essential values of Islamic unity in a long term (Commins, 1994: 136). Thus, al-Banna repeatedly assures that his reforms start with social level but only as an initial step that must lead to the establishment of pan-Muslim government. al-Banna pragmatically perceives the national state and its governance to be a necessary, but

temporary reform-inducing alternative that paves the way towards his ultimate ideological end goal: the restoration of the caliphate

Rebuilding the international prominence of the Islamic Umma by liberating its land, reviving its glorious heritage, bringing closer the cultures of its regions, and uniting its countries so that one Islamic Caliphate may be established ... Instructing the world about the Islamic ideology by spreading the call of Islam to all corners of the globe. (1978, 16)

‘Instructing the world’ or ‘mastering the world’ in another translation (al-Ghazaliy, 191) reveals al-Banna's self-evident belief of the superiority of Islam and its system over every other ideology. Since Islam, in al-Banna's perspective, presents the ultimate good through its ‘perfect, “all-embracing system” (1999, 59), there is no surprise that all the evil forces have united to stand against it. For al-Banna, this evil is Westernization and its ‘devil of colonialism’ that targets Islam and its followers (1999, 103). Muslims, consequently, must face this threat by reviving their ‘true Islam’ in light of the purification of the Muslim nation in beliefs and practices. Islam, for Hassan al-Banna, is the ultimate solution of the mankind because it alone can solve every single problems and satisfy the material and spiritual needs of everyone by its comprehensive system of ideas and all-embracing political ideology.

al-Banna's ideas of the comprehensiveness of Islam leads him to believe in the totality of evil embodied in the form of the West. Islam and the West are the Ahura Mazda

and Ahriman of his entire writings. The inclusive nature of Islam is designed by God to guarantee the happiness for all people. However, Islam has not reached its ultimate goal because the pure good has evoked its opposite the pure evil, that is, the West. The East and the West are not only opposite in direction, for al-Banna, but also in morality, religion and values. Unlike Islam, the Christian West is decadent and corrupt. According to al-Banna,

the Noble Qur'an appoints the Muslims as guardians over humanity in its minority, and grants them the right of suzerainty and dominion over the world in order to carry out this sublime commission. Hence it is our concern, not that of the West, and it pertains to Islamic civilization, not to materialistic civilization. (1981, 120)

However, to prove his opinions, whether about the comprehensiveness of Islam or the totality of the Western evil, al-Banna relies only on his own interpretations of verses of Quran and his personal belief of the golden age of Islam when the Muslim conquests had "saintly victories which astounded the world and went beyond anything history had known in their swiftness, justice and virtue" (1981, 91). These "saintly victories," in al-Banna's account, are the opposite of the vicious colonialism of the West. The latter, as a whole, have always, claims al-Banna, "proceeded to seize opportunity as it arose, to adopt the flimsiest excuses, to attack the peaceful, negligent Islamic state, and to reduce its periphery or break off portions of its integral fabric" (1981, 49).

The founder of the Muslim Brotherhood offers neither concrete evidence to support his claims nor consistent theoretical rationalization. The basis of al-Banna's biased and prejudiced accusations against the West are nothing but preconceived and over-generalized claims. There is no discussion in al-Banna's texts about the origin and creditability of this alleged existential hostility between the West and Muslims. Furthermore, al-Banna does not refer to specific conspiracies, their motives and planners. Rather, he articulates that “the Europeans,” in general, conduct “worked assiduously to enable the tide of this materialistic life, with its corrupting traits and its murderous germs, to overwhelm all the Islamic lands toward which their hands were outstretched” (1981, 57). The Europeans' wicked plans against the Muslim nation aim to corrupt all aspects of life; “[t]hey laid their plans for this social aggression in a masterly fashion invoking the aid of their political acumen and their military predominance until they had accomplished their desire” (1981, 57). These plans, according to al-Banna, are not sporadic, random, improvised or dispersed but well prepared by the Europeans to not only dominate Muslims but also eliminate their identity and dignity in all levels. In addition, the Europeans, adds al-Banna,

[D]eluded the Muslim leaders by granting them loans and entering into financial deals with them, making all of this easy and effortless for them, and thus they were able to obtain the right to infiltrate the economy, and to flood the country with their capital, their banks, and their companies; to take over the workings of the economic machinery as they wished; and to monopolize, to the exclusion of the inhabitants, enormous profits and immense wealth. After that, they were able to alter the basic principles of

government, justice, and education, and to imbue political, juridical and cultural systems with their own peculiar characteristics in even the most powerful Islamic countries. They imported their half-naked women into these regions, together with their liquors, their theatres, their dance-halls, their amusements, their stories, their amusements, their stories, their newspapers, their novels, their whims, their silly games, and their vices. Here they countenanced crimes they did not tolerate in their own countries” (57-8).

One can find the negative impacts of the Western colonialism in the Muslim countries on al-Banna's perspective regarding the relationship between the West, particularly the Europeans, and Muslims. al-Banna deduces from some of the consequences of colonialism its initial sordid intention.

The logic of al-Banna is hard to argue with; he considers some observations, especially the disadvantages of colonialism, as conclusions of his claimed premises without proving the relationship between the two as well as revealing the reasonable grounds of his premises. In his writings, al-Banna seems as a voluble and enthusiastic preacher rather than intellectual who relies on reasoning, not emotion. However, al-Banna's discourse has impacted the public and sundry thinkers while his organization, the Muslim Brotherhood, has gained millions of followers in Egypt and the rest of the Middle East since the forties of the last century. al-Banna's accusation against the West and its comprehensive conspiracies towards Muslims has become an important incentive behind the dogmatic

acceptance of conspiracy theory in the Muslim World in general and the Middle East in particular. Consequently,

As is the case with any conspiracy theory, the cyclical logic of the “cultural attack” cannot be defeated : one who denies the existence of the cultural attack must be part of it, thus proving its existence. Hence, one who denies the existence of the cultural attack must be a traitor to the Muslim nation.” (Shavit 77)

al-Banna employs the accumulated tension between the Middle East and the West including the colonial legacy, and the memories of the Crusades to create public awareness of the necessity of their unity against ‘the other’. The coming pages will reveal some aspects of al-Banna's influence on other Islamic thinkers as well as examining their thoughts on conspiracy theory.

Sayyid Qutb

Sayyid Qutb is another key thinker in the Muslim Brotherhood. Like Hassan al-Banna, Qutb strongly believes that Islam alone has the capacity to find solutions to the world's problems. For Qutb, Islam also is able to lead under its rules and principles humanity into a bright future because “its solutions are based on the foundation of the wholesome nature of man” (155). Furthermore, Qutb thinks that the struggle for achieving

the dominance of Islam “is not a temporary phase but an eternal state - an eternal state, as truth and falsehood cannot co-exist on this earth” (75). However, as Peter Mandaville emphasizes, “in contrast with Banna, Qutb was primarily an intellectual and theorist” (101). Even though the latter uses the same preaching style that lacks theoretical complexity and philosophical argumentation to make his points, “[h]is theological reconstruction involves a complete rewriting of Islamic intellectual history characterized ... a departure from the traditional emphasis on jurisprudence and law [and] ...a new emphasis on the centrality of political power to the establishment of the City of God” (Pasha, 115). This newness of his approach explains why he depends, especially in his latest work, *Milestones*, only on the Quran and a few sayings attributed to the Prophet Mohammad. Yet, Qutb's thoughts are not generated by thoughtful discussions with different viewpoints derived from constructive ways of thinking with logic arguments, analytic methods and reliable evidence. Rather, Qutb who “was defending God's absolute truth against the apparent barbarism of the modern world” (Calvert, x) only uses his readings of the Quran to justify his sharp ideas about Islam, state, politics and especially the battle between *Hakimiyyah* (Theodemocracy / obeying the God's rule embedded in Shari'a law) and its antithesis, *Jahiliyyah* (ignorance). Clarifying Qutb's unscientific reasoning is important because such reasoning is more likely to fall into conspiracy theories than into acknowledging the relativity of its own among different accounts in the same field of studying.

Qutb follows Hassan al-Banna in avoiding mentioning any certain conspiracy theory. Qutb, however, thinks that besides Europe, the rest of the world is engaged in an

existential conflict with the Muslim world including the Muslims who refuse the concept of *Hakimiyyah* as he understands it. As Bettina Koch points out, “Qutb's reasoning overcomes any ambiguity in al-Banna's argument about the legitimacy of revolution. Furthermore, fellow Muslims who are no longer perceived to be Muslims could be targeted by jihad” (145). This is not a conflict between two religions or ideologies but “struggle between good and evil, between the truth and falsehood, and between faith and tyranny” (177). Qutb wants Muslims to be vigilant against anyone who tries to convince them that there might be other ways to look at the nature of this struggle. Hence, he illustrates that

The enemies of the Believers may wish to change this struggle into an economic or political or racial struggle, so that the Believers become confused concerning the true nature of the struggle and the flame of belief in their hearts becomes extinguished. The Believers must not be deceived, and must understand that this is a trick. The enemy, by changing the nature of the struggle, intends to deprive them of their weapon of true victory, the victory which can take any form, be it the victory of the freedom of spirit as was case of the Believers in the story of the Makers of the Pit, or dominance in the world - as a consequence of the freedom of spirit - as happened in the case of the first generation of Muslims. (177)

Although Qutb accepts al-Banna's emphasis on the superiority of Islam as the only efficacious for society's discriminations and inequities, he “envisioned that process to be a cataclysmic revolutionary event that could be brought about only through the establishment of an Islamic state” (Aslan, 244). History shows, from Qutb's perspective, that

“Christendom” relentlessly stands against this establishment. Qutb describes ‘the Christian resistance to the Islamic truth’ as spirit permeating time and space. Here, Qutb clarifies that

We see an example of this today in the attempts of Christendom to try to deceive us by distorting history and saying that the Crusades were a form of imperialism. The truth of the matter is that the latter-day imperialism is but a mask for the crusading spirit, since it is not possible for it to appear in its true form, as it was possible in the Middle Ages. The unveiled crusading spirit was smashed against the rock of the faith of Muslim leadership ... (177)

Imperialism is not a manifestation of a capitalist system which is nothing but “a corollary of rebellion against Allah's authority and the denial of the dignity of man given to him by Allah Almighty” (27) as Qutb declares earlier in his book. Essentially, the struggle, rather, is religious since it existed far before the emergence of Capitalism. Despite the absence of evidence to support a direct relationship, some writers associate Qutb's idea of the Crusading spirit with preparing the atmosphere to conspiracy thinking. For example, Natana J. DeLong-Bas accentuates that “Bin Laden also echoes Qutb's theme of the global Christian, Crusader- Zionist, Jewish conspiracy to destroy Islam” (274). In the footsteps of Hassan al-Banna, Sayyid Qutb does not believe in a single conspiracy theory but he, yet, invigorates the environment with conspiracy reasoning that triggers or at least welcomes enormous conspiracy theories. By providing an hospitable environment for conspiracism, al-Banna, Qutb and other Islamic thinkers have popularized conspiracy theory in the Muslim world. What we see here is a transferring of conspiracy theory from being a rational

way of thinking formed and adopted by an individual or small group of people into a widely accepted reasonable approach. Sayyid Qutb represents a further step towards planting conspiracy theory in the Muslims' mentality, especially Middle Easterners'.

Abu Al-'Ala Maududi

Both Qutb's ideas of *Hakimiyyah* and *Jahiliyyah* are borrowed from Abu Al-'Ala Maududi, a Pakistani intellectual, theologian and the founder of Jamaat-e-Islami, an Islamic political organization and social conservative movement. However, these ideas take more peaceful tune with Maududi as he focuses on the Islamization of society first “through parliamentary and party political activism” (Bubalo 18) rather than using force to establish an Islamic state. The difference between Maududi and Qutb is that “[w]hereas Maududi used the opposition between *hakimiyyah* and *jahiliyyah* to gauge the moral temper of an Islamic society, this distinction acquires a particular force in Qutb's late writings, which no doubt influenced by Maududi's themes (Safdar, 158-9). One of these themes is Mawdudi's idea that “sovereignty belongs exclusively to God. No worldly political power, therefore, can be truly sovereign. The nature and purpose of human political agency, it then follows, is to bring about a social order reflective of divine ordinance” (Mandaville 82). Maududi thinks, writes Sheikh Jameil Ali, that due to the disregarding of *Hakimiyyah* by Muslims and non-Muslims alike, secularism along with its corollaries, such as atheism and immorality, must emerge as a deviation from human

nature. For Maududi, Ali continues, “[w]ith the exception of belief in the God of the Qur’an and his exclusive transcendental sovereignty, conforming as it does to the innate and instinctive inclinations of human beings, all other philosophical or ideological notions serve to erect barriers of artificial and imaginary solutions” (375). Accordingly, as Ali concludes,

Deviation and conspiracy, as the two most devastating scourges ever to afflict Islam. Both were the result of a long-term plan hatched by internal and external forces. Strangely enough, even Muslims often exhibit highly ambivalent and contradictory attitudes towards sovereignty of God. ... Sensing the dangers of this ideology, in whatever form it may appear, now not only surviving but thriving, seems to have instigated Mawlana Mawdudi to emphasize the idea of oneness of God and his exclusive transcendent sovereignty as means to reinstate Islam as a political system, and to counter adverse ideologies. (375)

Deviation and conspiracy represent the opposite situation in which humanity can reach *Hakimiyyah* and uphold to it, and, as a result, they are nothing but tools of *Jahiliyyah* to prevent any possibility of implementing God's will. As long as humanity exists, secularism and other worldly conceptions conduct conspiracies to substitute humanity's rulership over God's sovereignty. Such sharp opinion, however, seldom takes place in Maududi's literature. One of its rare examples is expressed at the beginning of his book, *The Islamic Law and Constitution*, in which he professes that

[T]he educated younger generations of the Muslim world too have been estranged from their own cultural and intellectual tradition. Under the influence of Western education they have imbibed the Western political concepts and are thinking of introducing them in the Muslim world without any regard for the Muslim tradition as such. And as through a cruel conspiracy of circumstances, the reins of power in many a country have passed from the hands of the erstwhile Imperialist powers to the very class of West- oriented Muslims, the need for a precise presentation of the Islamic case has increased manifold. (1960, 3)

In contrast to this example, Mawdudi, in most cases where conspiracies are mentioned, refers to them as plots that play only a small role in certain events for specific goals. Such conspiracies frequently occur in history and always conducted by enemies to hurt and weaken believers who are quite unlikely to engage in such intrigues. In this sense, Mawdudi revisits events occurring during the Prophet Muhammad's life and describes some hostile deeds managed by the Prophets' enemies as conspiracies (1988, 144); (1990, 251).

Among other Islamists discussed in this section, including Ruhollah Khomeini whose thoughts on conspiracy theory will be considered in detail in the coming paragraphs, Mawdudi is the most hesitant theorist to deploy conspiracy theory in order to strengthen his positions. Yet, like other Islamist theorists, Mawdudi shows no awareness of the disastrous consequences of adopting conspiracy theory as a belief system or principle that explicitly affects people's conception of any courses of action in the political field.

Khomeini

Ruhollah Khomeini, the leader of the 1979 Iranian Revolution and the first supreme leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran, takes the idea of establishing Islamic rule further than his contemporaries. He firmly stands for the implementation of the theory of velayat-e faqih, (the Guardianship of the Islamic Jurist) after providing “the fullest explanation and justification” (Mandaville 248). For Khomeini, the theory of velayat-e faqih has a divine root because it comes from God. According to Khomeini,

The prophet ... is empowered to rule and govern over the believers, and the same rule and governance that has been established for the Most Noble Messenger (s) is also established for the scholars for both in the verse quoted and in the tradition under discussion the titular designation ‘prophet’ has been used. (89)

The regime of velayat-e faqih is the only legitimate governance to revolt against tyrannical authorities and to smooth the path for establishing Islamic government and the enforcing Islamic precepts. Khomeini's emphasis on the theory of velayat-e faqih falls in the context of suspicion in Iran over the Western colonialism. However, as Mehdi Mozaffar assures, “[t]he decline and disintegration of the British Empire reduced this feeling among Iranians, but as a result of American domination, a new paranoia emerged (63). Mozaffar adds that “[i]n his ferocious attacks on the West and particularly on the USA, Khomeini indicated

not only his own feelings, but to some degree he also personified the accumulation of both traditional Shi'a and Iranian (anti-British and anti-American)” (63). In a historical sense, Khomeini's theory of velayat-e faqih addresses what is described as the conflict between the West and the Islam.

Besides, Khomeini employs what he wants it to be a hostile atmosphere between the West and its previous Muslim colonies as well as the rhetoric of velayat-e faqih to rally support for overthrowing the secular Iranian Regime. To make his case, Khomeini blames secular governments in the Muslim world for corruption and crimes committed by the state. In this respect, he articulates that:

The existence of a non-Islamic political order necessarily results in the non-implementation of the Islamic political order. Then, all non-Islamic systems of government are the systems of kufr [the rejection of the divine guidance] ... We have in reality, then, no choice but to destroy those systems of government that are corrupt in themselves and also entail the corruption of others, and to overthrow all treacherous, corrupt, oppressive, and criminal regimes. (28-9)

Khomeini's emphasis that all non-Islamic systems are nothing but systems of kufr (disbelief in Allah) makes his thoughts in this regard similar to Qutb's accounts of *Hakimiyyah* and *Jahiliyyah*. Unlike worldly ideologies and methods, Islam “as laid down no laws for the practice of usury, for banking on the basis of usury, for the consumption of alcohol, or for the cultivation of sexual vice, having radically prohibited all of these” (8). To explain the

existence of these vices in Muslim countries, Khomeini does not only blame the absence of implementing the Islamic law but, also, and foremost, the West. On this point, Khomeini contends

The ruling cliques, therefore, who are the puppets of imperialism and wish to promote these vices in the Islamic world, will naturally regard Islam as defective. They must import the appropriate laws from Britain, France, Belgium, and most recently, America. The fact that Islam makes no provision for the orderly pursuit of these illicit activities, far from being a deficiency, is a sign of perfection and a source of pride.

The conspiracy worked out by the imperialist government of Britain at the beginning of the constitutional movement had two purposes. The first, which was already known at that time, was to eliminate the influence of Tsarist Russia in Iran, and the second was to take the laws of Islam out of force and operation by introducing Western laws. (8)

Similar to al-Banna, Qutb and Maududi, Khomeini does not mention any particular conspiracy theory and he give no specific historical events that support his claims. Khomeini's general idea of conspiracy theory regarding the imperialist government of Britain has no proof whether historical or theoretical.

Some scholars think that along with the West, the Jews are subject to Khomeini's accusations of everlasting conspiracy against Muslims. In this respect, Martin Riesebrodt attributes Khomeini's anti-Semitic conspiracy theories to his constant "critique of the state

of Israel or of Zionism, which would be thoroughly understandable from an Islamic point of view, given the wars between Israel and its neighbors. He went on to represent Jews as the enemies of Islam and the divine order from the very beginning ... (140). Riesebrodt draws his opinion from Khomeini's comment on the Jews of Banu Qurayza "who are alleged to have aided the forces of the Prophet's enemies"(Kister 45). Khomeini considers Banu Qurayza as "a troublesome group, causing corruption in Muslim society and damaging Islam and the Islamic state, the Most Noble Messenger ('a) eliminated them" (76). This comment by itself does not prove Riesebrodt's claims. In contrast, the context reveals only the Khomeini's stress on the necessity of rooting out the harming groups, such as Banu Qurayza, to ensure the collective interest of the Muslim society.

A close look at Khomeini's thought on the Jews shows that they are not perceived as the planners of conspiracy theories but merely tools to assist the West. In his viewpoint, "a handful of wretched Jews (the agents of America, Britain, and other foreign powers) would never have been able to accomplish what they have, no matter how much support they enjoyed from America and Britain" (27). For Khomeini, neither Judaism nor Christianity attempts to encounter Islam but it is the Western civilization whose primary identity is built on liberal values that stand, by its own nature, against Islamic way of life. Therefore, unlike Qutb, Khomeini's arguments have no indications of religious background behind the imperial conspiracies against Muslims. The clash here is not between religions but between Islam and un-Islamic ideologies adopted by the West and Russia with which Iran has had a long complicatedly and multi-faceted relationship.

Based on the above, one can conclude that Khomeini uses his comments on conspiracy theory to guarantee public support to his arguments for velayat-e faqih but without providing any logical justification. In other words, through conspiracy theory, Khomeini promotes fear of imperialism to mobilize people around him. There is no better way to alleviate local struggles and create a united people than making a common enemy.

Conclusion

Even though al-Banna, Qutb, Maududi and Khomeini differ from one another about some details and attitudes on conspiracy theory, they use it as a part of their Islamization of political discourse which lead, eventually, to the Islamization of the public sphere of the Muslim world. All of these Islamic thinkers do not mention any specific conspiracy theory but their conspiracy thinking exacerbates suspicion and distrust between Muslims and the West and paves the way, subsequently, for the public acceptance of conspiracy theory in the Middle East and the rest of the Muslim world. These Islamist figures are not only political theorists; they are also revolutionists, state men, and leaders of mass movements joined by millions of people. al-Banna's, Qutb's, Maududi's and Khomeini's accounts on conspiracy theory lack theoretical framework, logical arguments and, rather, rely only on some historical circumstances, mutual tensions between the West and the Muslim world and more importantly some Qur'ānic verses and other Islamic sources taken out of context and interpreted differently depending on the theorist's values and intentions. The

comparison between these accounts illustrates that the less the Islamic theorist has of traditional religious learning (al-Banna and Qutb), the more he places reliance on conspiracy thinking to make his points and convince his audience if forced to acknowledge the inevitability of war between religions. On the other hand, when the theorist has a deep knowledge of the Islamic religious learning (Maududi and Khomeini), he becomes more reluctant to take such position and prefers, instead, to see the war between religion and secular ideologies and values. In other words, he becomes more vigilant when politics and religion overlap.

CHAPTER III

THE CULTURAL AND CRITICAL APPROACHES OF CONSPIRACY THEORY

In this chapter, I attempt to explore several cultural and critical approaches that revolve around defining the concepts and functions of conspiracy theory. This study follows Jan-Erik Lane's and Svante Ersson definition of the cultural approach in their book *Culture and Politics: A Comparative Approach* as “the major framework for mapping this domain of social interaction consisting of the sense that human beings link up with behaviour and which may also propel interaction” (35). As far as defining the critical approach is concerned, I follow the prevailing opinion according to which the critical approach considers culture as various manifestations of class struggle, emphasizing on power relations and historical contexts. Unlike the cultural approach,

The purpose of the critical approach,” as Richard Schaefer points out, “is not to describe, understand, and predict culture and communication, but to critique and make changes in discursive practices that perpetuate and reinforce social injustices, discursive oppression, and human alienation. (731)

Regardless of their differences, both cultural and critical approaches concentrate on the significant interrelationship between ideology and the material conditions of our contemporary life.

A careful examination of the studies on the nature and functions of conspiracy theories shows that the vast majority of scholars tend to take the cultural approach in two directions or forms; either considering conspiracy theory as a paranoid symptom or knowledge form. The first direction, on first hand, characterizes conspiracy theory, Mark Fenster emphasizes,

[A]s illegitimate, pathological, and a threat to political stability.” On the other hand, the second direction focuses on “an entertaining narrative form, a populist expression of a democratic culture, that circulates deep skepticism about the truth of the current political order throughout contemporary culture. (xiii)

And yet, although these two directions articulate profound thoughts on the cultural contexts of conspiracy theories, their arguments are not generally systematically structured in light of pre-established rules. The critical approach takes a different trajectory; while being less popular among scholars who study conspiracy theory, it discusses issues with relying heavily on philosophical perspectives compared to the cultural approach.

Given that the critical approach emerged mainly from Karl Marx's thoughts (Willis and Jost 44), the hypothesis of this chapter is that the studies that follow the principles of the critical approach are more likely to offer more detailed explanations based

on definite philosophical grounds compared to those of the cultural approach. To test this hypothesis, this chapter briefly studies examples of the cultural approach and, then, concentrates, for its most part, on the Slovenian intellectual and psychoanalyst Slavoj Žižek's notions on conspiracy theory as the most significant example of the critical approach. Žižek unprecedentedly develops noteworthy ideas that deal directly with conspiracy theory and relies on theoretical insights that he evolves from various sources as it will be seen in this chapter after exploring the two directions of the cultural approach.

The Cultural Approaches:

1- Form of Knowledge

In his book *American Monroe: The Making of a Body Politic*, Paige Baty pays a close attention to how conspiracy theory is promoted through mass media. The author suggests that conspiracy theory is manifested systematically through media publicity by modifying remembering in “cartographic” form. Such process, as Baty indicates, “rendered maps emplot the historical in a curious set of visual terms: they attempt to reproduce history's effects as a sort of evidential testimony or ‘big picture’ capable of revealing history's ‘real story’” (117). Baty adds that this real story is pictured in television as

narrative or plotted form (117). Through this cartographic remembering, Baty finds out that the political cultural literacy as a whole has been “circulated through the channels of television” (117-8). Being the major mediator of information, the mass media has been the field where the systematic cartographic rememberings are manipulated to convince the public of certain narratives about events that took place in the past.

For Baty, remembering is not a random, fragmentary, selective and unreliable act of summoning a spontaneous memory, but, rather, a deliberate activity that is “equivalent to tracking, or mapping, history's hidden plots” (119). Depending upon remembering, Baty then explains the process of creating conspiracy theory by stating that

The conspiracy narrative traces a seemingly random series of events and weaves them into a coherent “secret plot.” Conspiracy narratives fix plots as a normative standard, producing narrative structures in which the world becomes more coherent but less open to the exigencies of spontaneous human action mediator of political culture to “tell history's hidden story” as if it were a scripted production waiting to be discovered by the vigilant eye of the press and the people. (119)

By organizing random information in particular narrative structures, conspiracy theory as a form of knowledge becomes a strong tool for influencing people and directing their intention against the formal narrative. Established on the grounds of the political cultural mediator that already recreated by the selective and deliberate cartographic rememberings, this form of knowledge, as Baty conceives it, echoes Michel Foucault's thought on

knowledge in his analysis of psychiatric power. Foucault thinks that “knowledge functions as power, and this power of knowledge presents itself as reality within which the individual is placed” (190). As a result, according to Baty, the mentality of the citizen is directed toward monitoring “details of plots unfolding in the world around her: she becomes a collector of political cultural knowledge, the recipient and organizer of history's aftereffects” (119). The cartographic mode of remembering does not only lead the public to live reality in the terms of conspiracies but also disable them to “clearly distinguish what is the real and what is the map, the two forms will have bled into, and reconstituted, one another” (125).

Baty's perspective gives an interesting understanding of conspiracy theory and how it works but her concentration only on the narrative that takes the form of cartographic rememberings is not quite enough to explain how conspiracy theory remains successful and dominate the cultural political mediator even when it fails as a form of knowledge. In fact, almost all of conspiracies lack strong narrative structures to support their claims. Jodi Dean, in this context, thinks that “[t]he power of a conspiracy theory comes less from its narrative than from the evidence upon which it is built. Once a fact is established, verified, myriad links become possible. Ufologists, Kennedy assassination researchers ... take great pains to produce evidence” (1998, 225). In addition, continues Dean, the evidence of conspiracy theory encounters the official explanations and takes advantage of “the failure of such explanations to account for the evidence” (225). Nevertheless, Dean also presents an unilateral explanation of conspiracy theory. For Dean, unlike other theories, the rationality of conspiracy theory is not built on the strength of its evidence or the weakness

of the official explanation per se. As mentioned before in this thesis, conspiracy theory depends on a way of thinking that emerged within Enlightenment and its implications and found its support in skepticism and the desire of establishing an ideal world.

For Mark Fenster, conspiracy theory is “a strategy of delegitimation in political discourse” that consists of “a set of illegitimate assumptions” that “reject the notion that history moves through the triumph of progress and leadership as well as through the vagaries of coincidence and mistake” (xii). Fenster asserts that “conspiracy must be recognized as a cultural practice that attempts to map, in narrative form, the trajectories and effects of power” (108). Instead of dealing with conspiracy theory in a simplistic, limited way, he thinks that conspiracy theory “continually threatens to unravel and leave unsettled the resolution to the question of power that it attempts to address” (108). As Aaron John Gulyas notices, conspiracy theory in Fenster's viewpoint is not a “symptom of political or institutional breakdown” (8), but, rather, a manifestation of what Fenster describes as “a political life live in significance: in reading the signs of the powerful, in finding and investigating conspiracy” (xiv). Accordingly, conspiracy theory becomes the field where the populist imagination appears as “a sort of populist political unconscious, stirs” (xiv). This imagination does not act as pure fantasy, a form of escapism, or pure fantasy, but it unveils the unbalanced power relationship embedded in economy and politics. Fenster indicates this point in the following passage:

[C]onspiracy theory is a theory of power. As such, it deserves attention for its understanding of the uneven distribution of resources and coercive power. Conspiracy theory perceives the power of the ruling individual,

group, or coalition to be thoroughly instrumental, controlling virtually all aspect of social life, politic, and economics. The singularity of its instrumentalism is its belief that although power has real effects and creates traces that can be discovered by those aware of its existence, the “truth” of power—the identities and motivations of actors who actually wield power—remains hidden to the 'naked' eye of those who dismiss or are ignorant of the conspiracy. (xiv)

Conspiracy theories, as cultural practices, keep investigating the implications of power but with no final destination or goal because of their bottomless obsession with secrecy. “Secrecy, in short,” states Fenster, “constitutes conspiracy's most egregious wrong. Yet, unlike ‘vulgar’ or ‘plain’ Marxist instrumentalism, conspiracy theory does not claim that the state is used by “the ruling class for enforcing and guaranteeing the stability of the class structure itself” (xiv). Fenster recognizes that conspiracy theories are not organized in hierarchical structures as we see in the Marxist theory. Instead, “[c]onspiracy theories seek to explain the power of ethnic, social, or even supernatural elites over ‘the people’ rather than focus on the systemic exploitation of the oppressed through control of the relations of production and ideological structures of domination” (xiv). Secrecy, therefore, hampers conspiracy theory from becoming a systematic and scientific theory. Following the above remarks, Fenster states that “conspiracy theory thus seems a rather disabling theory of power” (xv). In Fenster's view, conspiracy theory is strongly associated with power checking by the public and their imagination but without resorting to a viable approach. Fenster's implied frustration of the inability of conspiracy theory comes from the

contradiction of his premises; he expects conspiracy theory to be a populist imagination and includes a systematic method of investigation at the same time.

2- Symptom of Paranoid

In his book *The Paranoid Style in American Politics*, Richard Hofstadter advocates for the idea that paranoia is one of dominating pattern in the American political scene. To prove his point, Hofstadter outlines several conspiracy theories of the radical right since the emergence of the French Revolution. Hofstadter defines the paranoid style as “the feeling of persecution is central, and it is indeed systematized in grandiose theories of conspiracy” (4). Hofstadter recognizes this paranoid style as “the curious leap in imagination that is always made at some critical point in the recital of events” (37). As a self-defense mechanism system, the spokesman of this paranoid style, illustrates Hofstadter, “finds it directed against a nation, a culture, a way of life whose fate affects not himself alone but millions of others” (4). From this ground, conspiracy theory emerges as, “logically necessary form of madness” as H. S. Harris describes it (71).

After mentioning a series of examples, Hofstadter, identifies the basic elements of the paranoid style, starting with “[t]he central image is that of a vast and sinister conspiracy, a gigantic and yet subtle machinery of influence set in motion to undermine and destroy a way of life” (29). Unlike the ‘real conspiracies’ which take place only in limited periods of time, “[t]he distinguishing thing about the paranoid style is its exponents see conspiracies

here and there in history, but that they regard a “vast” or “gigantic” conspiracy as the motive force in historical events” (29). Hofstadter notes that the paranoid style is distinguished by its apocalyptic characteristic, indicating that its apocalypticism “runs dangerously near to hopeless pessimism, but usually stops short of it” (30). In addition, the paranoid style seeks complete victory since “the enemy is thought of as being totally evil and totally unappeasable” (31). In contrast to the interpretations of reliable theories, “[t]he paranoid's interpretation of history is in this sense distinctly personal: decisive events are not taken as part of the stream of history, but as the consequences of someone's will” (31). Hofstadter then indicates that the paranoid style frequently occurs in different span of times and in various places (39). Rather than seeing this recurrence stand in contradictory relation with paranoia as a special case, Hofstadter thinks that it “suggests that a mentality disposed to see the world in the paranoid's way may always be present in some considerable minority of the population” (39).

The problem with Hofstadter's argument is that conspiracy theory is not only limited to minorities. That might be the reason why Hofstadter extends his scope by suggesting that “the paranoid disposition is mobilized into action chiefly by social conflicts that involve ultimate schemes of values and that bring fundamental fears and hatreds, rather than negotiable interests, into political action” (39). Admitting that the paranoid style is an outcome of social conflicts does not contradict its very essence. Hofstadter justifies this view by affirming that social conflict creates the paranoid tendency when it becomes “totally irreconcilable, and thus by nature not susceptible to the normal political processes of bargain and compromise” (39). The notion that the intensity of social conflict might

solve this contradiction seems overly simplistic because such intensity is open to a lot of possibilities, taken in consideration that Hofstadter does not offer any justification for preferring one possibility over the others.

Hofstadter's elements of the paranoid style do not necessarily mean that conspiracy theory is a paranoid way of thinking. Unlike the condition of paranoia, conspiracy theory does not address personal issues nor it expresses the delusions of a single person or small group, though it can be conducted by one individual or a small group of people. Although motivated by fear and delusions of persecution, conspiracy theory predominantly does not fall into the trap the exaggerated self-importance of its own theorist, but, rather, tries to sound objective while presenting its case with relatively rational tone and argumentation. Of course, there is a paranoid aspect in conspiracy theory but it is far more complicated to be merely a paranoid style of thinking. Conspiracy theory illustrates a way of thinking inspired by ideal orientation, the Enlightenment rationality, skepticism and secrecy.

The Critical Approach: Žižek's Psychoanalysis View

No thinker has been more conscious of conspiracy theory and more concerned about its theoretical and practical implications than Slavoj Žižek. However, Žižek has not

dedicated a single work to study this subject closely. Rather, his thoughts in this regard are scattered in his writings. Accordingly, in order to form an accurate idea about his general conception of conspiracy theory, it is necessary to go through all of his writings to collect his perspectives on conspiracy theory and try eventually to find the overall concept that lies behind them without neglecting the importance of the context under which these thoughts are drawn. Besides his outstanding interest in conspiracy theory, both in terms of quality and quantity, Žižek's ideological affiliation to Marxism, in a general sense, makes him a unique case that is worth being analyzed in detail. Marxists' normative belief systems, as presented in the previous chapter, spare them the trouble of examining the premises and the implications of conspiracy theory since their own theory interprets events and their causes with no need of a separate set of considerations. My hypothesis here is that the more the thinker wants to develop ideas or concepts in regard to conspiracy theory within the Marxist literature, the more s/he is obliged to revolutionize the way s/he looks at the fundamental doctrines of Marxism. Otherwise, it is most likely that the thinker finds it impossible to evolve novel ideas associated with Marxism and conspiracy theory.

My assumption is that Žižek reads the key intellectual sources of Marxism in a different way which allows him to extract new meanings and concepts. To test this assumption, this section begins with studying Žižek's comprehension of Hegel in particular in respect of issues related to conspiracy theory, and then, carefully examines his general conception of this theory throughout his various books. Only by illustrating Žižek's fundamental elements of understanding the world, his stand towards conspiracy theory can be accurately recognized along with his position as a Marxist thinker even though he has

departed from traditional Marxist theory since 1989 when he published his first English book *The Sublime Object of Ideology*. Žižek's theoretical approach essentially rests upon two thinkers, Hegel and Jacques Lacan. In order to avoid the ramification of the discussions linked to these intellectuals, this section deals only with their thoughts as related to conspiracy theory.

Different View on Hegel

In his book *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, Žižek does not only explicitly refuse the common understanding of Hegelian dialectics but, also, presents a thesis that stands in the opposite direction. Žižek states his thesis as follows:

[F]ar from being a story of its progressive overcoming, dialectics is for Hegel a systematic notation of the failure of all such attempts— ‘absolute knowledge’ denotes a subjective position which finally accepts ‘contradiction’ as an internal condition of every identity. In other words, Hegelian ‘reconciliation’ is not a ‘panlogistic’ sublation of all reality in the Concept but a final consent to the fact that the Concept is ‘not-all’ (to use this Lacanian term). In this sense we can repeat the thesis of Hegel as the first post-Marxist: he opened up the field of a certain fissure subsequently ‘sutured’ by Marxism. (6)

Rather than being progressive, Hegelian dialectics, for Žižek, is nothing but a static notation resting on a perspective that acknowledges contradictions not as a necessary step for a higher level of overcoming but merely as an omnipresent quality embedded within everything. More interesting, this perspective is subjective. Thus, Hegelian dialectics, in Žižek's account, is not a mandatory inclusive process that explains all the historical events and the universe as a whole, but a way of thinking that refers only to our inability to explain any contradiction.

Through 'not-all' idea, (in French: the *pas-tout*), Žižek links Hegel to Lacan whose "Hegelianism is ... in the logic of the *pas-tout*, in the importance he placed on the Real, on the Lack in the Other. And, reciprocally, a reading of Hegel through the lens of Lacan gives us a picture of Hegel that is radically different from the commonly accepted view of him as a 'panlogocist'" (2014, 3). Due to the nature of the 'not-all' as a concept inherited from Sigmund Freud and revolved around feminine identity, Lacan is presented, in this context, as a Hegelian thinker who advocates for a feminine ontology. Lacan, however, differs from Freud who believes that despite of the fact that the female organ is smaller than that of the male, it "plays the same role" (Freud, 128). In Lacan, the "not-all" indicates that having a smaller organ makes the female more significant than the male in terms of the collectivizing identification. Lacan thinks that there is no over-arching identity rule or principle for being, but, rather, situations must be taken "one by one." "The woman," according to Lacan, "can only be written with The crossed through. There is no such thing as The woman, where the definite article stands for the universal. There is no such thing as The woman since of her essence - having already risked the term why think

twice about it? - of her essence, she is not all” (144). The totality, inclusiveness and collectiveness are all precluded as concepts, objects and a way of the thinking. This attitude includes Hegel as an obsolete thinker and feminine identity for the favor of the approach that considers objects and concepts individually. “Feminine sexuation thus,” notes Gildert D Chatin, “results neither from the body nor from the meanings assigned by culture but from the logic of language. It is this logic of the Other embodied ... which requires that women be considered individually, one by one” (124). This individualistic characteristic of thinking contradicts not only the traditional perception of Hegel but also conspiracy theory as far as it tends to be a complex explanatory claim over a long period of time.

Universality

In this context, Žižek's perspective on Hegel stands against any form of absolutist claim. Žižek attributes his objection to

The not-all certainly forbids any universal predication, for in dealing with the multiple, it only makes a series out of it, because of the lack of an exception that would constitute it as a set; it is inhabited, however, by the Other jouissance that femininity conceals, a jouissance that does itself exist, and even makes itself exist in a real way, on the margins. (Soler 219)

From a broader perspective, universality, for Žižek, is not just about being accessed from “an engaged partial subjective position,” as Randall Terada observes (260), it also carries, as an element that makes it a self-contradictory concept. Žižek identifies this element as a 'symptom' “which subverts its own universal foundation, a species subverting its own genus” (1989, 21). The 'symptom' functions as an interpretative structure for analyzing cultural phenomena.

According to Žižek, this 'symptom', or in Marxists' term, 'critiquing ideology' is “a point of breakdown heterogeneous to a given ideological field and at the same time necessary for that field to achieve its closure, its accomplished form” (1989, 21). To clarify, Žižek adds, “every ideological Universal — for example freedom, equality — is 'false' in so far as it necessarily includes a specific case which breaks its unity, lays open its falsity” (1989, 21). Žižek continues that by selling freely his labor on the market, the worker subverts the universal notion of freedom, and, therefore, loses it. In Žižek's words, “the real content of this free act of sale is the worker's enslavement to capital. The crucial point is, of course, that it is precisely this paradoxical freedom, the form of its opposite, which closes the circle of 'bourgeois freedoms’ (1989, 21). This theoretical predicament of universality can be directly employed on conspiracy theory itself and how scholars study it. In this regard, Hoon Song takes the protocol of academic disinterest “as an aspiring universalist foundation,” and considers its symptom as the “element that straddles both academic universalism and the particularity of its object of inquiry—in our case, the academic theories on conspiracy theory and conspiracy theory itself” (134). Song's observation,

however, finds its application only in Richard Hofstadter's study on conspiracy theory in which his psychologism echoes the disproportionality in conspiracy theory.

In short, the concept of universality bears the seeds of its own contradiction. Similar to Hegel's dialects, universality, in Žižek's perspective, does not refer to objectivity and generalization but, in contrast, to subjective estimate and particularity. As a result, lacking any philosophical rationales that might underpin conspiracy theory as a universal objective explanation encourages Žižek to look at it in the opposite way: as a special and subjective method to explain events and phenomena.

The Other of the Other

Like its usage in a special context, the symptom, in a general sense, carries always more than one meaning according to Žižek. The symptom is not only an objective condition that refers to a specific meaning heterogeneous to itself. Rather, as Žižek states in his first book *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (1989), “there is a lot behind a symptom, a whole network of symbolic overdetermination, which is why the symptom involves its interpretation” (126). By considering the symptom as a symbolic sign, Žižek, here, elaborates Lacan's perspective of 'the other of the other' which functions as the guarantee of the symbolic order, especially of the other. The latter, according to Lacan, is

[P]recisely not purely and simply the locus which is this something perfectly organised, fixed, rigid. It is an other which is itself symbolised.

This is what gives it its appearance of liberty. It is a fact that it is symbolised, and that what happens at this level of the other of the other, namely of the father in this instance, of the locus where the law is articulated from the point of the perspective of (ou) him, who depends on an Other... (1958, 426)

As he does with several of Lacan's doctrines, Žižek brings 'the other of the other' into political theory and political analysis by illustrating that

[B]ehind the visible, public Power, there is another obscene, invisible, 'crazy' power structure. This other, hidden law acts the part of the 'Other of the Other' in the Lacanian sense, the part of the meta-guarantee of the consistency of the big Other (the symbolic order that regulates social life). (2006, 230)

As 'the other of the other' guarantees the symbolic order for the other in Lacanian discourse, it provides here consistency and the symbolic fabric for the big Other.

What links 'the other of the other' and the big Other in Žižek's view is nothing but conspiracy theory since it “provides a guarantee that the field of the big Other is not an inconsistent bricolage: its basic premise is that, behind the public Master (who, of course, is an imposter), there is a hidden Master, who effectively keeps everything under control (2006, 230).” To clarify the role of conspiracy theory in this context, Žižek brings the idea of 'the other of the other' more closely to the political field. He thinks that totalitarian regimes exemplify 'the other of the other' because they usually are “skilled in cultivating

the myth of a secret parallel power, invisible and for that very reason all-powerful, a kind of "organization within the organization"... this myth is not only in no way subversive, it serves as the ultimate support of power (96-7)" (1996). Žižek's example in this case does not only oversimplify Lacan's idea of 'the other of the other'; it also deeply misunderstands it.

The other, or first other as Lacan sometimes calls it, does not necessarily represent or stand for the big Other, in Žižek's analysis because his transferring of Lacan's concept from its cognitive context to political analysis causes confusion in understanding 'the other of the other'. As quoted above, Žižek thinks that 'the other of the other' resides behind the facade of the other as "organization within the organization" and deepens the impression of the other as a powerful agent by supporting its image among the public through the illusion of power. 'The other of the other', thus, is belong to the same kind and work to reach a same goal. The only difference between these two is their location. 'The other of the other' lies beneath the other. This conception is quite different that of Lacan. For Lacan, 'the other of the other' does not share any similarity with the other whether in essence or quality. In addition, it is impossible to refer to either one of them by their position or location. In contrast to Žižek' perspective, Lacan considers 'the other of the other' as a condition that gives the other its meaning through articulation and transparency. In this context, Lacan declares that

[T]his other of the Other, which should be the most transparent element for us, is given in a way along with the dimension of the Other, that it is in this very other of the Other that the discourse of the unconscious

is articulated, this articulated thing which is not articulatable by us.

(1958, 439)

This 'other of the other' is not located behind the other but in our mind to create, based on itself, the other itself as a subject. For Lacan, “the other of the other is nothing but ‘the locus where the word of the other is delineated as such’” (1958, 438). Therefore, neither the other nor 'the other of the other' in Lacan's discourse can be deployed as a frame or example of conspiracy theory in the way that Žižek presents it and attributes it to Lacan as 'the Lacanian sense'.

Signifier

Because Žižek usually reuses many of his paragraphs and ideas in his new books, he repeats his misreading of 'the Lacanian sense' when he discusses the same issue of 'other of the other' and its relationship with conspiracy theory in his book *The Ticklish Subject: The Absent Centre of Political Ontology* (2000). Yet, after reusing the aforementioned quotation regarding the relationship between the big Other and conspiracy theory, Žižek prefers to approach the latter from a different angle. Žižek sees conspiracy theory as an important possibility of interpreting sundry political phenomena nowadays. For Žižek, conspiracy theory cannot be defined as a paranoid reaction manifested by one individual but, rather, a signifier of 'cognitive mapping', as he explains in the following passage:

In our era, when global, all-encompassing narratives ("the struggle of liberal democracy with totalitarianism", etc.) no longer seem possible, "the only way to achieve a kind of global 'cognitive mapping' is through the paranoid narrative of the 'conspiracy theory'". It is all too simplistic to dismiss conspiracy-narratives as the paranoiac proto-Fascist reaction of the infamous "middle classes" which feel threatened by the process of modernization: it would be much more productive to conceive "conspiracy theory" as a kind of floating signifier which could be appropriated by different political options to obtain a minimal cognitive mapping. (362)

In *Your Symptom!: Jacques Lacan in Hollywood and Out*, Žižek gives further clarification to the concept of cognitive mapping and its relationship with conspiracy theory. In pessimistic tone, Žižek indicates that the cause of political frustration among the public rests in the majority's ineffectiveness "to decide, i.e. to objectively weigh the pros and cons. The recourse to "conspiracy theories" is a desperate way out of this deadlock, an attempt to regain a minimum of what Fred Jameson calls "cognitive mapping" (219).

In order to be acquainted with cognitive mapping, one must track it back to its inventor, Fredric Jameson, who identifies it as

[A]pedagogical political culture which seeks to endow the individual subject with some new heightened sense of its place in the global system – will necessarily have to respect this now enormously complex

representational dialectic and invent radically new forms in order to do it justice. (54)

Conspiracy theory signifies the need for an alternative way to find a place in globalization after excluding the individual's engagement in its cognitive activities. Based on this viewpoint, despite its negativity, conspiracy theory is not merely a pathological symptom of this age, but also “as an indicator of a more general weakness” as Clare Birchall concludes in her analysis of the culture and literary studies on conspiracy theory (66).

Epistemology

Žižek thinks that conspiracy theory is more than an indicator of some weak manifestations of the global system. Conspiracy theory is, also, and more importantly, a telltale sign indicating a serious prejudice within the conceptual scheme of modern epistemological thinking. Hence, Žižek illustrates that

Conspiracy theories, of course, are not to be accepted as "fact" - however, one should also not reduce them to the phenomenon of modern mass hysteria. Such a notion still relies on the "big Other," on the model of "normal" perception of shared social reality, and thus does not take into account how it is precisely this notion of reality that is undermined today. The problem is not that ufologists and conspiracy theorists regress to a paranoiac attitude unable to accept (social) reality; the problem is that this

reality itself is becoming paranoid. Contemporary experience again and again confronts us with situations in which we are compelled to take note of how our sense of reality and normal attitude towards it is grounded in a symbolic fiction, i.e. how the "big Other" that determines what counts as normal and accepted truth, what is the horizon of meaning in a given society. (2013, 219)

What is paranoid is the reality itself more than conspiracy theory by itself. Through such perspective, conspiracy theory can help us to fully realize the flaws embedded in the dominant perception of the big Other's reality. While the big Other resides in the social reality, conspiracy theory locates in the mind of people who believe in it. Thus, this case makes a proper example of the other and 'the other of the other' in the "Lacanian sense." While Žižek thinks that both the other and 'other of the other' are two levels of conspiracy theory in which the latter supports the former, more accurate understanding of Lacanian perspective, based on the argument mentioned above, considers the big Other as a representative of reality, and 'other of the other' as conspiracy theory. In this case, the 'other of the other' who exists in our minds creates (or support) the illusion of power claimed by the reality (the big Other). As Lacan states, "this other of the Other, which should be the most transparent element for us, is given in a way along with the dimension of the Other, that it is in this very other of the Other that the discourse of the unconscious is articulated, this articulated thing which is not articulatable by us" (1958, 429). Therefore, through conspiracy theory, the public creates a specific picture of the big Other and its opaque discourse, given that "the unconscious is the discourse of the Other" (1958, 439). At this

point, one should agree with Žižek's conclusion that conspiracy theory “serves as the ultimate support of power” but differently not with his premise.

With a different angle, Žižek continues to discuss conspiracy theory within the context of the contemporary struggle between the big Other, namely the authorities, and the public as a group of individuals who are deprived of sufficient information and political participation. At this point, Žižek distinguishes between two kinds of obtaining knowledge:

[S]ociety, is in no way directly grounded in "facts" as rendered by the scientific "knowledge in the real." Let us take a traditional society in which modern science is not yet elevated into the Master-discourse: if, in its symbolic space, an individual advocates propositions of modern science, he will be dismissed as "madman" - and the key point is that it is not enough to say that he is not "really mad," that it is merely the narrow ignorant society which puts him in this position - in a certain way, being treated as a madman, being excluded from the social big Other, effectively EQUALS being mad. "Madness" is not the designation which can be grounded in a direct reference to "facts" (in the sense that a madman is unable to perceive things the way they really are, since he is caught in his hallucinatory projections), but only with regard to the way an individual relates to the "big Other." Lacan usually emphasizes the opposite aspect of this paradox: "the madman is not only a beggar who thinks he is a king, but also a king who thinks he is a king," i.e. madness designates the collapse of the distance between the Symbolic and the Real. (2013, 219)

The role of conspiracy theory is no more than that of madness in its attempt to “collapse of the distance between the Symbolic and the Real” since it stands for the interest of the big Other, such as governments. Here, one can see the double-edge effect of conspiracy theory; as it supports the big Other by endorsing its illusion of obtaining complete power through spreading fear and fatalism among public, it creates an environment of distrust and suspicion that distorts the reputation of the authorities and limits its chances to gain the public trust when it is needed.

From this discussion, one can conclude that, according to Žižek, conspiracy theory is madness in a time of insanity in which the big Other imposes its false values. Obviously, this viewpoint on conspiracy theory shares in some degree its ideal message. As Žižek decisively differentiates between the Symbolic and the Real, conspiracy theory also resolutely draws a line between trust and distrust, truth and falsehood, honesty and dishonesty, secrecy and transparency and good and evil. In this respect, a question arise: would conspiracy theory (and Žižek's ideal thoughts on it, as well) still hold together if it becomes subject to the argument that surpasses the inclination to think in a dichotomous, either-or style? For instance, when one discusses the concerns of secrecy in the rhetoric of conspiracy theory within a spectrum of related concepts, such as confidentiality and privacy, it is most likely that this rhetoric is going to sharply affected. The ideal world of pure good and pure bad will no longer hovering above complexity and equivocation. Rather, the logic of conspiracy theory, in this case, would find itself in the gray area where the truth is not an absolute value since time, place and other circumstances are fundamental elements of determining which is which. Instead of putting his ideas about universality into

practice, Žižek here becomes another example of Hoon Song's criticism of the academic theories on conspiracy theory for echoing through psychologism the disproportionality in conspiracy theory.

Fantasy

Despite leaning towards an ideal stance regarding conspiracy theory, Žižek recognizes that the paralogism in its logic is similar to that in the Kantian pure reason. Žižek illustrates that such paralogism exists due to “the confusion between the two levels: the suspicion (of the received scientific, social, etc. common sense) as the formal methodological stance, and the positivation of this suspicion in another all-explaining global paratheory” (2013, 220). In other words, both conspiracy theorists and Kant fail to recognize that doubting the corrupted established foundations does not necessarily leads to promising results bases on which better foundations can be built. Žižek accidentally identifies an important issue that goes beyond this similarly. His notion sheds light on a potential epistemological origin of conspiracy theory as an outcome of the Enlightenment rationality and the reality it has engendered. Nevertheless, Žižek does not develop this notion into an instructive discussion that might help to develop a profound understanding of the overlapping and the interactive relationship between Enlightenment rationality and conspiracy theory.

The aforementioned paralognism contradicts with Mark Fenster's attempt to link Žižek's account of conspiracy theory to fantasy. Even though that the paralognism of conspiracy theory refers to the unawareness of the gap between the doctrine, namely suspicion, and its potentiality of occurrence, Fenster thinks that there is a similarity between conspiracy theory and Žižek's definition of fantasy as "a means for an ideology to take its own failure into account in advance" (1989, 126). At this point, Fenster states that

In a similar way, conspiracy theory masks the impossible ideals of representative, participatory democracy within a capitalist economy. Displacing the fears of this impossibility onto fears of conspiracy condensing these fears into notions of murderous, licentious presidents and secretive cabals (or simply mercenary corporate executives) the conspiracy theorist enjoys his/her symptom, indulging in its practice, reveling in its excess, never fully reaching the fulfillment of desire lest s/he be confronted with the realization that the notion of a willful, secretive conspiracy by an elite cabal is not quite right. (94)

From this perspective, Kevin McDonald articulates, "embedded within conspiracy theory is an acceptance that the perfectly transparent world it longs for is impossible given the state of corruption and opaqueness of the world in which it finds itself" (98). For Žižek, on the contrary, conspiracy theory simply is not quite aware of the practical possibilities of its approach of suspicion. If his thoughts on the relationship between conspiracy theory and the Real are taken into consideration, one concludes that the latter challenges the symbolic role in a simple way without masking itself or complexing its method the way

Fenster describes. In addition, Žižek's thought on conspiracy theory as 'the other of the other' in a sense of 'organization within the organization' does not go along with Fenster's perspective because even though conspiracy theory, in light of this understanding, works in two levels, it still goes in one simple direction as it were consist of one level.

Another comparison between Žižek's idea of fantasy and conspiracy theory is made by Carsten Strathausen who professes that unlike Althusser, Žižek believes that “ideology is self-conscious about its falsity which leads him back to the very conspiracy theory Althusser rejected — the idea of Hitler, who knows that the totalitarian project is impossible and thus "constructs a new "constructs a new terrifying subject” ... in order to "capture our desire .” (70). It is unlikely that Strathausen uses the term 'conspiracy theory' in a manner that is in keeping with the general characteristics of conspiracy theory as discussed in this study. Furthermore, based on Žižek's writings, ideology and conspiracy theory are different in nature and attitudes towards each other; while the former tries to use the latter to manipulate the public, the latter essentially tends to undermine the former, especially when it seizes power.

Real 'Conspiracies'

Žižek makes a clear difference between conspiracy theory which he refuses to deal with as a fact and what he describes as real 'conspiracies'. Unlike the former, he explicitly gives the latter factual credibility. In his book *Iraq: The Borrowed Kettle* (2005),

Žižek defends certain conspiracies by linking them to historical references. To justify the acceptance of conspiracies and the refusal of conspiracy theories, Žižek revisits Fredric Jameson's cognitive mapping:

We all know the cliché about conspiracy theories being the poor man's ideology: when individuals lack the elementary cognitive mapping capabilities and resources that would enable them to locate their place within a social totality, they vent conspiracy theories which provide an ersatz mapping, explaining all the complexities of social life as the result of a hidden conspiracy. However, as Fredric Jameson likes to point out, this ideologico-critical dismissal is not enough: in today's global capitalism, we are all too often dealing with real 'conspiracies'. (78)

Žižek, then, gives an example of a 'real conspiracy' whose historical reference is guaranteed. The example goes as follows:

[T]he destruction of the Los Angeles public transport network in the 1950s was not an expression of some 'objective logic of capital', but the result of an explicit 'conspiracy' between car companies, road construction companies and public agencies - and the same goes for many 'tendencies' in contemporary urban development" (2005, 78). After giving the example, Žižek reassures the importance to paying attention to 'real conspiracy'.

Hence, Žižek declares that “[t]he dismissal of the 'paranoid' ideological dimension of conspiracy theories (the supposition of a mysterious all-powerful Master, and so on) should alert us to actual 'conspiracies' going on all the time” (2005, 78-9). Žižek, in this context, adds that “[t]oday, the ultimate ideology would be the self-complacent critico-ideological dismissal of all conspiracies as mere fantasies” (2005, 78-9). Ideology demands a total control, and therefore, seeks to get rid of real 'conspiracies' by turning them into fantasies i.e., conspiracy theories. One should clarify at this point that fantasy is equal to conspiracy theory because it is not given any specific meaning. Instead, it presents the paranoid world of conspiracy theory where events are connected together without reasonable basis.

Conclusion

Studying Žižek's thoughts on conspiracy theory are indispensable for any serious research on this subject because they provide a spectrum of perspectives whose various theoretical backgrounds enrich the understanding of conspiracy theory. Žižek draws attention to subjects and concepts inseparably connected to conspiracy theory and present intelligence augmentations on their philosophical basis. Nevertheless, Žižek's thoughts are scattered and unconnected in one general form and lack accuracy in some cases, but they are still highly useful and remarkable. Most importantly, unlike the studies within the cultural approach, what makes Žižek's thoughts on this respect are extremely valuable is their substantial role in moving conspiracy theory from the political field as a concept with

a potential practical applications into the epistemological domain as an analytical tool through which politics can be interpreted and analyzed in light of their philosophical backgrounds.

CONCLUSION

Conspiracy theory is a rational conception emerged from the Enlightenment rationality and its Kantian doctrines. The major distinctive characterizations of Enlightenment, such as, rationality, skepticism and idealism are the key pillars of the theoretical foundations of conspiracy theory. Yet, although rational, conspiracy theory refuses to compromise with other rational parties to establish a reasonable common ground according to which they form general roles. Despite its rationality, conspiracy theory lacks a substantive and coherent theoretical structure. Taking skepticism to extremes cripples the ability of conspiracy theory to seek reasonability as a collective rational incubator that encompasses different trends, viewpoints and movements. Refusing reasonability in the rhetoric of conspiracy theory might be taken as a defense of modern rationality from its own self.

Through an epistemological point of view, this thesis finds out that the rationality in conspiracy theory is manifested in two ways: a deliberate individual pragmatic argument and spontaneous collective defensive strategies. In both ways, conspiracy theories have not succeeded in connecting between the fundamental element of their arguments and their epistemological concept, idealism. Nevertheless, the pragmatic vision has several logical flaws while the impulsive nature of the defensive mechanism prevents it from including any solid logical correlation between its epistemological background and its arguments.

Studying several writings of the rightists', leftists' and Islamists' thinkers and activists shows that they have different approaches, perspectives and attitudes towards this theory based on their principles. For the rightists, religion is their foundation on which they have built their conspiracy theories. The Protestant intellectuals have used religion to fortify against the French Revolution and its unprecedented consequences that threatened and challenged their establishments. To encounter their fear of the momentum of the Enlightenment, the Right-wing conspiracy theorists strongly believed in unverified assumptions and accusations against various groups and movements including Catholics. In addition, this study finds out that throughout time, the conspiracy theories of the Right-wing have extended their list of accusations to include new political players, such as Marxism without presenting justified backgrounds. This thesis also discovers that the Right-wing conspiracy theorists who lack theoretical bases to support their claims have been unaware of some of Hegel's thoughts that might have backed their conspiracy theories since they both have developed similar negative positions against some accepts of Enlightenment and their manifestations.

Conspiracy Theory in Political Thought investigates the claims that Marxism creates or adopts conspiracy theories and finds no concrete evidence to support such claims. Marxist ideology has its own theoretical principles to interpret the world, and, therefore, it necessarily has had no need to invest in conspiracy theory. Then, the thesis focuses on trying to explain why these claims have been brought up against Marxism in this respect.

Examining the Islamic writings on conspiracy theory delivered by four key figures, namely, al-Banna, Qutb, Maududi and Khomeini shows that they use this theory as part of their Islamization of political discourse which leads, eventually, to the Islamization of the public sphere in many Muslim countries. However, this study concludes that these four Islamic thinkers do not mention any specific conspiracy theory. Rather, their conspiracy thinking exacerbates suspicion and distrust between Muslims and the West and paves the way, consequently, for the public acceptance of conspiracy theory in the Muslim world. By comparing these Islamist accounts, this study realizes that the less the Islamic theorists have of traditional religious learning (al-Banna and Qutb), the more they place reliance on the inevitability of war between religions. On the other hand, when the theorists have deep knowledge of the Islamic religious learning (Maududi and Khomeini), they become more reluctant to take such position and prefers, rather, to see the war between religion and secular ideologies and values. In other words, they become more vigilant when politics and religion interact with each other.

This thesis describes several cultural and critical approaches that define the concepts and functions of conspiracy theory. As this thesis discovers, there are two main forms of the cultural approach. The first considers conspiracy theory as a paranoid symptom while the other is identified as a knowledge form. Compared to the perspective of paranoid symptom who falls short of being a sufficient explanation, the critical approach provides more detailed explanations of conspiracy theory based on definite philosophical grounds. This study, in the context of its discussion to the critical approach, gives a close look at Slavoj Žižek's notions on conspiracy theory. Žižek's thoughts are highly remarkable

due to their substantial role in moving conspiracy into the epistemological domain as an analytical tool through which politics can be interpreted and analyzed in light of their philosophical backgrounds.

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