

# Session 9

## Conspiracy theories in authoritarian regimes

30228 - Sociology of conspiracy theories - summer-term 2023

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# Recap

- Populism and CTs
  - thin centered ideology; people vs. elite; Manichean worldview.
- #Pizzagate and mainstreaming:
  - Satanism, Trump, QAnon

# Turkish case

Nefes, T. S. (2017). The impacts of the Turkish government's conspiratorial framing of the Gezi Park protests. *Social Movement Studies*, 16(5), 610–622.

# Classic vs. cultural view

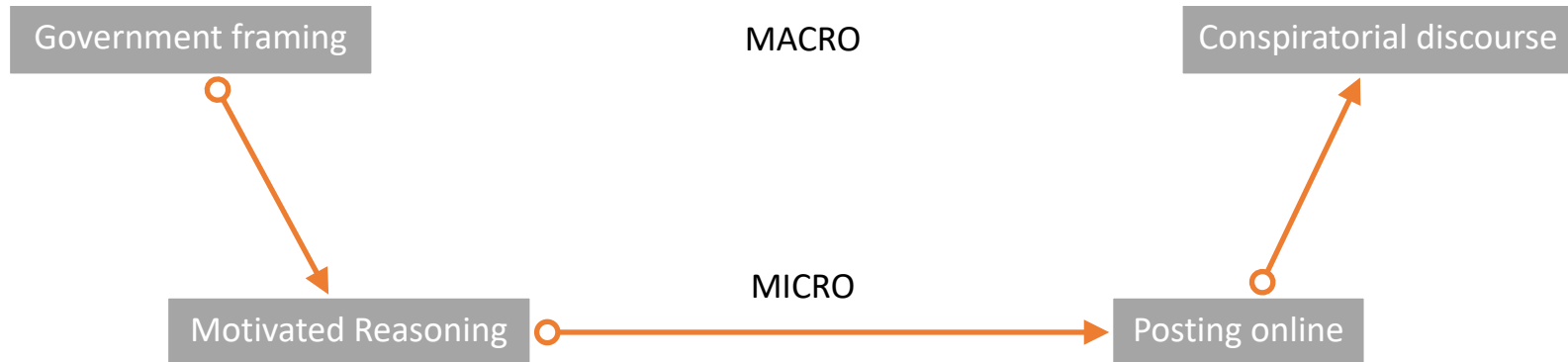
- Classic (Hofstadter): value-laden narratives that fail to explain true cause of events.
- Cultural: People's attempts to understand social reality, regardless of rationality / appropriateness.
- Call for transcendence of this divide.
- Ration choice theory: Instrumental reasons for beliefs in CTS → Defense of interests and values.
- Social movement theory: *Diagnostic frames*

# History of CTs in Turkey

- “historically persistent frames” (Nefes, 2017, p. 612)
- Breakdown of the Ottoman empire.
  - „Sèvres syndrome“
- “According to the Turkish prime minister at the time of the Gezi protests, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, an **interest rate lobby** conspired against the Turkish government in the Gezi Park protests.” (Nefes, 2017, p. 612)

# CTs and political orientation

- “(1) on a macro-level, the Turkish government proposes the conspiracy theory concerning the Gezi Park protests; (2) on a micro-level, an individual interprets the conspiracy theory according to his/her interests and values; (3) he/she comments on the conspiracy theory on Ekşi Sözlük and responds to the macro-politics” (Nefes, 2017, p. 613)



# Method

- “quantitative and qualitative content analyses of online discussions about the interest rate lobby conspiracy theory on Ekşi Sözlük” (Nefes, 2017, p. 615)

**Table 1.** Online users’ responses to the conspiracy theory.

Category	Examples
Accept	‘This is the lobby that has been exploiting the Turkish economy and has been discussed in Turkey for years. With the Gezi Park protests their existence became obvious.’
Reject	‘Erdoğan knows that they have nothing to do with the Gezi Park protests, but as this lobby brought him to power, he fears that they will replace him ...’

# Findings

**Table 2.** Perception of the conspiratorial rhetoric and political view.

		Previous political view		
		Anti-AKP	Pro-AKP	Total
Response to the gov. rhetoric	Not believe in the government's account	336	1	337
	Believe in the government's account	12	23	35
Total		348	24	372

**Table 4.** Ways of rejecting the conspiratorial rhetoric.

Interpretation	Examples
Erdoğan right	'The interest rate lobby exists!'
The conspiracy exists in a different form	'Despite the fact that the Prime Minister wants to make Istanbul a global financial centre, he complains about the interest rate lobby!'
Erdoğan wrong	'If they do not raise my salary, I will unveil their identity!'
AKP propaganda	'A good example of inventing an imaginary enemy'



# Russian case

Yablokov, I. (2020). Conspiracy theories in Putin's Russia—The case of the 'new World order.' In M. Butter & P. Knight (Eds.), Routledge Handbook of Conspiracy Theories (pp. 582–595). Routledge.

# Origins of the New World Order

On 17 January 1991, U.S. President George Bush gave a televised speech in which he announced the military operation in Iraq:

We have before us the opportunity to forge for ourselves and for future generations a new world order – a world where the rule of law, not the law of the jungle, governs the conduct of nations. When we are successful – and we will be – we have a real chance at this new world order, an order in which a credible United Nations can use its peacekeeping role to fulfil the promise and vision of the UN’s founders.

*(Bush 1991)*

- Comparative analysis of the NWO Theory in U.S and post-Soviet Russian context.

# New World Order in the USA

- *“Bush’s messianic claim for the United Nations has been perceived by some Americans with great suspicion: In their view, for the first time in decades, their leader admitted his participation in a global conspiracy aimed at building a New World Order which would strip the U.S.A. of sovereignty and put it under U.N. control.”* (Yablokov, 2020, p. 582)
- Threatened object: Nation, sovereignty.
- Christian fundamentalism, reference to illuminati and atheists.
- „Totalitarian socialism“.

# New World Order in the USA

Our nation is plunging headlong toward ‘convergence’ and the eventual ‘merger’.... Our nation – along with the other nations of the world – is being steadily drawn into the tightening noose of ‘interdependence’. Our political and economic systems are being intertwined and are increasingly being subjected to control by the United Nations and its adjunct international organizations. Unless this process can be stopped, it will culminate in the creation of the omnipotent global governance and the ‘end to nationhood’.

*(Jasper 1992)*

# Adaption in post-soviet Russia

- Historical timeline:
  - 1991: collapse of Soviet-Union, loss of statehood, poverty.
  - 1999: impeachment attempt against Yeltsin
  - 2004: Putin's authoritarian turn
  - mid-00s: Color revolutions
- Anti-Western CTs are used by both opposition and government elites.

# Dugin's import of NWO theories

- Visit to French far-right in 1990 → „mondialism“
  - „transplanting“ European conspiracy culture to Russia.
- U.S. military interventions (Balkans, Kuwait ...) read as steps towards NWO.

# Antisemitic undertones

- U.S. → Christian fundamentalism see Jews as proponents of NWO and internationalism.
- Russia → Ruling elite (1990s) as zionist occupation government. (also Putin's financial opening and W.T.O. membership)
- Myth of “Invisible Khazariia” (Yablokov, 2020, p. 589)

Russia, which was historically formed as the repository of Christian values, today is the main obstacle [to the destruction of religions and nation-states]. Not a single religious denomination, aside Orthodox Christianity, has sufficient spiritual power for successful resistance ... [to the] architects of the “new world order”.

*(Snychev 1996)*

(Yablokov, 2020, p. 588)

# Threat of a unipolar world

After the collapse of the bipolar world the USA strives to become the sole global dictator, the only superior judge in international affairs. Do other nations need that? I am not sure. Moreover, the planetary dictatorship will eventually destroy the USA.

*(Sokolov 1992)*

Fifteen years later, these ideas have been repeated almost word by word by the top-ranking politician in Russia:

The unipolar world that had been proposed after the Cold War did not take place either. The history of humanity certainly has gone through unipolar periods and seen aspirations to world supremacy.... However, what is a unipolar world? However one might embellish this term, at the end of the day it refers to one type of situation, namely one centre of authority, one centre of force, one centre of decision-making. It is a world in which there is one master, one sovereign. And at the end of the day this is pernicious not only for all those within this system, but also for the sovereign itself because it destroys itself from within.

*(Putin 2007)*



# Similarities between US and Russia

- Agency panic and threats to national sovereignty in a post-Cold-War context.
- Integration and transfer of power to international organizations.
- “Indeed, integration always poses a threat to individual agency (Grewal 2016: 28)” (Yablokov, 2020, p. 591)