

Sociopolitical Issues of a “Problematic Category”: “Conspiracy Theories”

Discourses, (Dis)Qualification, Uses



International Symposium organised by:

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June 10th and 11th, 2021

Due to the situation, the conference will not be held physically but via Teams

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Summary

Perceived since the 2000's as a Far Right mantra or memories of the Dreyfus Affair (1894-1906) and Vichy (1940-1944), the issue of “conspiracy theories”, despite some pioneering studies, was understudied in the French speaking academic world while they constitute since the World War II a genuine field of research for the English speaking social sciences.

Nonetheless, in the 2000's, the publicity given to the 9-11 “conspiracy theories” caught the attention of a larger scholar community and initiate a dynamic interdisciplinary production with different approaches. Since then, the label or the portmanteau “conspiracy theories” has underwent a process of naturalization in the scholar community, the media and politics. Indeed, it happens as if this category, and its “vague effects”, makes immediately sense that it is not necessary to question its meanings, presuppositions, biases, social conditions of emergence and production as much as its uses and effects on social actors.

In this respect, many scientific or journalistic analyses and political discourses arose in the public sphere. Most of them are characterized by passionate or militant approaches with ideological biases that tend to amalgam under the sole category of “conspiracy theories” several kinds of radical, fringe or critical beliefs, representations, practices, behaviours and discourses that, even though they can be sometimes linked, are undoubtedly to be distinguished and questioned apart.

Hence, conspiracy as an ideological system and symbolic representation, the fear of bogus, imaginary or unproven plots, the hypothesis of secret plans behind historical events, the denunciation of certain pressure groups or think-tanks, the expression of alternative and/or fringe beliefs, rumours, fake news, political or religious extremisms and some critical/determinist approaches in social science, etc., all of them sometimes appear as a heterogeneous collection gathered under the “conspiracy theories” catch-all label. An example was given by a highly criticized poll which equally considered as “conspiracy theories” some “alternative explanations” on JFK's assassination, the endorsement of racist views, flat Earth beliefs or horoscope reading.

So say, more than “conspiracy theories” *per se*, this conference rather intend to first question through a critical perspective the competing academic discourses and uses produced by the different social sciences disciples of this infamous and (dis)qualification label. Secondly, we aim to investigate the interactions between those diverging academic approaches and the media and political fields through the development of an “anti-conspiracist” militancy that we will try to understand its social conditions of appearance and forms of mobilization.

Programme

Thursday, June 10th

9 a.m.: Welcoming

9.30 a.m.: Conference Opening

Welcoming speech: Alfonsina Bellio, GSRL Director

Opening speech: J. Giry and E. Kreis, “Sociopolitical and Framing Issues of ‘Conspiracism’ and ‘Anti-Conspiracism’ in Social Sciences”.

10 a.m. - 11 a.m.: Opening Keynote

P. Knight, “Infodemic: Making Sense of Covid Conspiracy Theories”.

11 a.m. - 11.15 a.m.: Coffee Break

11.15 a.m. - 1 p.m.: “Conspiracy theories” at Stake. On the Contemporary Debates in Social Sciences

Chair: E. Kreis

J. Giry, “Les théories du complot comme enjeux de luttes au sein des SHS : un état des lieux critique des débats académiques contemporains”.

M. X. R. Dentith, “Sorting between warranted and unwarranted conspiracy theories”.

V. Collard, “La sociologie de Bourdieu : un complot sans comploteurs ?”.

1 p.m. - 2 p.m.: Lunch Break

2 p.m. - 3 p.m.: Round Table: “Fake News” as a Social Science Issue

Host: J. Giry

Attendees: E. Kreis, J. Nicey, A. Van de Winkel

3 p.m. - 3.15 p.m.: Coffee Break

3.15 p.m. - 4.30 p.m.: On the “Conspirator” figure and the debates over the rationality of “Conspiracy Theories”

Chair: A. Van de Winkel

R. Markner, “How not to quash a conspiracy theory: The Mueller Report and its failings”.

D. Guillaume, “Un arrière-plan ‘rationnel’ aux cristallisations conspirationnistes ? Le cas emblématique de l'Alliance israélite universelle de la fin des années 1860 au tournant des années 1880”.

4.30 p.m.: Closing

Friday, June 11th

9 a.m.: Welcoming

9.15 a.m. - 11 a.m.: Genesis and Construction of “Conspiracy Theories” as a “Problematic Category” and “Public Issue”

Chair: E. Kreis

D. Karbovnik, “De l’art de passer d’une ‘théorie’ à une ‘théorie du complot’ : la question de la réception des œuvres au sein de l’ésotérisme contemporain”.

P. Fragnoni, “La ‘théorie de la Terre plate’, entre science et complot : univers lexicaux et sémantiques autour de l’expression ‘flat earth’”.

G. Frigoli, “‘Les promeneurs du web’. Les ‘théories du complot’ au prisme d’une sociologie des problèmes publics”.

11 a.m. - 11.15 a.m.: Coffee Break

11.15 a.m. - 12.30 a.m.: “Conspiracy Theories” in the Public Sphere: Label and (Dis)Qualification Issues

Chair: J. Giry

A. Lantian, “Théories du complot : un stigmate social ? Éléments de réponses issus de la psychologie sociale”.

M. Erbani, “Les opposants à la ‘théorie du genre’ : des adeptes de ‘théories du complot’ ? Usages politiques et scientifiques d’une catégorie polémique”.

12.30 a.m. - 1.30 p.m.: Lunch Break

1.30 p.m. - 2.45 p.m.: Media Approaches and the Contemporary “Anti-Conspiracy Theory” Activism

Chair: V. Campion-Vincent

A. Leiduan, “Contre le complotisme. Au-delà de l’anticomplotisme. Pour une approche problématique de la question”.

S. Rouiller, “Les ‘théories du complot’, l’École et les adolescents : quels enjeux ? Analyse qualitative de discours d’élèves suisses romands (région francophone) et français”.

2.45 p.m. - 3 p.m.: Coffee Break

3 p.m. - 4 p.m.: Round Table: Feedback. Scholars and the Media Discourses over “Conspiracy Theories”

Host: E. Kreis

Attendees: G. Frigoli, J. Giry, D. Nouvel, S. Rouiller

4 p.m.: Closing Speech