

Article

On Conspiracy Thinking: Conspiracist Ideology as a Modern Phenomenon

Stefan Christoph

Department of Political Science, University of Regensburg, Germany; regensburg@stefan-christoph.de

Submitted: 29 April 2022 | Accepted: 20 September 2022 | Published: 24 November 2022

Abstract

Conspiracism is a well-known topos in the history of humankind. Cassius Dio wrote about it as did anti-Judaic authors in the Middle Ages. Nevertheless, from the dawn of modernity until today, we have faced the rise of a new phenomenon. Pretty much on the eve of the French Revolution, conspiracists began to tell anti-Catholic and anti-masonic narratives down to the last detail. Jews, later on, became a recurring foe in those anti-modernist narratives. Conspiracism managed successfully to incorporate other forms of anti-modernism to form a fairly new form of thinking that I call “conspiracist ideology.” While Enlightenment was the setting in which this amalgamation could take place, conspiracist ideology and its intellectual roots were characterized by a deep rejection of enlightenment thinking. The dialectical nature of conspiracist ideology is what makes it interesting from a historical perspective, in particular for the history of ideas.

Keywords

anti-modernism; conspiracism; conspiracy thinking; Enlightenment; history of ideas; intellectual history

Issue

This article is part of the issue “The Role of Religions and Conspiracy Theories in Democratic and Authoritarian Regimes” edited by Oliver Hidalgo (University of Münster) and Alexander Yendell (Leipzig University).

© 2022 by the author(s); licensee Cogitatio (Lisbon, Portugal). This article is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY).

1. Prologue: 300,000 Years of Humankind, 300,000 Years of Conspiracies?

For obvious reasons we cannot tell if our common ancestors some ten or even a hundred thousand years ago did think of conspiracies as we do nowadays: as being thrilling, fascinating, but also wicked and evil. Even more, we do not know if they were pondering conspiracies at all. Barely do we know about the prehistory of ideas—mainly because prehistoric events have not been written down and prehistoric eyewitnesses are hard to get hold of nowadays.

We can assume that a conceptualization of conspiracies necessarily would not exist before (complex) societies emerged. A prehistoric Homo Sapiens has no use in thinking some hyenas or a pack of mammoths would conspire against them since those beasts have no moral compass which can be corrupted or which could be addressed. Even contact with other sapiens only happened occasionally in the early times of hunter-gatherers. That two or more of them would conspire to commit some evil deeds was quite unlikely at that time because we can see ingroup–outgroup mecha-

nisms growing together with the complexity of society (Smaldino, 2019, pp. 111–112). Even if so, they would hardly reach a scale on which they would become relevant in the terms of political science. So was this maybe the “golden age” of humankind, before conspiracies? When Jean Jacques Rousseau wrote his *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality Among Men*, he did not mention “conspiracies” as a word (Rousseau, 1754/1913). Though, he might well have meant that—respectively their absence—when describing the human “state of nature,” a state in which everything happens in a “uniform manner” and therefore the human has neither a need for conspiracy nor conspiracism.

Fast forward to the Greek Dark Ages. We find complex societies as well as a commonly understandable language. However, we do not know of any written sources from that time, but we are acquainted with stories that must already have had an oral tradition and which were written down later, like Homer’s *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, or the genealogy of gods in Hesiod’s *Theogony*. “The belief in the Homeric gods whose conspiracies explain the history of the Trojan War is gone,” Sir Karl Popper wrote (Popper, 1945/2011, p. 306). Reading the archaic Greek

stories can give us the impression that advanced civilizations in ancient times had a concept of conspiracy and that this was so common, they even used it for literary purposes. In fact, and even though this may sound commonplace, the stories of the ancient gods and demigods can be read as a projection of the political and cultural history then and before. The topic of conspiracies has been a well-known narrative in political and literary history—fiction and non-fiction—since then, be it the mythological stories of the Trojan War, the actual crime behind Cicero’s Catiline Orations, but also the bogus and anti-Jewish narrative of well poisoning in the European Middle Ages. They all show us that humankind has had a concept of conspiracy for at least some thousand years.

Without going deep into detail, conspiracies, in the past and today, can be characterized as (a) deeds targeted to achieve some goal (b) two or more conspirators have agreed to commit (c) clandestinely. This can be seen as a most minimalistic characterization of what a conspiracy is and most scholars of conspiracism could agree on that definition (e.g., Aaronovitch, 2009, pp. 4–5; Anton, 2011, p. 30; Barkun, 2003, p. 3; Douglas et al., 2017, p. 538; Giry & Tika, 2020, pp. 113–114; Goodnight & Poulakos, 1981, p. 299; Imhoff & Bruder, 2014, p. 25; Lutter, 2001, p. 18; Pfahl-Traughber, 2002, p. 31). As our subject will not be a phenomenology of conspiracies but an account of conspiracy thinking, this working definition will suffice. Real conspiracies are most likely “banal” and a byproduct of “institutional disorganization” (Jane & Fleming, 2014, p. 28), other than the subjects told in what I will call “conspiracist ideology” from this point on.

This article is meant to work out the history of ideas of this modern form of conspiracy thinking. Conspiracist ideology, in this sense, is a truly modern phenomenon that did not emerge until the eve of the French Revolution, the time of rationalism and early modernism. Conspiracist ideology borrows the concept of conspiracy and settles it into this fairly new intellectual environment. In the following, I will depict the concept of conspiracist ideology from a systemic point of view, as a form of thinking that was paralleled by more general developments in the modern history of ideas (Section 2). This attempt is novel insofar as most of the comprehensive literature on conspiracy thinking is leaning towards focusing on either a systematic approach to conspiracy thinking or a contextualized one. While both approaches have advantages depending on the research design, blending diachronic and synchronic perspectives might give us a deeper understanding of how conspiracy thinking has worked and still works today. Hence, in Section 3, I will point out that conspiracist ideology has presented and still does present itself in different narratives that have roots in this common form of thinking that consists of the merging of ideology with conspiracy thinking. Section 4 gives an outlook on the problems and threats this form of thinking poses, mostly to liberal democracies as they tend to be most vulnerable to the mechanisms of conspiracist ideology.

2. The Eve of the French Revolution; Or to Think Like a Conspiracist

In 1797 French Jesuit Augustin Barruel published his first book in a series on the history of Jacobinism. Fifteen of its eighteen subheadings mention “conspiracy” or a similar term. The “anti-Christ” conspiracy (Barruel, 1797/1800, p. 17) that had been spread all over Europe (pp. 351–353) was, he tells us, plotted by Voltaire, king Frederick of Prussia, and the Encyclopédistes d’Alembert and Diderot (pp. 18–19). Abbé Barruel’s ex-post explanation of the French Revolution and the events leading to it was not actually a novelty at that time. Preceding Barruel, for example in Germany, a group of anti-revolutionaries published conspiracy literature from the mid-1780s on. Barruel himself was not only featured by German anti-revolutionaries but also by the “father of British conservatism,” Edmund Burke, as Seidler (2016, pp. 137–140) points out. In 1698, almost a hundred years before Barruel, a London leaflet warned against a freemason conspiracy (Winter, 1698).

The 18th century in Middle Europe was marked by a decline in social stratification, scientific advance, the industrialization of economy, and, not least, the “de-sacralization” (Hausberger & Lehnert, 2011, p. 12) or “disenchantment” (Weber, 1917/2004, p. 12) of the world. The French Revolution was not the cause of modernization and modernism in Europe but the consequence of changes in the history of ideas in this *siècle des Lumières* that had begun some decades or even over a century before.

Conspiracist ideology, I would argue, is not only by its content and history tied to rationalism and the period of enlightenment but, even more closely, by its structure. Conspiracist ideology is not merely a “form of narration” (*Erzählform* as Seidler, 2016, p. 137, says for the 18th century “conspiracy theories”), but can be characterized as a “form of thinking” (*Denkform*) as described analogously by Ernst Cassirer for the “myth” (Cassirer, 1924/2010, pp. 35–91). What characterizes conspiracist ideology may—for better handling and better understanding—be categorized into four dimensions, following Parsons’ (1956, p. 23) AGIL paradigm.

2.1. Logical-Epistemological Dimension: Adaption—Structures Behavior and/or Reasoning

Empirical research from the past years onwards shows that the epistemic dimension has a great influence on the formation of and belief in conspiracism. In their comprehensive paper, Lamberty and Imhoff (2021, p. 204) summarize these phenomena under the keyword “epistemic motives.” I think—from a history of ideas point of view rather than an empirical one—this dimension is worth further differentiation as I will do in this subsection and the following.

First and foremost, conspiracist ideology is closely tied to the emergence of the Enlightenment. When the

period of enlightenment was characterized by the dispute between rationalists and empiricists, conspiracist ideology took the stance of an anti-thesis to empiricism. Early rationalism was characterized by the method of deduction, in other words: deducing the explanation of phenomena through universal principles and reason. While, to a certain extent, this is a normal and even quite useful instrument, conspiracist ideology is quite radical at this point. Nevertheless, I would not mention Augustin Barruel side-by-side with renowned rationalists like René Descartes or Baruch de Spinoza. While the latter were part of an ongoing epistemological debate, conspiracist ideologists to some extent disregarded empirical learning. Phenomena may only be interpreted in a certain, default way. This “a-priori-ism” (Jane & Fleming, 2014, p. 36) or “motivated reasoning” (Douglas et al., 2019, p. 12) is the first attribute by which conspiracist ideologies’ *Denkform* may be characterized.

Following this radically deductive way of thinking, conspiracists’ “end-oriented belief...is willing to contort the available evidence to support a preferred conclusion” (Collins, 2012, p. 77). They tend to accept poor evidence if it only supports their aprioristic assumptions. Like Barruel, early proponents of conspiracist ideology gave little or no evidence for their allegations. In his three books on the history of Jacobinism, Barruel describes his alleged conspiracy down to the last detail. He “proves” it only by hermeneutic interpretations and by syllogisms but not by empirical standards. Later conspiracists would heighten the bar a little over ground-level but would still be more than willing to accept dubious sources. Even more, conspiracists tend to accept evidence that contradicts official statements more than accepting “mainstream” evidence, as studies, for example, on the 9/11 conspiracism show (Wood & Douglas, 2013, p. 8).

On the other hand, conspiracists tend to a form of thinking I will call “congruency thinking.” They tend to scrutinize anomalies and inconsistencies in explanations of certain events and dramatically overrate their influence. While conspiracists do not accept pure chance as an explanation for those anomalies, they tend to build up highly complex, “hyper-rational” (Groh, 1996, p. 15) hypotheses of pure syllogisms. In a de-sacralized or disenchanting world, there must be no teleological blank space. But conspiracists can fill it: As every phenomenon must happen for some reason, a mechanistic worldview could evolve that demands some kind of reason for any phenomenon in a disenchanting world. Or as Max Weber put it in his 1917 *Science as a Vocation*:

Thus the growing process of intellectualization and rationalization does *not* imply a growing understanding of the conditions under which we live. It means something quite different. It is the knowledge or the conviction that if *only we wished* to understand them we *could* do so at any time. It means that in principle, then, we are not ruled by mysterious, unpredictable forces, but that, on the contrary, we can in principle

control everything by means of calculation. That in turn means the disenchantment of the world. (Weber, 1917/2004, pp. 12–13)

As Lamberty and Imhof, Douglas et al. (2019) combine this dimension of conspiracism under the umbrella term “epistemic motives.” While I tend to differentiate this dimension further as I did here, nevertheless, Douglas et al. (2019, pp. 7–8) enumerate quite important effects of this dimension like “perceiv[ing] patterns in randomness,” “cognitive closure,” or the Linda problem (conjunction bias).

2.2. Perceptive-Epistemological Dimension: Goal-Attainment—Structures Personal Motives

Conspiracist ideology uses a certain perception of the alleged conspiracies and conspirators. Abstract phenomena that are regarded by them as problematic—like, e.g., enlightenment philosophy, democratization, the decline of religiosity, or the emergence of capitalism—are being personalized into certain groups of people—sophists, politicians, atheists, and economists (Barruel, 1801, p. 268)—or even specific individuals—Voltaire, Frederick of Prussia, d’Alembert, and Diderot. This personalization often goes hand in hand with a projection of one’s own hidden motives into the alleged conspirators—like power, wealth, or glory. In this case, the motives of the conspirators often become more exaggerated than the projected motives had been.

When a certain group of people profit (or may profit) from the alleged conspiracy, they are blamed as the conspirators. In the world view of conspiracist ideology, a conspiracy suspect cannot act morally or ethically but is limited to decisions that augment their wealth or power. Sometimes, alleged conspirators do not even show interest in money or might, but act out of pure evil: “They often behave more like villains in old comic books or movie series, being evil for evil’s sake” (Collins, 2012, p. 74).

Even if that were true—which it obviously is not—large-scale conspiracies would necessarily involve huge resources and a great number of people to be involved. By realistic standards of logistics, human resources, or sometimes even the laws of physics, many alleged conspiracies would not be able actually to happen. Conspiracist ideology does not meet general standards of plausibility. But conspiracists, for example, tend to underestimate systematically the required size of a conspiracy, e.g., with the moon landing hoax theory or 9/11 conspiracism. Conspiracist ideologists also often underestimate the logistic accounts an alleged conspiracy would need; or overestimate the power of the alleged conspirators. Despite the mere omnipotence of the conspirators, conspiracists are always able to find some weak spots in the conspiracy. Groh (1996, p. 13) describes this as a kind of “conspiracist paradox,” where conspirators are more competent than “common mortals” but have weak spots to be exploited.

Conspiracist ideology tends to totalize its explanation of phenomena as it lacks ambiguity tolerance. Stretching the arc to our first observation, conspiracist ideology's a-priori-ism renders it difficult to learn from new information. This kind of "ideological learning" (Miller, 1986, p. 434) instead "splits" new problem contexts. When conspiracist ideology fails to learn from new information, this information instead is incorporated into the wider framework of the existing ideology and thus, this ideology becomes immunized. Conspiracist ideologists render information disproving their arguments as an assault on their own worldview. Disagreement and debunking thus are interpreted as proof of the truth of their own conspiracist ideology.

2.3. Socio-Psychological Dimension: Integration—Structures Interaction With Society

The first conspiracist ideologists showed no intention to take part in the enlightenment debate between rationalists and empiricists that we saw some paragraphs before. They were rather disapproving of all those new and modern forms of thinking. Like with the first conspiracists, later conspiracist ideology always formed a critique on modernization one way or the other. Anti-masonic conspiracist ideology's main stance from the beginning was a strong rejection of world views perceived as being modern. For example, Barruel's (1801, p. 268) enemies of Catholicism were sophists, politicians, atheists, and economists. Those can be read as signifiers for four properties of modernization: (a) modern enlightenment philosophy, (b) democratization and/or revolution, (c) the decline of religious dogma, and (d) early capitalism. Later, conspiracist ideologies became more pronounced regarding their enmity toward modernism. Conspirators have been accused of capitalism as well as communism (Benz, 2007, p. 106; Groh, 1992, p. 305), been accounted for "Marxism, Darwinism, liberalism, individualism, atheism as well as, in recent times, the emancipation of women, sexualization and abortion, in a nutshell, everything that promotes the dissolution of traditional relations and the decay of morals" (Hagemeister, 2004, p. 90). Conspiracist ideology, from a psychological point of view, therefore is able to dissolve dissonant perceptions of reality (Groh, 1992, p. 18). They can, superficially, answer the "unanswered questions"—according to Brotherton (2016, p. 8), the very essence of conspiracy thinking. As recent research in the field of psychology shows, psychological factors also play a major role in the belief in conspiracism (e.g., Lamberty & Imhoff, 2021). Lamberty and Imhoff (2021, p. 204) also show that individual experience of deprivation plays a minor role in comparison to a perceived political deprivation which is congruent to categorizing critique in modernization into the socio-psychological dimension of conspiracist ideology.

As we learned before, conspiracy thinking as a political phenomenon emerged together—or in reaction to—the occurrence of early complex societies. Not only

because a certain amount of civilization is needed to conceptualize the phenomenon of conspiracies, but also because conspiracy thinking can be a reaction to the alienation humans experience. This is even more true in modern civilization than it was in older ones. In the situation of an ever more complex world in modern times, conspiracist ideology can give simple answers. As old religious, as well as political and scientific, dogmata were questioned, modernity since the period of enlightenment has become more complex. So it is not that big a surprise that the first Conspiracist ideologists had been clergymen as well as conservative statesmen. But we must not be surprised either, that the stance on modernism and the instrument for the reduction of complexity that conspiracist ideology gives us was soon to be expanded to nearly every other area of human existence.

Those simple answers call for simple solutions, so complex phenomena are reduced to monocausal or relatively simple mechanisms of problem-solving by conspiracists. This mechanism leads to a kind of self-empowerment of conspiracists which makes conspiracist ideology quite attractive from a socio-psychological perspective. Of course, as the underlying explanations of the world are too monocausal, this only provides pseudo-self-empowerment and conspiracist ideology's offer for problem-solving can only stay a fictitious one. Social psychology research also calls a similar phenomenon—more on social-psychological rather than individual-psychological means—by the name "collective narcissism" as an ingroup-outgroup mechanism (e.g., de Zavala et al., 2009; Marchlewska et al., 2019; van Prooijen, 2018, p. 57). In both ways, this mechanism can fulfill a psychological function for an individual who has experienced alienation in a modern, globalized, and capitalist society.

2.4. Contentual-Ideological Dimension: Latency—Structures the Maintenance of Learned/Acquired Values and Patterns

Most prominently pronounced is this reduction of complexity in the view of history that conspiracist ideology is based on. Conspiracist ideology tells us that global history could be altered merely by the intentional action of some particular actors (Groh, 1996, p. 13), meaning "powerful" actors. Such an intentional view of history, despite playing a major role in historiography for quite a long time, was also contested by enlightenment philosophy. The progress thinking and advocacy for universal human rights that we see, for example with the Marquis de Condorcet (1795), gives any individual agency in the course of history, resulting in quite complex social interaction schemes. Conspiracist ideology's view of history is one of a few powerful actors—in contrast to a modernist view of history, shaped by the many, but interdependent people.

For conspiracist ideology, such evil persons can only be faced with enmity and hostility. In recent literature,

this Manichaeism, dualistic worldview or friend-and-foe-thinking has been described as central to conspiracy thinking (e.g., Groh, 1992, p. 273, 1996, p. 18; Rogalla von Bieberstein, 2002, p. 17). These observations of the mechanisms of ingroup–outgroup bias in conspiracist ideology are rooted in an ideological monism, in which people are no homines duplicates (Durkheim, 1914) comprised of both lower instincts and morality. In the ideological monism of conspiracist ideology, people are confined to either the former or the latter. Dualism and dialectics (as not only Durkheim shows in his concept of homo duplex, but as most notoriously Descartes elaborated earlier in his mind–matter dualism) are concepts that have been rediscovered by enlightenment and modern philosophy. The ideological monism of conspiracist ideology is in fact a tendency to reject recognizing that actors can be driven by more than only one interest at a time; that they are able to subordinate their interest in, e.g., economic, political, or personal power to their moral compass.

In the end, conspiracist ideology works with broad-brush images of its enemies. This allows an openness for adopting all kinds of prejudices in general and in specific situations, re-occurring enemies more in-depth. The work of early protagonists of conspiracist ideology was already full of stereotypes, slurs, and even hatred against certain groups of the population, such as Freemasons, Jews, Jesuits, and many more. Some recent sociological and psychological research (Bartoschek, 2017; Imhoff, 2015, pp. 136–137; Pickel et al., 2020, p. 105) shows clear correlations between prejudicial attitudes and conspiracism—while there seem to be different findings if those correlations are distinctive for every kind of prejudice (Frei & Nachtwey, 2022, p. 15).

While we see in those topoi that conspiracist ideology offers a form of thinking which is significantly different and opposed to Enlightenment thinking, the emergence of Enlightenment philosophy may have also been a positive influence on the development of conspiracist ideology. One may find it ironic that the scientific approach to the world could lead to a most unscientific explanation pattern. Scholars of the history of ideas would call it the “dialectic of Enlightenment” (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1969) rather than “irony.”

The previous approximation to the phenomenon gives us an impression of the dialectical character of conspiracist ideology. We see not only that it is a phenomenon that de facto emerged in the antecedence of Enlightenment and the French Revolution, but we see why it fits well into this dispute of world views beginning back then but characterizing modernity until today.

3. One, Two, Three Many Conspiracist Ideologies?

While the last section tried to approximate the common characteristics of conspiracist ideology as a form of thinking shares, there are indisputably different narratives told under the umbrella of conspiracist ideology. Thus,

we are facing the question: Is there a conspiracist ideology or are there many conspiracist ideologies?

3.1. A Papal Conspiracy

We can find predecessors of early modern conspiracist ideology in early modern England, for instance, from the 1534 Act of Supremacy that effectively emancipated the Church of England from the Roman Catholic Church and when Roman Catholics in England were eyed suspiciously as they were said to be allied with the English monarch as well as the pope. Not exactly helpful regarding the public image of Roman Catholicism in England was the fact that Pope Pius IV in 1570 dispensed all Roman Catholics from their obedience to the English monarch. In the ongoing two centuries, not only real events like the Gunpowder Plot or Jacobite claims to the throne were attributed to Roman Catholics but also tragic—but supposedly unrelated—ones like the 1666 Great Fire of London. Allegations culminated in anti-Catholic legislation like the 1698 Popery Act in which priesthood of Roman Catholicism was effectively forbidden in England.

In fact, combatting Roman Catholicism was not a stance of anti-modernism. On the contrary, the events following the English Reformation led to enormous steps in modernization in early modern England. But within the 18th and 19th centuries, anti-Catholicism and conspiracy theories merged into what we came to know as conspiracist ideology. Most prominently, the Jesuit order had been accused of conspiracy, no longer only in England but also in Catholic countries. After the kings of Portugal, France, and Spain had forbidden the Jesuit order in their territories—after at least partly faked allegations—in 1773 pope Clement XIV officially dissolved the Jesuits.

Anti-Catholicism and even anti-Catholic conspiracist ideology is present at least up until the 20th century. As recently as 1960, then-Democratic nominee John F. Kennedy felt obliged to publicly announce that no “Catholic prelate would tell the President—should he be Catholic—how to act,” that he would not “accept instructions on public policy from the pope” and that he was “not the Catholic candidate for president...[but] the Democratic Party’s candidate for president who happens also to be a Catholic.”

18th-century France on the other hand was entangled in an intra-Catholic dispute between Jansenists (more or less “Catholic Enlighteners”) and traditionalist Catholics like the Jesuit order. Other then-Catholic countries, like Bavaria, had been a site of this dispute as well. Jansenists were mixed together with rationalists and Encyclopedists like Diderot and D’Alembert (Graßl, 1968, pp. 3, 18).

As we see, there is an anti-Catholic and anti-Jesuit line of thought that, nevertheless, brings us to the Catholic priest and Jesuit Augustin Barruel. What at first glance seems improbable, is closely related to the way conspiracist ideology works in a sense of the history of ideas. Modern conspiracy thinking tends to absorb

ideologies and merge them with its own form of thinking. Both together alloy to the phenomenon of conspiracist ideology.

3.2. Freemasons and Jews

A most prominent amalgamation of this kind is that between anti-Masonism (and later on antisemitism) and conspiracy thinking that is still predominant in conspiracist ideology today.

One of the first anti-masonic leaflets (de Hoyos & Brent Morris, 2010, p. 14) dates back to 1698 and is titled *To All Godly People, in the Citie of London*. It tells us about the:

Mischiefs and Evils practiced in the sight of GOD [sic] by those called Freed Masons....For this devllish [sic] Sect of men are Meeters [sic] in secret which swear against all without their Following. They are the Anti Christ which was to come leading Men from Fear of GOD [sic]. (Winter, 1698)

Like in England, anti-masonic conspiracism spread over Germany in the pre-revolutionary era; the most important work of 18th-century conspiracism being the 1786 *Enthüllung des Systems der Weltbürger-Republic* (*Revealing the System of the Cosmopolitan Republic*) by Ernst August Anton Göchhausen that mixed Freemasons, Illuminati, and Jesuits alike (Pfahl-Traughber, 1993, pp. 13–14).

Cosmopolitanism can be read as a *chiffre* and a signifier for modernization in opposition to a kind of natural order. More than that, the author of the 1786 pamphlet opens a dichotomy between the citizen and cosmopolitan that already resembles Carl Schmitt's later friend-and-foe dichotomy (Albrecht, 2011, pp. 97–99). In this early example, we can see how conspiracy thinking and anti-masonic literature slowly amalgamate into conspiracist ideology, showing the first of its main components like Manichaeism and a critique on modernization.

Göchhausen (1786) also makes a stance on the secrecy of masonry and its rites. Being secret of course makes masonry quite a good vessel for projections of all sorts. Later on, in the 19th century, masonry was seen as “contrary to the open spirit of Christianity” (Wallach, 1873, p. 2), as seeking “opportunity to do evil” (Ward, 1828, p. 4) and as promoting socialism or democracy (Rogalla von Bieberstein, 2002, p. 25).

But, not even ten years after Göchhausen's work, a Blackfriar preacher was the first to (publicly) make a connection between Freemasons and Jews (Rogalla von Bieberstein, 2002, pp. 19–20). Freemasons and Jews have, from then on, been the most prominent victims of conspiracists. Over the long 19th century and the first half of the 20th century, those remained the main narratives of conspiracist ideology, even though they have been connected, equated, or replaced by democrats, socialists, or other signifiers of modernity (Pfahl-Traughber, 1993,

p. 18; Rogalla von Bieberstein, 2002, pp. 25, 27). Or as Hofstadter (1964, p. 79) put it in his renowned essay *The Paranoid Style in American Politics*: “One meets here again the same frame of mind, but a different villain.”

Before going to Richard Hofstadter's 1960s and the post-WWII era, allow me to take two further stances on the historical process of amalgamation of conspiracist ideology in the 19th century that should have had long-lasting consequences.

There is an ongoing debate about whether modern antisemitism is a completely new phenomenon or just an evolution of old anti-Judaism (Gräfe, 2016, pp. 83–89; Salzborn, 2014, pp. 12–15). We can find that, during the 18th and 19th centuries, amid the progress of the Enlightenment, science developed new hypotheses which gained more social impact than ever before. During that time, old anti-Judaic prejudices were able to establish a connection to the then-up-to-date biological and anthropological research. Enlightenment thinking and Enlightenment's scientific approach paved the way for modern, biologicistic, and essentialist racism (though Enlightenment philosophy also paved the ground for universal human rights and Fraternité). So, Jew-targeted hatred became disenchanting in the Age of Enlightenment: A mash-up of Jew-targeted hatred and essentialist racism led to modern antisemitism (Vartija, 2020). Even more, the first elements of anti-modernist (Salzborn, 2014, p. 13) and anti-emancipatory (Wyrwa, 2019, pp. 25–26) ideology were incorporated into modern antisemitism quite early. Those facts lay the foundation for a long-lasting relationship between modern antisemitism and conspiracy thinking as the most prominent form of conspiracist ideology.

The most influential work of this strain of conspiracist ideology is the so-called *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, a fictitious work about an alleged congress of Jewish leaders (Hagemeister, 2020, p. 139). The work has been used for antisemitic propaganda from Czarist Russia and the German NS Regime until today. It has also been used to delegitimize ideas of democracy and liberalism since. From a history of ideas perspective, the *Protocols* is quite a phenomenal object of study. On the one hand, it contains text parts that date as far back as the 1840s to Alexandre Dumas, which actually propagated democracy and liberalism instead of opposing them.

On the other hand, the text has quite an astonishing history of impact. The *Protocols* has been published and propagated by counter-revolutionaries and Nazi writers, but also most prominently by Henry Ford and Gamal Abdel Nasser. As early as the 1920s it already had been debunked as fake. But this did not do any harm to the antisemites' fascination for the work. The debunking of the *Protocols* even played its very own role in the totalization of 20th-century antisemitism when Adolf Hitler wrote in *Mein Kampf*: “They are supposed to be based on “forgery,” the *Frankfurter Zeitung* keeps moaning and screaming to the world every week; the best proof that they are genuine” (Hartmann et al., 2016, p. 325).

Contemporary Islamism also still refers to the *Protocols*, e.g., when the founding charter of Hamas reads:

The Zionist plan is limitless. After Palestine, the Zionists aspire to expand from the Nile to the Euphrates. When they will have digested the region they overtook, they will aspire to further expansion, and so on. Their plan is embodied in the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, and their present conduct is the best proof of what we are saying. (Islamic Resistance Movement, 1988)

Interesting from the point of view of the history of ideas is the re-enchantment of *Protocols*-based antisemitism by Hamas and other Islamic radicals. Here, modern antisemitic conspiracist ideology from the *Protocols* (re)amalgamates with radical Islamic Jew-hatred.

3.3. UFOs, Aliens, and Conspiratoriality

Another line of continuity is quite notable: The *Protocols* also lead into narratives of conspiracist ideology that are not, at least at first glance, antisemitic or Jew-related. British conspiracist ideologist David Icke writes:

I don't accept that the *Protocols* are "Jewish" in the way people have come to understand that term. They are the work of the reptile-Aryans and made to appear "Jewish" so that we lose the plot. (Icke, 1999)

It is Icke who propagates (and popularized) the idea of a conspiracy of shape-shifting reptiloids to govern the Earth. Knowing that one of the reptiloid clans in Icke's narrations is the "Rothschilds," everyone may make up their own mind about his narrations being antisemitic or not. Nevertheless, Icke closes the gap to another amalgamation into conspiracist ideology that happened in the second half of the 20th century.

In fact, Icke was not the first and surely not the last to connect UFO topics and other spiritualistic or holistic thinking to conspiracy narratives. Ward and Voas (2011) coined the keyword "conspiratoriality" for this amalgamation. They summarized conspirators' narratives from a range, like UFO thinking up to New Age spiritualism under their concept. Even though the idea of linking conspiracy thinking with esotericism and the concept phrase "conspiratoriality" seem quite appealing, I merely think that the phenomenon Ward and Voas are writing about is not at all new, but only a new amalgamation of a certain ideology into the wider framework of conspiracist ideology. Asprem and Dyrendal (2015, p. 367), when criticizing Ward and Voas' concept, also refer to modern conspiracy thinking's teleological roots in the era of Enlightenment (p. 374). Nevertheless, like conspiracist ideology, modern esotericism finds its roots in Enlightenment (Neugebauer-Wölk et al., 2013). As both forms of thinking share a similar history, they blend

quite well. A contemporary form of this amalgamation of conspiracy thinking and spiritualism or esotericism has gained media coverage since 2017: the QAnon movement. QAnon managed to blend most radical conspiracy narratives (like "blood-libel"-narrations, "deep state"-conspiracy thinking) with esotericism (like "secret knowledge"-esotericism, apocalypticism, millennialism; see MacMillen & Rush, 2022). QAnon became a most politically relevant phenomenon when it had the potential to interfere with the 2020 US presidential election and when it did trigger the events on January 6, 2021, the storm on the US Capitol (Yablokov & Chatterje-Doody, 2022, pp. 10–11).

In another most recent account, a form of amalgamation of science denialism and conspiracist ideology gained greater public coverage through the Covid-19 pandemic. Yet, this is no truly novel phenomenon, as science denialists—not only climate change deniers but also anti-vaccine and other conspiracists—for years now have crowded conspiracist ideology.

Over the history of conspiracy thinking until today, we see the same form of thinking we already learned to know from Barruel and other early Conspiracist ideologists. But conspiracist ideology by its very own definition passes through an evolutionary process in which new ideologies are amalgamated effectively to become an inseparable part of conspiracist ideology itself. Instead of letting itself be challenged by new challenges, conspiracist ideology incorporates them. This way, conspiracist ideology can match its universal and total claim of an explanatory account to reality.

Answering the question about one or many conspiracist ideologies is therefore futile. Conspiracist ideology, by its very concept, is a form of thinking that can absorb other different ideologies. Hence, conspiracist ideology always works alike, even though in history it represents itself in many different narratives.

4. Are We Seriously in Danger?

In history, conspiracist ideology has sometimes been used to legitimize rule. The German NS regime most definitely used conspiracy narratives to legitimize and stabilize their rule, as did the Soviet dictator Stalin with allegations of a Trotskyist conspiracy within the Great Terror, the "rootless cosmopolitan"-campaign, and the "doctors' plot." Conspiracies have also been blamed for train crashes as well as not fulfilling five-year plans (Aaronovitch, 2009, p. 61). Late-18th-century conspiracists like Barruel and Starck had been apologetic towards the (then-no more-existing) Ancien Régime.

In liberal democracies, however, conspiracist ideology, more than legitimizing regimes, is an instrument of delegitimization. While I tend to agree with Joseph Uscinski that conspiracy thinking can be a warning sign for a political system (Uscinski, 2018, p. 242), other than him, who gives conspiracy thinking some kind of cathartic function or at least makes it a necessary antagonist in

the democratic “war of political ideas” (p. 238), I think democratic societies are most vulnerable to conspiracist ideology. Conspiracist ideology cannot necessarily work as a source of democratic legitimization. This works mostly through three mechanisms inherent in democratic systems:

- Conspiracist ideology operates with prejudices, with an intentional view of history, and an absolute friend-or-foe way of thinking. Those are characteristics of mere authoritarian politics while being adverse to democratic politics. On the other hand, political sociology shows that conspiracism can play a key role in the formation of far-right political attitudes (Schießler et al., 2020, p. 297).
- As conspiracist ideology rejects basic democratic or democratically determined values, it is hard to incorporate into a democratic political system and its public discourse (e.g., Pickel et al., 2020, p. 90).
- As conspiracist ideology limits the problem-solving skills of a system—or vice versa, it proposes ineffective solutions to problems—a political system influenced by conspiracist ideology can gain no legitimacy through solving people’s problems, be it a democratic or an authoritarian regime.

Looking into the political history and the history of ideas, one can see how conspiracism managed to incorporate different anti-modernist ideas in the past and also effectively legitimize or delegitimize political systems. This is—and can only be—a brief sketch of the mechanisms by which conspiracist ideology interacts with political institutions and political systems. Nonetheless, it underlines why the study of the history of ideas of conspiracy thinking in general, and conspiracist ideology in particular, is most beneficial for the study of political science.

To democracy, conspiracist ideology actually can pose a serious threat, be it through domestic turmoil and the rise of populism as depicted above, or through the reinforcement of authoritarian regimes that political institutions and systems have to deal with externally. Similar issues may apply to conspiracist ideology’s impact on the logic of democracy-building and regime change as those depicted mechanisms may help to immunize authoritarianism and obstruct the emergence of a liberal-democratic civil society.

On the good side, we might be able to take a further step toward the prevention and debunking of conspiracist ideology by looking at its history of ideas and, subsequently, how past generations have dealt or not dealt with this ideology. My intention with this analysis was to go a brief step further into this.

Acknowledgments

I thank Professor Dr. Oliver Hidalgo for giving helpful advice regarding the research design and structure of the article. The publication of this work was supported by the

German Research Foundation (DFG) and the University of Regensburg via the open-access publication fund of the University of Regensburg.

Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interest.

References

- Aaronovitch, D. (2009). *Voodoo histories: The role of conspiracy theory in shaping modern history*. Jonathan Cape.
- Albrecht, A. (2011). *Kosmopolitismus: Weltbürgerdiskurse in Literatur, Philosophie und Publizistik um 1800* [Cosmopolitanism: Global citizen discourse in literature, philosophy and journalism]. De Gruyter.
- Anton, A. (2011). *Unwirkliche Wirklichkeiten. Zur Wissenssoziologie Von Verschwörungstheorien* [Unreal realities. On the sociology of knowledge of conspiracy theories]. Logos.
- Asprem, E., & Dyrendal, A. (2015). Conspiratoriality reconsidered: How surprising and how new is the confluence of spirituality and conspiracy theory? *Journal of Contemporary Religion*, 30(3), 367–382. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13537903.2015.1081339>
- Barkun, M. (2003). *A culture of conspiracy. Apocalyptic visions in contemporary America*. University of California Press.
- Barruel, A. (1800). *Denkwürdigkeiten zur Geschichte des Jakobinismus vom Abbé Barruel, Erster Theil* [Memorabilia on the history of Jacobinism by the Abbé Barruel, Part I]. Peter Waldeck. (Original work published 1797)
- Barruel, A. (1801). *Historie du Clergé pendant la Révolution Française, Tome premier* [History of the clergy during the French Revolution, Part I]. Chez les Libraires & Marchands de Nouveautés.
- Bartoschek, S. (2017). *Bekanntheit von und Zustimmung zu Verschwörungstheorien—Eine empirische Grundlagenarbeit* [Prominence and approval of conspiracy theories—An empirical basic work]. JMB.
- Benz, W. (2007). *Die Protokolle der Weisen von Zion. Die Legende von der jüdischen Weltverschwörung* [The protocols of the elders of Zion. The legend of the Jewish world conspiracy]. Beck.
- Brotherton, R. (2016). *Suspicious minds: Why we believe conspiracy theories*. Bloomsbury Sigma.
- Cassirer, E. (2010). *Philosophie der symbolischen Formen. Zweiter teil: Das mythische denken* [Philosophy of symbolic forms. Part two: Mythical thinking]. Felix Meiner. (Original work published 1924)
- Collins, L. (2012). *Bullspotting: Finding facts in the age of misinformation*. Prometheus Books.
- de Hoyos, A., & Morris, S. B. (2010). *Is it true what they say about freemasonry? The methods of anti-masons*. M. Evans.
- de Zavala, A. G., Cichocka, A., Eidelson, R., & Jayawick-

- reme, N. (2009). Collective narcissism and its social consequences. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 97(6), 1074–1096. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0016904>
- Douglas, K. M., Sutton, R. M., & Cichocka, A. (2017). The psychology of conspiracy theories. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 26(6), 538–542. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0963721417718261>
- Douglas, K. M., Uscinski, J. E., Sutton, R. M., Cichocka, A., Nefes, T., Ang, C. S., & Deravi, F. (2019). Understanding conspiracy theories. *Advances in Political Psychology*, 40(S1), 3–35. <https://doi.org/10.1111/pops.12568>
- Durkheim, É. (1914). Le dualisme de la nature humaine et ses conditions sociales [The dualism of human nature and its social conditions]. *Scientia*, 15, 206–221.
- Frei, N., & Nachtwey, O. (2022). *Quellen des “Querdenkertums.” Eine politische Soziologie der Corona-Proteste in Baden-Württemberg* [Sources of “Querdenkertum.” A political sociology of corona protests in Baden-Württemberg]. SocArXiv. <https://doi.org/10.31235/osf.io/8f4pb>
- Giry, J., & Tika, P. (2020). Conspiracy theories in political science and political theory. In M. Butter & P. Knight (Eds.), *Routledge handbook of conspiracy theories* (pp. 108–120). Routledge.
- Göckhausen, E. A. A. (1786). *Enthüllung des Systems der Weltbürger-Republic: In Briefen aus der Verlassenschaft eines Freymaurers* [Revelation of the system of the cosmopolitan republic: In letters of the legacy of a Freemason].
- Goodnight, G. T., & Poulakos, J. (1981). Conspiracy rhetoric: From pragmatism to fantasy in public discourse. *Western Journal of Speech Communication*, 45(4), 299–316. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10570318109374052>
- Gräfe, T. (2016). *Antisemitismus in Deutschland 1815–1918: Rezensionen—Forschungsüberblick—Bibliographie* [Antisemitism in Germany 1815–1918: Reviews—research overview—bibliography]. Books on Demand.
- Graßl, H. (1968). *Aufbruch zur Romantik. Bayerns Beitrag zur deutschen Geistesgeschichte 1765–1785* [Departure to romanticism. Bavaria's contribution to German intellectual history 1765–1785]. C. H. Beck.
- Groh, D. (1992). *Anthropologische Dimensionen der Geschichte* [Anthropological dimensions of history]. Suhrkamp.
- Groh, D. (1996). Verschwörungen und kein Ende [Conspiracies and no end in sight]. In K. M. Michel & T. Spengler (Eds.), *Kursbuch Verschwörungstheorien* [Class book on conspiracy theories] (pp. 12–26). Rowohlt.
- Hagemester, M. (2004). Die jüdische Verschwörung [The Jewish conspiracy]. In H. Reinalter (Ed.), *Typologien des Verschwörungsdenkens* [Typologies of conspiracist thinking] (pp. 89–99). Studien Verlag.
- Hagemester, M. (2020). Die “Weisen von Zion” als Agenten des Antichrists [The “Elders of Zion” as agents of the anti-Christ]. In J. Kuber, M. Butter, U. Caumanns, B.-S. Grewe, & J. Großmann (Eds.), *Von Hinterzimmern und geheimen Machenschaften. Verschwörungstheorien in Geschichte und Gegenwart* [On backrooms and secret machinations. Conspiracy theories in history and present] (pp. 139–153). Akademie der Diözese Rottenburg-Stuttgart. <https://doi.org/10.25787/IDADRS.V013.257>
- Hartmann, C., Vordermayer, T., Plöckinger, O., Töppel, R., Raim, E., Trees, P., Reizle, A., & Seewald-Mooser, M. (Eds.). (2016). *Hitler, Mein Kampf: Eine kritische edition* [Hitler, My Struggle: Critical edition]. Institut für Zeitgeschichte.
- Hausberger, B., & Lehnert, J.-P. (2011). Das 18. Jahrhundert: Eine Beschleunigung [18th century: An acceleration]. In B. Hausberger & J.-P. Lehnert (Eds.), *Die Welt im 18. Jahrhundert* [The world in the 18th century] (pp. 12–41). Mandelbaum.
- Hofstadter, R. (1964). The paranoid style in american politics. *Harper's Magazine*, 1964(November), 77–86. <https://harpers.org/archive/1964/11/the-paranoid-style-in-american-politics>
- Horkheimer, M., & Adorno, T. W. (1969). *Dialektik der Aufklärung* [Dialectic of enlightenment]. S. Fischer.
- Icke, D. (1999). *The biggest secret. The book that will change the world*. Bertelsmann Industry Services.
- Imhoff, R. (2015). Beyond (right-wing) authoritarianism: Conspiracy mentality as an incremental predictor of prejudice. In M. Bilewicz, A. Cichocka, & W. Soral (Eds.), *The psychology of conspiracy* (pp. 122–141). Routledge.
- Imhoff, R., & Bruder, M. (2014). Speaking (un-)truth to power: Conspiracy mentality as a generalised political attitude. *European Journal of Personality*, 28(1), 25–43. <https://doi.org/10.1002/per.1930>
- Islamic Resistance Movement. (1988). *The covenant of the Islamic resistance movement*. The Avalon Project. https://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/hamas.asp
- Jane, E. A., & Fleming, C. (2014). *Modern conspiracy: The importance of being paranoid*. Bloomsbury Academic.
- Kennedy, J. F. (1960). *Address to the greater Houston Ministerial Association*. American Rhetoric. <https://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/jfkhoustonministers.html>
- Lamberty, P., & Imhoff, R. (2021). Verschwörungserzählungen im Kontext der Coronapandemie [Conspiracist narratives in context of the Corona pandemic]. *Psychotherapeut*, 66(3), 203–208. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00278-021-00498-2>
- Lutter, M. (2001). *Sie kontrollieren alles!: Verschwörungstheorien als Phänomen der Postmoderne und ihre Verbreitung über das Internet* [They're controlling everything!: Conspiracy theories as a postmodern phenomenon and their spread through the internet]. edition fatal.

- MacMillen, S. L., & Rush, T. (2022). QAnon—Religious roots, religious responses. *Critical Sociology*, 48(6), 989–1004. <https://doi.org/10.1177/08969205211063565>
- Marchlewska, M., Cichocka, A., Łozowski, F., Górska, P., & Winiewski, M. (2019). In search of an imaginary enemy: Catholic collective narcissism and the endorsement of gender conspiracy beliefs. *The Journal of Social Psychology*, 159(6), 766–779. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00224545.2019.1586637>
- Marquis de Condorcet, N. (1795). *Esquisse d'un tableau historique des progrès de l'esprit humain* [Sketch of an historical image of the progress of the human mind]. <https://www.digitale-sammlungen.de/de/view/bsb10702170?page=1>
- Miller, M. (1986). *Kollektive Lernprozesse. Studien zur Grundlegung einer soziologischen Lerntheorie* [Collective learning processes. Studies on the foundations of a sociological theory of learning]. Suhrkamp.
- Neugebauer-Wölk, M., Geffarth, R., & Meumann, M. (Eds.). (2013). *Aufklärung und Esoterik: Wege in die Moderne* [Enlightenment and esotericism: Ways to modernism]. De Gruyter.
- Parsons, T. (1956). *Politics and social structure*. Free Press.
- Pfahl-Traughber, A. (1993). *Der antisemitisch-antifreimaurerische Verschwörungsmythos in der Weimarer Republik und im NS-Staat* [The anti-semitic, anti-masonist myth of conspiracy in the Weimar Republic and the NS state]. New Academic Press.
- Pfahl-Traughber, A. (2002). “Bausteine” zu einer Theorie über “Verschwörungstheorien”: Definitionen, Erscheinungsformen, Funktionen und Ursachen [“Elements” on a theory of “conspiracy theories”: Definitions, phenomena, functions, and reasons]. In H. Reinalter (Ed.), *Verschwörungstheorien: Theorie—Geschichte—Wirkung* [Conspiracy theories: Theory—history—effects] (pp. 30–44). Studien Verlag.
- Pickel, G., Pickel, S., & Yendell, A. (2020). Zersetzungsprozesse einer demokratischen politischen Kultur: Verschwörungstheorien und erodierender gesellschaftlicher Zusammenhalt? [Decomposition potential in a democratic political culture: Conspiracy theories and erosion of social cohesion?] In O. Decker & E. Brähler (Eds.), *Autoritäre Dynamiken: Alte Ressentiments—Neue Radikalität. Leipziger Autoritarismus Studie 2020* [Authoritarian dynamics: Old resentments—New radicalism. Leipzig study on authoritarianism 2020] (pp. 89–118). Psychosozial Verlag.
- Popper, K. (2011). *The open society and its enemies*. Routledge. (Original work published 1945)
- Rogalla von Bieberstein, J. (2002). Zur Geschichte von Verschwörungstheorien [On the history of conspiracy theories]. In H. Reinalter (Ed.), *Verschwörungstheorien: Theorie—Geschichte—Wirkung* [Conspiracy theories: Theory—history—effects] (pp. 15–29). Studien Verlag.
- Rousseau, J. J. (1913). *Discourse on the origin of inequality among men*. J. M. Dent and Sons. (Original work published 1754)
- Salzborn, S. (2014). *Antisemitismus: Geschichte, Theorie, Empirie* [Antisemitism: History, theory, empiricism]. Nomos.
- Schießler, C., Hellweg, N., & Decker, O. (2020). Aberglaube, Esoterik und Verschwörungsmentalität in Zeiten der Pandemie [Superstition, esotericism and conspiracist mentality in pandemic times]. In O. Decker & E. Brähler (Eds.), *Autoritäre Dynamiken: Alte Ressentiments—Neue Radikalität. Leipziger Autoritarismus Studie 2020* [Authoritarian dynamics: Old resentments—new radicalism. Leipzig study on authoritarianism 2020] (pp. 283–308). Psychosozial Verlag.
- Seidler, J. D. (2016). *Die Verschwörung der Massenmedien: Eine Kulturgeschichte vom Buchhändler-Komplott bis zur Lügenpresse* [The conspiracy of mass media: A cultural history from the bookseller-plot to lying press]. transcript.
- Smaldino, P. E. (2019). Social identity and cooperation in cultural evolution. *Behavioural Processes*, 161. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.beproc.2017.11.015>
- Uscinski, J. E. (2018). The study of conspiracy theories. *Argumenta*, 3, 233–245.
- van Prooijen, J.-W. (2018). *The psychology of conspiracy theories*. Routledge.
- Vartija, D. (2020). Revisiting Enlightenment racial classification: Time and the question of human diversity. *Intellectual History Review*, 31(4), 603–625. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17496977.2020.1794161>
- Wallach, W. A. (1873). *Anti-masonic Christian herald and national reform advocate*.
- Ward, C., & Voas, D. (2011). The emergence of conspiracy theories. *Journal of Contemporary Religion*, 26(1), 103–121. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13537903.2011.539846>
- Ward, H. D. (1828). *The anti-masonic review and magazine* (Vol 1). Vanderpool & Cole Printers.
- Weber, M. (2004). *Science as a vocation*. Hackett Publishing Company. (Original work published 1917)
- Winter, M. (1698). *To all godly people, in the citie of London*. <http://www.freemasons-freemasonry.com/beresiner18.html>
- Wood, M. J., & Douglas, K. M. (2013). “What about building 7?” A social psychological study of online discussion of 9/11 conspiracy theories. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 4(409). <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2013.00409>
- Wyrwa, U. (2019). Zur Entstehung des Antisemitismus im Europa des 19. Jahrhunderts. Ursachen und Erscheinungsformen einer wahnhaften Weltanschauung [On the origins of antisemitism in 19th century Europe: Reasons and phenomena of a delusional worldview]. In M. König & O. Schulz (Eds.), *Antisemitismus*

im 19. Jahrhundert aus internationaler Perspektive
[19th century antisemitism from an international perspective] (pp. 13–38). Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.

Yablokov, I., & Chatterje-Doody, P. N. (2022). *Russia Today and conspiracy theories: People, power and politics on RT*. Routledge.

About the Author



Stefan Christoph studied at the University of Leipzig and the University of Regensburg where he received a bachelor's degree in political science and law and a master's degree in democracy science. He is currently working towards his PhD with research on conspiracist ideology in democratic societies. Stefan Christoph's further research interests are political theory and history of ideas, in particular theories of legitimacy, construction of knowledge, and social contract theory, as well as terrorism research, far-right extremism, and antisemitism. He works as a parliamentary adviser on science policy at the regional parliament of Bavaria.