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CONSPIRACY THEORY

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ABSTRACT

This paper interrogates the concept of conspiracy theory and its impacts on global political affairs. The narrative is saddled with the sole responsibility of exploring the different aspects or areas of the concept such as the history or the origin, various examples and political uses of conspiracy theory. It is common knowledge that some people will never agree that some events happened as a result of a certain cause, in other words, the relationship of cause and effect. This set/group of people as earlier stated, never agree that some things happened by accident or co-incidence, for them they hold the belief that an event is plot: a belief that a particular event is the result of a secret plot rather than the actions of an individual person or chance. (Microsoft Encarta;2009). This group of people are called conspiracy theorists.

Keywords: conspiracy theory, conspiracy theorists, secret plot. Global politics

INTRODUCTION

What exactly do we mean by the phrase "conspiracy theory"? The problem is vexing enough in the academic literature, where scholars have made countless attempts to formulate a firm definition, none of which has managed to push its rival definitions off the stage. In everyday usage, the term is even more slippery: Its meaning constantly stretches and narrows, particularly when it is used as a pejorative. What follows is more impressionistic than systematic—not a complete study of the way the words "conspiracy theory" are used, but some observations about the way it bends to include or not include certain stories, and a hypothesis about why that might be so. (Jesse, 2015).

WHAT IS CONSPIRACY THEORY?

The various definitions that shall be examined in this area are:

A conspiracy theory is an explanatory proposition that accuses two or more people, a group, or an organization of having caused or covered up, through deliberate collusion, an event or phenomenon of great social, political, or economic impact (as cited by Mick West; 2012).



In other words, conspiracy theory is a pejorative term used almost exclusively to refer to any fringe theory which explains an historical or current event as the result of a secret plot by conspirators of almost superhuman power and cunning. Conspiracy theories are viewed with skepticism by scholars because they are rarely supported by any conclusive evidence and contrast with institutional analysis, which focuses on people's collective behaviour in publicly known institutions, as recorded in scholarly material and mainstream media reports, to explain historical or current events, rather than speculate on the motives and actions of secretive coalitions of individuals. (Randall; 2010)

A conspiracy theory originally meant the "theory" that an event or phenomenon was the result of conspiracy between interested parties; however, from the mid-1960s onward, it is often used to denote ridiculous, misconceived, paranoid, unfounded, outlandish or irrational theories. (Rational Wiki; 2015)

A conspiracy theory is an explanatory proposition that accuses two or more persons, a group, or an organization of having caused or covered up, through secret planning and deliberate action, an illegal or harmful event or situation. (Wikipedia; 2015)

HISTORY

According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the first use of the phrase "conspiracy theory" occurred in a 1909 article in *The American Historical Review*.

Some scholars suggest that people formulate conspiracy theories to explain, for example, power relations in social groups and the perceived existence of evil forces. It has been suggested by some thinkers that conspiracy theories have chiefly psychological or socio-political origins. Proposed psychological origins include projection; the personal need to explain "a significant event [with] a significant cause;" and the product of various kinds and stages of thought disorder, such as paranoid disposition, ranging in severity to diagnosable mental illnesses. Some people prefer socio-political explanations over the insecurity of encountering random, unpredictable, or otherwise inexplicable events. (Wikipedia; 2015)



Other Scholars argue that the term originated very long ago as far as the moment or span of time in which certain events occurred that man couldn't find an explanation for, but became extremely popular and weaponized by the CIA (Central intelligence Agency) in the 1960s especially after the death of the late U.S president John F. Kennedy.

It is a little-known though well-documented fact that the origin of the campaign to ridicule research into conspiracies was initiated by the CIA in 1967 to undermine the credibility of those who questioned the official claims of the Warren Commission regarding the so-called facts of the Kennedy assassination.

Given the challenge we and others feel when speaking out about conspiracies, I think Lance deHaven-Smith is right when, in his new book *Conspiracy Theory*, he suggests “the CIA’s [covert and illegal] campaign to popularize the term ‘conspiracy theory’ and make conspiracy belief a target of ridicule and hostility must be credited...with being one of the most successful propaganda initiatives of all time...” (Foster Gamble; 2013)

Conspiracy theories acutely negative connotations may be traced to liberal historian Richard Hofstadter’s well-known fusillades against the “New Right.” Yet it was the Central Intelligence Agency that likely played the greatest role in effectively “weaponizing” the term. In the groundswell of public skepticism toward the Warren Commission’s findings on the assassination of President John F. Kennedy, the CIA sent a detailed directive to all of its bureaus. Titled “Countering Criticism of the Warren Commission Report ,” the dispatch played a definitive role in making the “conspiracy theory” term a weapon to be wielded against almost any individual or group calling the government’s increasingly clandestine programs and activities into question. (James Tracy; 2013).

Having seen the different views given by professionals, one can accurately conclude that the term “conspiracy theory” has been in existence a long time, but was made popular by the CIA according to the unanimous answers provided by scholars.



TYPES OF CONSPIRACY THEORIES

Walker's five kinds

Jesse Walker (2013) has developed a historical typology of five basic kinds of conspiracy theories:

The first identifies an **"Enemy Outside,"** with devilish figures mobilizing outside the community and scheming against the community.

The **"Enemy Within"** finds the conspirators lurking inside the nation, indistinguishable from ordinary citizens.

The **"Enemy Above"** involves powerful people manipulating the system for their own gain.

The **"Enemy Below"** features the lower classes ready to break through their constraints and overturn the social order.

Finally, there are the **"Benevolent Conspiracies,"** where angelic forces work behind the scenes to improve the world and help people.

Barkun's three types

According to Barkun Michael (2003) there are three types of conspiracy theories viz;

Event conspiracy theories. The conspiracy is held to be responsible for a limited, discrete event or set of events. The conspiratorial forces are alleged to have focused their energies on a limited, well-defined objective. The best-known example in the recent past is the Kennedy assassination conspiracy literature, though similar material exists concerning the September 11 attacks, the crash of TWA Flight 800, and the spread of AIDS in the black community.

Systemic conspiracy theories. The conspiracy is believed to have broad goals, usually conceived as securing control of a country, a region, or even the entire world. While the goals are sweeping, the conspiratorial machinery is generally simple: a single, evil organization implements a plan to infiltrate and subvert existing institutions. This is a common scenario in conspiracy theories that focus on the alleged machinations of Jews, Freemasons, or the Catholic Church, as well as theories centered on Communism or international capitalists.



Super conspiracy theories. Conspiratorial constructs in which multiple conspiracies are believed to be linked together hierarchically. Event and systemic are joined in complex ways, so that conspiracies come to be nested together. At the summit of the conspiratorial hierarchy is a distant but powerful force manipulating lesser conspiratorial factors. Super conspiracy theories have enjoyed particular growth since the 1980s, in the work of authors such as David Icke, Alex Constantine and Milton William Cooper.

CASE STUDIES

There are innumerable conspiracy theories about different subject matter and interests. For the purpose of this paper, only some of the most famous conspiracy theories shall be examined in brief details. According to **TIME**, these are the world's most enduring conspiracy theories.

The JFK Assassination

This much we can stipulate: President John F. Kennedy was assassinated on Nov. 22, 1963, struck by two bullets — one in the head, one in the neck — while riding in an open-topped limo through Dealey Plaza in Dallas. Lee Harvey Oswald was charged with killing him, and a presidential commission headed by Chief Justice Earl Warren found that Oswald acted alone.

That conclusion hasn't passed muster with the public. A 2003 ABC News poll found that 70% of Americans believe Kennedy's death was the result of a broader plot. The trajectory of the bullets, some say, didn't square with Oswald's perch on the sixth floor of the Texas School Book Depository. Others suggest a second gunman — perhaps on the grassy knoll of Dealey Plaza — participated in the shooting. Others believe in an even broader conspiracy. Was Kennedy killed by CIA agents acting either out of anger over the Bay of Pigs or at the behest of Vice President Lyndon Johnson? By KGB operatives? Mobsters mad at Kennedy's brother for initiating the prosecution of organized crime rings? Speculation over one of history's most famous political assassinations is such a popular parlor game that most people have taken the rumors to heart: just 32% of those polled by ABC believe Oswald carried out the killing on his own.



9/11 Cover-Up

Not since the JFK assassination has there been a national tragedy so heavily imprinted in American minds — or that has given rise to quite as many alternative explanations. While videos and photographs of the two planes striking the World Trade Center towers are famous around the world, the sheer profusion of documentary evidence has only provided even more fodder for conspiracy theories.

A May 2006 Zogby poll found that 42% of Americans believed that the government and the 9/11 commission "concealed or refused to investigate critical evidence that contradicts their official explanation of the September 11th attacks." Why had the military failed to intercept the hijacked planes? Had the government issued a "stand down" order, to minimize interference with a secret plan to destroy the buildings and blame it on Islamic terrorists? In 2005, Popular Mechanics published a massive investigation of similar claims and responses to them. The reporting team found that the North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD) did not have a history of having fighter jets prepped and ready to intercept aircraft that had gone off route. And while the team found no evidence that the government had planned the attacks, lack of proof has rarely stopped conspiracy theorists before.

Area 51 and the Aliens

We may have Tang thanks to the space program, but who gave us such innovations as the Stealth fighter and Kevlar? Aliens, of course. Conspiracy theorists believe that the remains of crashed UFO spacecrafts are stored at Area 51, an Air Force base about 150 miles from Las Vegas, where government scientists reverse-engineer the aliens' highly advanced technology. Fodder for this has come from a variety of supposed UFO sightings in the area and testimony from a retired Army colonel who says he was given access to extraterrestrial materials gathered from an alien spacecraft that crashed in Roswell, N.M. Some believe that the government studies time travel at Area 51, also known as Groom Lake or Dreamland.



The government has developed advanced aircraft and weapons systems at nearby Nellis Air Force Base, including Stealth bombers and reconnaissance planes. And the government's official line — that the details of Area 51 are classified for purposes of national security — is only seen as further proof that the military is hiding aliens or alien spacecraft.

Secret Societies Control the World

If you were really a member of the global élite, you'd know this already: the world is ruled by a powerful, secretive few. Many of the rest of us peons have heard that in 2004 both candidates for the White House were members of Yale University's secretive Skull and Bones society, many of whose members have risen to powerful positions. But Skull and Bones is small potatoes compared with the mysterious cabals that occupy virtually every seat of power, from the corridors of government to the boardrooms of Wall Street.

Take the Illuminati, a sect said to have originated in 18th century Germany and which is allegedly responsible for the pyramid-and-eye symbol adorning the \$1 bill: they intend to foment world wars to strengthen the argument for the creation of a worldwide government (which would, of course, be Satanic in nature). Or consider the Freemasons, who tout their group as the "oldest and largest worldwide fraternity" and boast alumni like George Washington. Some think that despite donating heaps of cash to charity, they're secretly plotting your undoing at Masonic temples across the world. Or maybe, some theorize, the guys pulling the strings aren't concealed in shadow at all. They might be the intelligentsia on the Council on Foreign Relations, a cadre of policy wonks who allegedly count their aims as publishing an erudite bimonthly journal and establishing a unified world government — not necessarily in that order.



The Moon Landings Were Faked

It's now been nearly four decades since Neil Armstrong took his "giant leap for mankind" — if, that is, he ever set foot off this planet. Doubters say the U.S. government, desperate to beat the Russians in the space race, faked the lunar landings, with Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin acting out their mission on a secret film set, located (depending on the theory) either high in the Hollywood Hills or deep within Area 51. With the photos and videos of the Apollo missions only available through NASA, there's no independent verification that the lunar landings were anything but a hoax.

(The smoking gun) Film of Aldrin planting a waving American flag on the moon, which critics say proves that he was not in space. The flag's movement, they say, clearly shows the presence of wind, which is impossible in a vacuum. NASA says Aldrin was twisting the flagpole to get the moon soil, which caused the flag to move. (And never mind that astronauts have brought back hundreds of independently verified moon rocks.) Theorists have even suggested that filmmaker Stanley Kubrick may have helped NASA fake the first lunar landing, given that his 1968 film *2001: A Space Odyssey* proves that the technology existed back then to artificially create a spacelike set. And as for Virgil I. Grissom, Edward H. White and Roger B. Chaffee — three astronauts who died in a fire while testing equipment for the first moon mission? They were executed by the U.S. government, which feared they were about to disclose the truth.

Far-fetched as the hoax theory may seem, a 1999 Gallup poll showed that it's comparatively durable: 6% of Americans said they thought the lunar landings were fake, and 5% said they were undecided

.

The CIA and AIDS

Since the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention first reported the HIV/AIDS epidemic in 1981, rumors have persisted that the deadly virus was created by the CIA to wipe out homosexuals and African Americans. Even today, the conspiracy theory has a number of high-profile believers. South African President Thabo Mbeki once touted the theory, disputing scientific claims that the virus originated in Africa and accusing the U.S. government of manufacturing the disease in military labs. When she won the Nobel Peace Prize, Kenyan ecologist Wangari Maathai used the



international spotlight to support that theory as well. Others insist that the government deliberately injected gay men with the virus during 1978 hepatitis-B experiments in New York, San Francisco and Los Angeles. Still others point to Richard Nixon, who combined the U.S. Army's biowarfare department with the National Cancer Institute in 1971. Though the co-discoverers of HIV — Dr. Robert Gallo of the National Cancer Institute and Dr. Luc Montagnier of the Pasteur Institute in Paris — don't agree on its origins, most members of the scientific community believe the virus jumped from monkeys to humans some time during the 1930s.

POLITICAL USE.

In his book *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, Karl Popper used the term "conspiracy theory" to criticize the ideologies driving historicism. Popper argued that totalitarianism was founded on "conspiracy theories" which drew on imaginary plots driven by paranoid scenarios predicated on tribalism, chauvinism, or racism. Popper did not argue against the existence of everyday conspiracies (as incorrectly suggested in much of the later literature). Popper even uses the term "conspiracy" to describe ordinary political activity in the classical Athens of Plato (who was the principal target of his attack in *The Open Society and Its Enemies*).

In his critique of the twentieth century totalitarians, Popper wrote, "I do not wish to imply that conspiracies never happen. On the contrary, they are typical social phenomena." He reiterated his point, "Conspiracies occur, it must be admitted. But the striking fact which, in spite of their occurrence, disproved the conspiracy theory is that few of these conspiracies are ultimately successful. Conspirators rarely consummate their conspiracy." (Wikipedia; 2014)



CONCLUSION

To sum up all that has been written on this subject matter, it is imperative to know that the main reasons why conspiracy theories exist and would continue to do so is because man would continue to look for answers to explain causes to certain events that have no logical or no explanation at all. The political scientist Michael Barkun, discussing the usage of this term in contemporary American culture, holds that a conspiracy theory is a belief which explains an event as the result of a secret plot by exceptionally powerful and cunning conspirators to achieve a malevolent end. According to Barkun, the appeal of conspiracism is threefold:

First, conspiracy theories claim to explain what institutional analysis cannot. They appear to make sense out of a world that is otherwise confusing.

Second, they do so in an appealingly simple way, by dividing the world sharply between the forces of light, and the forces of darkness. They trace all evil back to a single source, the conspirators and their agents.

Third, conspiracy theories are often presented as special, secret knowledge unknown or unappreciated by others. For conspiracy theorists, the masses are a brainwashed herd, while the conspiracy theorists in the know can congratulate themselves on penetrating the plotters' deceptions.



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