

## **CONSEQUENCES OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC: CONSPIRACY THEORIES VERSUS THEORIES CONSPIRACY**

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***Abstract:** One of the most significant phenomena that marked the second decade of the XXI century is certainly the phenomenon of the pandemic disease COVID-19 caused by the coronavirus (SARS-KoV-2). It has caused enormous public attention and initiated numerous explanations of the nature, origin, development, action and consequences that this virus will cause. Therefore, the paper discusses a wide range of theories that seek to explain this phenomenon, among which are significant and the so-called "conspiracy theories". The very notion of "conspiracy theory" appears in the very focus of the paper with the aim of drawing attention to the necessity of precisely defining this very frequent notion in the public sphere. Without understanding its semantic aspect, it is difficult to understand this world plague - the viral pandemic COVID-19. From this fact arises the intention to offer an argument for the establishment of a new construct – "conspiracy theory" because it is more coherent in its meaning but more useful in avoiding confusion, ambiguity, manipulation around the understanding of this global danger. This would also reduce the chances of the pandemic spreading the conspiracy narrative.*

***Keywords:** pandemic, narrative, theories of conspiracy, theories conspiracy*

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### **INTRODUCTION**

*"We live in a world where there is more and more information,  
and less and less meaning".*

**Jean Baudrillard**

The pandemic disease COVID-19 caused by coronavirus (SARS-KoV-2) has occupied the attention of the world public, creating a mass reception of events (dominant narrative, collective consciousness) and directing the direction of judging the background of this "Health accidents", defamation of common sense thinking, etc.

There are numerous dilemmas, doubts, mystifications (and the public is attracted by mysteries), etc. around this virus. Due to the ignorance of the nature of this virus and the lack of adequate information, an “empty space” has appeared, which with various explanations seeks to fill and satisfy the “hunger” of the public for existentially significant knowledge. This viral pandemic is an ideal habitat, natural climate, ideological miles, fertile ground for the emergence and spread of another type of pandemic - pandemic “conspiracy theory” but also conspiracy theorists of all kinds. Especially since many theorists warn that the pandemic will have far-reaching consequences for international relations, but also for the global picture of the world. That is, nothing in the world will be the same after this danger as it was before its appearance (*The corona will change the world!*, *The great global crisis is coming our way!*). More things in the world have changed in the past months than in the past two or three decades. So it is so powerful that it will cause big global changes, but there is no agreement on what will specifically change and to what extent. For a start, she put the daily lives of millions of people under masks and physically distanced them. There is a tendency to negatively observe this pandemic and explain the consequences it will cause both in the short and long term. Among the significant negative consequences are:

- Authoritarian regimes will be strengthened and civil rights and freedoms will be radically violated.
- The coronavirus will be (mis)used to redistribute geopolitical positions and change power relations in the world;
- Gold prices will rise and oil prices will fall;
- There will be a collapse of health systems in many states;
- There will be an even deeper polarization of society according to economic criteria (the rich became even richer, and the poor even poorer). The number of billionaires in the world will increase.
- The world economy will record huge financial losses;
- There will be a global paralysis of life that can cause socio-psychological trauma;
- There will be a chaotic socio-political situation and the like.

So, that danger has become quite evident (*The devil took the joke!*) And is not seen only as a potential threat to humanity. Therefore, numerous questions appear in the public narrative, such as: What awaits us? Are problems yet to come? Has the economy been destroyed and to what extent? Was the virus used as a biological weapon? Who uses it against whom? Is it a kind of struggle with uncertainty? Is this a virus at all? Is the virulence (pathogenicity, contagiousness, infectivity, reactivity, etc.) of SARS-CoV-2 weakening and strengthening over time? Which of the following about the virus is (semi) true, and which is a lie? Is this just a “deliberate event”? Do conspiracy theorists expose the plans of world powers? Are these theories just *I'm telling you a story* or vague “stories with a mistake” in which a more careful analysis can find numerous omissions, contradictions, illogicalities, etc. Is this just specific collective experience? Is it even possible to offer an honest answer to these and many other questions? Is it important not to keep silent about the answers to these open questions, despite the awareness that some of them will remain open?

What the pandemic is causing globally is very receptive to the creation of various theories. Therefore in the international public has appeared controversial expla-

nations and speculation about this mega-infection. This is understandable from the point of view of the need for objective knowledge. The search for the truth in this case is like trampling on a minefield. There are two basic public antipodes (extreme, often contradictory) narratives that are unshakable in their public belief:

- a) The virus was created by a natural mutation (there is no conspiracy) and
- b) The virus is an artificial creation for planned purposes (it is all a conspiracy of interest).

### **No conspiracy (virus is natural)**

This garden theory also convinces that it is a marginal phenomenon, that the pandemic itself is just the so-called “Conspiracy theory” (with a negative connotation) that it is a big lie, a fraud (*It's all fake!*). It follows the narrative of causing distrust in vaccination as the most effective way to fight this pandemic. Whoever raises a voice that is not in line with the official narrative is in danger of being labeled: You are a supporter of conspiracy theories! Those who are of the opinion that conspiracies (even conspiracies to cause viral epidemics) do not exist are also the most dangerous conspirators. (*The devil succeeded when he convinced!, Eve that he didn't even exist!*). They accuse the conspirators of further elaborating, operationalizing and spreading this conspiratorial narrative with the help of the media. With this attitude, many tried to preserve the reputation of the medical profession, but also the authority of the government (to preserve its political power). An example is the fact that in many cases around the pandemic, politics has been subordinated to science. In general, it is considered that both theories are not based on reality.

### **Conspiracy exists (virus is artificially created)**

The topic of “conspiracy theories” caused by the corona pandemic is a current topic and therefore deserves our attention. There is no doubt that there is a lot of conspiratorial thinking about this global viral pandemic. They belong to another group of theorists (the “well-informed bazaar”). The common denominator of these “conspiracy theories” is basically the position that it is a global conspiracy (because the pandemic is global) which is the realization of the so-called “golden billions”. That is, the thesis that the virus was artificially created dominates, and the fact that the crown is aesthetically graphically designed and that as such it seems very seductive (*Everything that is deadly is in itself seductive!*). Is used as a significant argument. It is clear to these theorists that the coronary pandemic is being packed into a narrative that can be challenged and “exposed”.

Some theorists try to capture the moments that appeared in numerous statements of experts or were carelessly stated in order to confirm that “something is wrong” in their story and that it is a “carefully packaged reality”. The conspiracy theorists strive to form the broadest possible consensus of belief and belief that it is a classic subversive global action of the (financial) global elite by which it seeks to achieve its long-planned goals. They strive to become masters of the *mainstream* narrative that is theoretically shaped. These perceptions are often schizophrenic, because the imagination often goes beyond reality itself. They focused on the machinations of an alienated center of power that create plans in accordance with their strategic interests and intentions to put a “noose around the neck” for humanity. In the pandemic, they

see the realization of the so-called obsession. of the global establishment to realize the idea of a new world order. They are constantly spreading distrust towards international medical institutions and seeking recognition of their guilt for organizational incompetence. Therefore, these “conspiracy theories” can be seen as a kind of rebellion against the world’s elite.

### THE CONCEPT OF “CONSPIRACY THEORY”

In order to understand the complex of this narrative that arose as a reaction to the COVID-19 pandemic, it is necessary to first clarify the very notion of “conspiracy theory”. “Conspiracy theories” (“conspiracy theories”, “conspiracy theory”, “conspiracies theories”) is in itself an intriguing topic. Conspiracies but also “conspiracy theory” are a companion of human civilization. It is a lasting feature of human history. The roots of conspiracies and efforts to explain conspiracies go back to the deep past, but it can be argued that “obsession with conspiracy theories serves only to explain the insane paranoia that flourished in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries” (Tuckett, K., 2005: 7). Therefore, the modern conspiracy has a rebellious spirit and declares itself the last bastion of resistance to world conspiracies and the “new world order”.

One of the most frequent terms that can be found in public, in the “ambient of daily politics” (Dragan Simeunovic) but also in the literature dealing with socio-historical phenomena and processes is certainly the term “conspiracy theory” or conspiracy theory (English *conspiracy theory*, Russian *теория заговора*, German *Verschwörungstheorie*, Spanish *teoría conspirativa*, French *théorie du complot*, Italian *teoria del complotto*, Croatian *teorija urote*), etc. Therefore, Branislav Matić claims that “if someone made such statistics, it would probably turn out that the notion of conspiracy is among the five most frequently used terms in Yugoslav countries during the past four years” (Matić, B., 1994: 6). She is a favorite reading of many debates. Many individuals present their knowledge of a conspiracy, most often (for the sake of persuasion), citing the sources of their claims and “quoting” well-known revelators of “conspiracy theory”. The manifestation of these phenomena is so present that it is difficult to avoid the need to pay scientific attention to them. The phenomena of “conspiracy” and “conspiracy theory” are attractive, intriguing, controversial, exotic, but also research interesting. Conspiracies and “conspiracy theories” have long been the subject of scientific research, but many researchers still treat them as part of political mythology because it is a labyrinth of conspiracies with many secret corridors. “Conspiracy theory” belongs to the so-called hoax theories, that is, in theories of deception, cunning, deception, jokes, bizarreness. She has the power of seduction like Armida.<sup>1</sup> All this was a strong motive for many researchers to go in search of “non-normative, hidden and difficult to transparent ways of practicing power”

(Đurković, 2013, str. 7). Those who create “conspiracy theories” are commonly called conspiracy theorists, those who investigate conspiracies are called conspiracy theorists, and those who accept it are more widely called “conspiracy theories”.

The term “conspiracy theory” has a number of synonyms such as: “controlled chaos theories”, “unargued attitudes”, “part of the irrational and conservative

<sup>1</sup> Armida (Latin name of a beautiful and powerful shepherdess in Tas’s song *Liberated Jerusalem*, a metaphor that means a woman who has the power of seduction. (Vujaklija, M., 1986: 74).

corpus”, “sphere of hidden reality”, “camouflaged truth”, “simulated performances”, “superstition”, “false claims”, “esoteric knowledge”, “dark corridors of power” (Miša Đurković), “opium for the people”, “exhaust valves of democracy”, “wrong knowledge of something”, “global backstage”, “order of power”, “the theory according to which nothing is as it seems”, “the attitude that there is always something that is kept silent and not revealed to the public”, “that nothing that is said is true” and the most modern “joint criminal enterprise”.

Similarly, there are numerous connotations related to conspirators: “financial oligarchies” (Slobodan Janković), “non-transparent mechanisms of power”, “informal groups of powerful people”, “social controllers”, “secret societies”, “alienated elite”, “certain interest circles”, “influential groups”, “hidden establishment”, “deep state” (...), “esoteric circles”, “global elite”, “individuals or castes whose identity is hidden and whose power is great”, “invisible masters of life and death”, “rulers from the shadows”, “invisible hand”, “elite of power” (Wright Mills), these are “organizations that work behind the scenes to achieve evil goals”, “charlatans”, etc.

“Conspiracy theories” can also serve as patterns of (re)directing attention from the fundamental and essential problems of the modern world. Thought patterns that skillfully and carefully create the reality of events in order to master the dispositions of behavior and thus the behavior of people. The creators of such a narrative try to make “reality” seem indisputable, logically structured, but to be an integral part of social life. Namely, these “theories of the beast” build a kind of framework of thinking: behind these dramatic events are mysterious world powers, secret and semi-secret power structures, dark forces that work on humanity’s head. These conspiratorial explanations of the current pandemic have a latently depressing tone because they expose the motives of the “shadow rulers”. So, it’s an apocalyptic tone, because it starts from the assumption that evil is intentionally caused by powerful global conspirators who are foolish and inhuman in their intentions. Especially if it is clear that “conspiracy theories” are immanently pessimistic. They are primarily directed against those who try to tell “their truth” which is not in accordance with the official explanations. Science has an obligation to establish landmarks in the forest of quasi-theories because they can have detrimental consequences for society. The disoriented public is subject to all kinds of influences, doubts, and beliefs. Although doubt is a valuable value, excessive and unfounded skepticism can be a socially negative phenomenon. They are primarily directed against those who try to tell “their truth” which is not in accordance with the official explanations. Science has an obligation to establish landmarks in the forest of quasi-theories because they can have detrimental consequences for society. The disoriented public is subject to all kinds of influences, doubts, and beliefs. Although doubt is a valuable value, excessive and unfounded skepticism can be a socially negative phenomenon.

“Conspiracy theory” is a term that is often used in everyday speech without a theoretically well-defined term. The phrase “conspiracy theory” is often used in a

synonymous sense, although it would be more precise to use the phrase “conspiracy theory”. Dragan Simeunović believes that the term “conspiracy theory” still “does not exist as a constructed and consistently exposed scientific term” (Dragan S. , 2018, str. 173). And we consider that in the need for this term in science is still problematic but not impossible. Mrvić Marina considers that it is important to “make a clear distinction between conspiracy (..) and ‘conspiracy theory’ which has remained at the level of conjecture and behind which there are no corroborating facts. However, ‘conspiracy theory’ knows how to find its place in the world of practical politics in different ways, and even to obscure the true essence of a phenomenon” (Mrvić, M., 2013: 289 - 302). The professional literature dealing with this notion suggests a tendency that it is still a descriptive notion with a tendency to become a theoretical notion. For that, it is necessary to overcome the existing one-sidedness, to reduce it to one (or unimportant) element. We believe that in accordance with the constitution and establishment of conspiracy theories as a scientific discipline, this concept as part of its categorical apparatus will eventually gain its consistency. After all, this is the case with many other concepts that have had their way of theoretical shaping.

When did this term originate? One of the answers to this question is related to the seventh decade of the XX century (1967) when the American secret service The Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) coined the term and recommended it to the media for use in order to counter the numerous theses that expressed a critical attitude towards the official version of the assassination of the 35th US President John Fitzgerald Kennedy (1917. – 1963.). Other authors, such as the French scientist Michel Lacroix, believe that it originated within the ideology of the *New Age* (Lacroix, M., 2001). There are also understandings that the term “conspiracy theory” was designed with the intention of discrediting (compromising) the very idea of the existence of a conspiracy as a phenomenon. Accordingly, it was given a pejorative meaning in order to cover up the conspiracies or, at best, to hide the true essence of the conspiracies. If a conspiracy is discovered, according to this understanding, then conspiracy theorists are accused of not having valid arguments for their claims and of using the term “conspiracy theories” as an instrument for false accusations. One of the world’s most famous thinkers, Noam Chomsky (1928. -) with his works and public appearances he shows a critical attitude towards the notion of “conspiracy theory”. He believes that this phrase is a product of the American political establishment, which seeks to impose unfounded views of certain phenomena on the domestic and world public in order to hide its real interest and real goal (Chomsky N., 2008).

Some scientists find the ethology of this theory in the complexity of social phenomena and processes. They believe that often certain social phenomena are difficult to explain because they are complex in themselves, because there is not enough visible information or they have not been the subject of more serious scientific research. That is why certain events (phenomena, processes) from everyday life are tried to be explained in the simplest possible way, even with “conspiracy theories”.

There is a widespread understanding that the modern concept of “conspiracy theory” was originally based on the conspiracy tradition and that the first written examples of this theory were recorded in the early twentieth century in countries such as the United States and Germany. At that time, the term “conspiracy theory” had a neutral character, and only a decade later it took on an irrational and derogatory character

and semantic content, which meant that the theory was not founded. There are also opinions that the deeper roots of “conspiracy theory” can be found in the mythological narrative about secret societies that developed at the end of the 18th century and earlier. Its appearance is often associated with the period when capitalism grows into the phase of imperialism and when the construction of the *New World Order* begins. Then scientists began to be more careful about the conspiratorial way of thinking and interpretation of social (political, military, economic, etc.) phenomena in the world. This led to the laying of the foundations of a new theoretical school called conspiracy, which explained many socio-political phenomena and events in the world precisely by conspiracy theory. The progenitor of this theory is considered to be the famous Russian philosopher Alexander Dugin (Александр Гельевич Дугин; 1962. -).

We believe that this construction arose as an instrument for disqualifying doubts about the official version of phenomena, events or processes.

### **Defining the “conspiracy theory”**

The phrase “conspiracy theory” qualifies various events and processes. They also link it to conservative ideologies that interpret world events in an unrealistic way. Numerous definitions follow from this. The number of definitions of “conspiracy theory” is proportional to the number of theorists who deal with its definition. Here we will list only some that are, in our opinion, the most paradigmatic and the most interesting, and which are very often of opposite meaning. Definitions of “conspiracy theory” can usually be classified into two antagonistic forms: a) as an affirmation of the existence of the conspiracy itself and b) as a negation of the existence of the conspiracy itself. American political scientist Michael Barkun (1938. -) in his famous work *Conspiracy Culture: Apocalyptic Visions in Contemporary America* classifies all conspiracy theories into three basic groups:

- a. event theory,
- b. systemic conspiracy theories and
- c. superconspiracy theory (Barkun, M, 2006).

There is also a widespread perception that “conspiracy theory” is only a part of urban legends that often enter the domain of speculation. The term does not pretend to explain the historical and current social reality, but serves to confuse the public. Many consider “conspiracy theory” to be classical scholasticism, that is, examples of explanations of some phenomena and that as such they are part of sensationalism which trivializes reality (*Simple explanation of complex phenomena!*). With this it is denied that an event (political, military, etc.) is a consequence of a deceptive plan of some secret association of powerful people or powerful elites. Đorđe Lukić in the *Small Diplomatic Dictionary* he defines conspiracy theory as an effort to explain the ultimate cause and reason of a social, political or historical event as a secret plan of a secret association of powerful people, denying the possibility that the event was the result of direct activity or spontaneous. Sometimes it has a connotation of paranoid and unfounded beliefs (Lukić Đ., 2013: 392).

Theories in a sense also have a metaphysical character because they do not coincide (are not in agreement) completely with the real facts. This may be the case with “conspiracy theory”. The term “conspiracy theory” is also defined as “an attempt to explain the ultimate reason for an (usually social, political, or historical) event, as a

secret plan of a secret association of powerful people (often described as a ‘powerful elite’), denying that the event was the result of direct activity or a spontaneous event” (Source: [https://sr.wikipedia.org/sr-ec/Teorija\\_zavere](https://sr.wikipedia.org/sr-ec/Teorija_zavere), March 2, 2021). Accordingly, other theorists believe that “conspiracy theory” seeks to convince the public that “everything is pre-directed”, “that some comrades are behind it”, that “it is a digging for someone else”, that it is an analysis of an event that comes to the conclusion that it is pre-planned and only “some conspiracy theories”.

Some theorists who research “conspiracy theory” on a global level believe that it is a specific statement (thesis, opinion, attitude) which marks significant social events as a behind-the-scenes action of powerful groups and individuals who are part of the hierarchy of power. As the truth of these events is not easy to know and establish, they constantly offer answers to the fundamental conspiracy question: Who rules the world?

### **CONSPIRACY NARRATIVE AND “CONSPIRACY THEORY”**

The phenomena of “conspiracy” and “conspiracy theory” are very complex and as such have different narratives and numerous discourses. Here we will indicate only some narrative elements and characteristic discourses. Narratives about conspiracies and “conspiracy theory” can be divided into three basic groups in the most general sense: a) narratives that deny the existence of conspiracy or diminish their significance and have a negative attitude towards “conspiracy theory” (anti-conspiracy theorists), b) narratives that view the history of human society as a history of conspiracies and have a negative or positive attitude towards “conspiracy theory” (“conspiracy theorists”, conspiracy apologists) and c) narratives that do not address the existence of conspiracy as a phenomenon but are primarily against “conspiracy theory” and ridicule all those who talk about some kind of conspiracy. The first two narratives are especially important for our discussion. Similarly, the American publicist Ralph Epperson (1937 - ) in his work *The Invisible Hand: Unseen Hand: An Introduction to the Conspiratorial View of History* argues that major historical events can be summarized in two “alternative schools of thought: a) Seeing history as a case: historical events happen by chance, for no apparent reason. Rulers have no power to influence them; b) Seeing history as a conspiracy: historical events take place according to an established plan for reasons that are usually unknown to people” (Epperson, R., 2000: 11).

#### **First group (negative determination)**

The first group theorists (anti-conspiracy theorists) believe that conspiracies do not exist or are, at best, rare in the history of society and as such have not significantly influenced social processes. They think that conspiracies are unsustainable in themselves because “truth is always stranger than fiction”. One current believes that “conspiracy theory” are incorrect theory and that as such it should be rejected and this construct should be used in order to bring down on preachers and supporters of all kinds of theories that are still resistant to counter-arguments about the existence of conspiracies. So, when there are no conspiracies (or they are as a phenomenon of little importance for social dynamics) there is no “conspiracy theory”, but then we can not talk about conspiracy as a science of conspiracies. As an example of this school of thought, it is possible to cite the statement of the famous American geopolitician Zbigniew Brzezinski (1928. – 2017.) that “history is much more a product of chaos than conspir-



acy” (Epperson R., 2000: 12). The American economist was even more explicit in this understanding of historical events James Warburg (1896. – 1969.), who in his book *The West in Crisis claims* that “history is determined much more by chance than by deliberate intentions, but very often by the irrational behavior of lunatics” (Warburg P. J., 1959: 20). American historian Daniel Pipes (1949. -) in his work *Conspiracy: How the Paranoid Style Flourishes and Where It Comes From* states a number of scientific analyzes that have confirmed the thesis that the arguments on which “conspiracy theory” are based are mainly based on quasi-arguments (Pipes, D., 1997). Accordingly, they view “conspiracy theory” a priori with contempt and contempt because they interpret those events and processes primarily on the basis of their external manifestation. They call them “wrong and superficial theories”, “unproven and unverified stories”, “demagogic populism”, “planting lies as truth”, “lightly stated qualifications”, even when there is a realistic determination of the fact. Therefore, this “the banalization of reality” does not even come close to reality. They point to the absurd and the unusual (the grotesque) the nature of the so-called *Lay conspiracy*. Otherwise, we can speak of certain social events as obscure and theoretical speculation. They believe that even today it is easy to state that an event is a conspiracy that is directed against someone or something, even when there is no valid and solid evidence for that. Many historical events are overshadowed by conspiracies simply because they are not objectively and timely clarified.

The main objection to this anti-conspiracy attitude is the nihilistic attitude towards the phenomenon of conspiracies. Science has long established that the phenomenon of conspiracy cannot be questioned, nor the need to study it on a scientific basis (even to establish a new scientific discipline - conspiracy). But it also opens up the possibility of critically observing the construct and narrative of “conspiracy theory”.

### **Second group (positive determination)**

Another group (conspiracy theorists) advocates the thesis that all social currents and events are primarily the result of someone’s conspiracies, that is, that thanks to conspiracies, socio-political life changes so dynamically. According to them, it can almost be said that the history of human society is a history of conspiracies. One current of conspiracy theorists believes that it is therefore necessary to constitute a science that would deal with the phenomenon of conspiracies and that would represent a “conspiracy theory”. Another current of conspiracy theorists believes that what seems realistic at first glance is just an illusion, prejudice, illusion, deception, and that it is “conspiracy theories” that reveal the true essence, point to what is true or what is hidden from the emergent.

Thus, for example, the British philosopher of Austrian origin Carl Popper (1902. – 1994.) in his work *Conjectures and Refutations: The Growth of Scientific Knowledge* claims to “Conspiracy theories” start from the position that nothing that happens in society is accidental, that is, that everything is already planned and that it is best seen in the prepared (carefully planned) activities of secret organizations, or various centers of power that manage events (Popper, K., 1963). This school of opinion is supported by the famous statement of the thirty-second American President Franklin Delano Roosevelt (1882. – 1945.) that “nothing happens by chance in politics. If it happens, that’s how it was planned” (Epperson, R., 2000: 12). Historians believe that these are

two extreme ways of explaining historical events, and that events in the past are much more complex.

American radio host Milton William Cooper (1943. – 2001.) has the status of a kind of legend among conspiracy theorists. He gained that status with a book *Behold A Pale Horse* in which he listed numerous conspiracies that he sought to substantiate with original documentation and a list of names involved in the conspiracies. He paid special attention to secret societies of the *New World Order* (NWO) and global conspiracies. He was killed in 2001. by the police in an attempt to arrest him because a warrant was allegedly issued for him for non-payment of taxes, and his supporters believe that he was killed for revealing a plan for a global conspiracy. He is followed by a Swiss writer Erich von Däniken (1935. - ) with his famous book with the controversial title *Remembering the Future (Erinnerungen an die Zukunft)*. The world's most current conspiracy theorist is the British writer and public speaker David Icke (1952. - ) who is the author of about twenty books dealing with this issue. One of the most famous is the *Guide to the Global Conspiracy and How to End it*.

The narrative of “conspiracy theory” has a dynamic character: sometimes their prevalence increases sharply, and sometimes interest in them declines. Thus, for example, interest in conspiracy theories and conspiracy theories rose sharply after the onset of the economic (financial) crisis in 2017, and plummeted after a few years. “Conspiracy theories” have not deprived any society, be it democratic and authoritarian.

A narrative that considers the number of authors who deny the existence of the conspiracy phenomenon to be negligible claims that it is difficult to find a historical event that does not at least partially contain some element of a conspiracy. Therefore, history abounds with numerous examples of unsolved assassinations, accidental murders, secret alliances, court conspiracies, political intrigues, betrayals in war and the like. Thus, conspiracy is not only a construct but also a fact that has become from time immemorial (“since the age of man and man”; “since when it is holy and eternal”). History has recorded the first conspiracies at the very beginning of civilization. It acquired its more modern character in ancient times. At that time, it manifested itself as a specific instrument (method, action) of politics used by dissatisfied individuals or groups to gain (and even maintain) power. It was used to overthrow or establish authoritarian rulers, dictators or oligarchy.

“Conspiracy theory” is also seen as part of an effort to understand and explain more clearly (simply) certain social events and processes that are in themselves very complex, at first glance unrelated but also difficult to explain. Therefore, they can be viewed as part of the intention to contribute to the perception of reality, but also as an intention to hide the truth about a phenomenon. There are also opinions that “conspiracy theories” have a higher meaning when there is a conspirator who directs events in the world.

There are countless examples conspiracy events as evidence of the existence of a conspiracy phenomenon around which “conspiracy theories” are woven. It is surprising what dimensions it has and to what extent it is historically implanted but also extremely powerful. Historians say that there were more failures than successes, but despite that, their appearance had continuity. On this occasion, for the sake of illustration, we single out a few. In the most famous world conspiracies are counted:

- Catiline conspiracy (63rd year. BC);

- Conspiracy of Marcus Junius Brutus a 44 BC against the Roman general Gaius Julius Caesar;
- Pisonian conspiracy against Nero (age 65);
- Jesuit conspiracy or Gunpowder Plot 1605 against King James VI of England;
- Seneca's court conspiracy against Claudius;
- Military coup of the Turkish army against Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan;
- The betrayal of General Benedict Arnold during the American Revolution;
- The assassination of the sixteenth American President Abraham Lincoln on Good Friday in 1865;
- Sarajevo assassination by Gavrilo Princip;
- The shooting of Colonel Dragutin Dimitrijevic Apis with several officers as conspirators who allegedly planned to assassinate Regent Aleksandar Karadjordjevic;
- The assassination of US President John F. Kennedy;
- The assassination of the Prime Minister of the Republic of Serbia, Zoran Djindjic etc.

Of all the conspiracies, the most famous are the court conspiracies. There are also understandings that diplomacy is a kind of conspiracy. Many publicists equate "conspiracy theory" with paranoia, that is, they consider them "political paranoia". There are also conspiracy theorists who believe that those constructions (claims) that start from the fact that conspiracies exist but that it is not easy to prove because the reality is complex, while others believe that it should not be proven but that the phenomenon is sufficient to qualify as a conspiracy. Thus, we can conclude that the conspiracy played a very significant role in the history of human civilization. We believe that as a very important phenomenon, it deserves much more scientific attention than has been given to it so far.

### **Basic elements of the conspiracy phenomenon**

Simeunović Dragan considers that such a classic conspiracy should have the following elements:

- a. plan (planning),
- b. action (action, action),
- c. organization (organization) and
- d. secrecy (secret) (Simeunović D., 2002: 177).

1) The plan is one of the most important and indispensable elements of the conspiracy. This means that the existence of a plan indicates that the conspiracy is by no means an accidental or spontaneous activity. This stems from the intention of the conspiracy actors to make it successful, and that is impossible without good thinking and planning. To this should be added a clearly specified basic goal of the conspiracy, which comes down to realizing the interests of the one who carries out the conspiracy (to gain some benefit). These interests are usually to the detriment of another (object of conspiracy), but it is not to harm someone out of some malice or spite. Those who secretly plan events that will be harmful for someone are called conspirators. So, in addition to making secret plans, he takes care that these plans are not disclosed to the public.

2) Action (sharing, action) is another important component of the conspiracy that acts in synergy with other elements. The action by which the conspiracy is realized is limited in time and space and is limited by other determinants. Only in coordination with other elements, the undertaken planning activities can be realized. Thus, for example, when the plan and activity are coordinated, the conspiracy gets a chance for success and gets the physiognomy of a classic conspiracy. “Conspiracy can also be realized through various forms such as: hybrid war, network war” (Kolev, D., 2018: 217 – 223), media war, diplomatic war, economic war, etc.

3) Organization and organization is an important part of the conspiracy phenomenon. Long ago, the Italian political philosopher Niccolò Machiavelli (1469. – 1527.) He claimed that organization was necessary for the conspiracy, because it is not very difficult for one conspirator to organize and carry out a conspiracy action on his own. The organization derives from a plan that allows conspiracy actors to act in accordance with the role it is intended to perform and to perform the tasks and duties entrusted to them. It is usual that the organization is hierarchically organized and that there is a leader of the conspiracy (conspirators) at the head, and that the others have precisely specified functions. you can hope for that benefit” (Machiavelli, N., 1976: 65). In a conspiratorial organization, individuals are hierarchically and subordinately structured and headed by a conspiratorial leader. As a rule, conspiracy groups are smaller in number because the larger the group, the more likely it is to be discovered. Sometimes an insider appears who violates the “conspiracy of silence” and speaks and presents information that is inaccessible to the general public.

Conspiracy implies the existence of conspirators, those who plan and carry out conspiracies. There are also those who work for conspirators and are not aware of it. Conspirators have a field of common interests (overlapping different goals) and often do not choose the means to achieve them. They often realize them in an illegal and even in a transparent and brutal way without any legal, moral or other considerations.<sup>2</sup> There is a significant number of subjects who appear as creators of “conspiracy theories”, ie conspiracy theorists. These subjects may be individuals who express doubts about official mainstream versions of certain social events and processes. They link their beliefs to alternative and “new” knowledge and research and create “conspiracy theories”. It is widely believed that these are conspiracy organizations and conspirators who try to cover up the real conspiracy with them. Conspiracy organizations are often the ones who place “conspiracy theories”. As a classic example of a conspiracy organization, Smilja Avramov cites the *Trilateral Commission* (Avramov S., 2000). The secret organization Gray Wolves is also globally known as the organization of the secret operation *Gladio* and the murder of Aldo Moro. This group includes some governments, secret services, powerful corporations, international organizations, and secret societies, representatives of certain peoples or religions.

4) Secrecy is the fourth important element of any conspiracy. It hides the conspirators, their intentions and goals, but also builds a sense of connection, dependence and mutual solidarity with the conspirators. Mystery is also made possible by the factor of surprise (unexpectedness) that contributes to the success of the conspiracy. Therefore, an oath is taken and signed for entering the conspiracy organization, and its vio-

<sup>2</sup> Those who possess power usually do not hide their intentions.

lation is paid for with life. In that sense, Niccolo Machiavelli claimed that “there were many conspiracies, and only a few of them succeeded, because the conspirator cannot survive alone, and can only unite with obviously dissatisfied people”. But, as soon as the intentions are revealed to the one who is dissatisfied, you gave him the opportunity to turn from a dissatisfied person into a satisfied one, because if he gives you hope, he can hope to benefit” (Machiavelli N., 1976: 65).

If these elements of the conspiracy are not well synchronized, its success is in question. Therefore, the ability of conspirators to plan well, to organize well and act in the direction of achieving the planned goals, but also to provide a high level of conspiracy is a condition for achieving conspiracy goals. Otherwise, disclosure may occur, and thus conspiracy may be prevented. At that moment, the creators of the conspiracy first do everything to annul the accusations and hide those who participated in it.

Conspiracies are, as a rule (but not necessarily and necessarily) of an asymmetric character: they are a tool of the weaker, which is carried out towards the more powerful. Those who possess the power of their own interests most often (but not necessarily and necessarily) realize it in a legal and transparent way. Those who do not have adequate power use behind-the-scenes, conspiratorial behavior, i.e. acting in the greatest possible secrecy, thus increasing their chances of success. The conspiracy is hiding, she is trying to remain unknown, that is, her characterized by a high degree of conspiracy. Conspiracies are realized in a more or less indirect way.

### **Political conspiracy**

The most common form of conspiracy is political conspiracy. It manifests itself as political violence which seeks to gain power and achieve narrow and not only political interests. “Conspiracy theory” is most often associated with politics. The rhetorical construct of “conspiracy theory” was identified as “deep politics”. This is very important because of the role that this construct has around the world. Therefore, a kind of paradox of politics took place, which according to its immanence and authenticity was supposed to be a “general old”, “public thing”, and which in many dimensions became a “backstage game of power”, secret because it became a means of achieving particular interests. Based on that, cryptopolitics developed as a scientific discipline that deals with the study of the conspiratorial dimension of politics, the hidden face of power, the hidden activities of the state in domestic and foreign policy, the secret services, the “real politic of dirty hands” (Thompson F. D., 2007). That is why the most common form of conspiracy is political conspiracy. It manifests itself as political violence which seeks to gain power and achieve narrow and not only political interests. It is basically understandable because the policy of powerful centers has always been the policy of force.

### **PSYCHOLOGICAL NARRATIVE OF THE “CONSPIRACY THEORY”**

Various sciences have studied the phenomenon of “conspiracy theory”, among which psychology stood out, which investigated the psychological reasons for such a widespread belief that the basis of many events are conspiracies. which were directed by some “dark forces”. Why is it believed in conspiracy to create a “new world order”, a conspiracy reducing the number of people on the planet to the “golden billion”, in the conspiracy to cause disease only in certain nations or ethnic groups with the help

of vaccines, in the conspiracy to trace chemtrails which planes leave exist chemical and biological agents used for pollination (a kind of eugenics), in a conspiracy that the floods are intentionally caused by the HAARP disaster, in the conspiracy that the Ebola epidemic was intentionally caused, in the conspiracy that the world is ruled by “reptiles”, etc.? These beliefs are not baseless. Several reasons are significant for this. The British psychologist Rob Brotherton, author of the book *Suspicious Minds: Why We Believe Conspiracy Theories* believes that “conspiracy theory” is primarily a matter of belief: for some it is a conspiracy and for others an excuse (Brotherton R., 2017). One of the most important factors of mass acceptance of “conspiracy theories”, in our opinion, is anthropological: man is much more a being of belief (*homo religiosus*) than a being of doubt. It is easier for a person to believe than to doubt. Man is both a gullible being and a being of superstition. Therefore, it is easier for him to believe in the existence of a conspiracy, in the behind-the-scenes activities of certain centers of (im)power, than to express doubt in their existence. They use this fact abundantly conspirators to convince everyone else that “there is no conspiracy”, or even better that the conspiracy is fabricated. The success of the conspiracy is largely based on this fact. Secondly, the existence or non-existence of the very phenomenon we call a “conspiracy” would not change anything in the story of conspiracies. Belief in the existence of conspiracies is the basis of their existence, regardless of whether conspiracies as phenomena exist or not. Thus, there is a socio-psychologically fixed belief that conspiracy exists. But it exists in the broadest sense of the word, but not in the colloquial sense, although it does not exclude it either: a conspiracy out of pure obscenity or malice. Consequently, there is a belief that throughout history, conspiracies have played a significant role in numerous events. What was the role of conspiracy and intrigue at the imperial, royal and imperial courts. “Conspiracy theories” have a very elaborate and diverse categorical apparatus, but also a rich argumentation. A large number of people are convinced of the existence of a network of “conspirators” who have their own strategic plans, special concepts that reflect their interests and that they want to impose on humanity. Conspiracy theories are present in contemporary history, in culturology, historiography, and even in daily politics. Sometimes it plays a very important role,

Third, man has a primordial need (motive) for events, he describes “excess of truth” with “confidential information” and the like. There is a fascination with conspiracies, secret esoteric knowledge. They satisfy the motive of self-affirmation and social promotion, it gives the conspiracy theorist a sense of triumph but also a loss of empathy. Hence the emergence of numerous creators of “conspiracy theories” who try to satisfy these motives by offering information that “others could not get”. When individuals believe in a “conspiracy theory”, it is very difficult to dissuade him because the belief is not based on facts and most often the beliefs are not logical. Experience shows that even when you point out the lack of evidence for “conspiracy theories”, it strengthens his belief that the facts about the evidence are deliberately hidden.

Many studies by modern sociologists and historians of religion point to a phenomenon that suggests the existence of conspiracies. At first glance, the illogical explanation of the causes of certain events and historical phenomena indicates that there are certain mythological complexes in the collective unconscious that these events lead to mythological paradigms (Aleksandar Dugin) and which are totally beyond the scope of rational explanation. Arguments are used that individuals naively succumbed to frauds

that they “made a mistake in their assessment”, “that they mistakenly believed in a chimera” because. There are archaic layers (unconscious archetypes) in their minds that tend to come to the surface from those depths to communicate a certain message that is in principle insufficiently articulated. It then approaches the “theories” that seek to rationalize such a phenomenon. There is a rich literature, both professional and fictional, about those who are so enthusiastic about esoteric and occult “knowledge” and obsessed with conspiracies as a psychopathological problem. With this we want to emphasize the extent to which “conspiracy” as a problem is rooted in the human individual psyche but also in the “collective unconscious” (archetypal, mythological). Efforts are being made to point out the “danger of the existence of a world conspiracy”, i.e. “threats of world proportions”.

### **CRITICAL NARRATIVE ON “CONSPIRACY THEORIES”**

We believe, on the basis of what has been said so far, that the stated discourses on “conspiracy theories” cannot withstand scientific criticism. That is, that this syntagm was clumsily chosen, that such a “theory” has an informal character and therefore, in the true sense of the word, does not exist.

These narratives of seeing certain events are incomplete and one-sided, based on preconceptions and stereotypes. It is somewhat understandable that the complexity of events often requires a simplified interpretation to make it easier to understand, but this can lead to a trivialization, a banalization of the explanation of what is really happening. “Conspiracy theories” often take into account only those facts that fit into a given narrative, and others are ignored or dismissed as incorrect. It is as if her apologists were guided by Hegel’s famous maxim “that if the facts speak against the claim, the worse for the facts”. The “conspiracy theory” category warns that it is not desirable to go beyond the framework Mainstream narrative as a framework for understanding and studying a particular phenomenon. With a large amount of information (or numerous “conspiracy theories”), the public is confused or directed in the desired direction, while concealing real interests and intentions.

This term is used in popular culture but also in academic circles as a folklore term, as gossip, rumor and the like. The term is especially used by opponents of “conspiracy theory” to “disqualify certain claims as ridiculous, unproven, incorrect, paranoid, bizarre or irrational, while giving it a negative connotation” (Birchall, C., 2006). If this way marks a claim or its proponent, then skepticism is expressed towards it or towards the one who makes that claim. The category of “conspiracy theories” does not explain specific political phenomena and processes, but calls into question the validity, accuracy and truthfulness of the interlocutor’s knowledge of a phenomenon (*It’s not like you think!*) Because “it is a country unknown to him” (*Terraincognita*), ie he “has no idea about it”.

The term “conspiracy theory” is a powerful rhetorical construct used to denounce any rational thought. It is applied when it is pointed out that social phenomena have a hidden agenda and that official reasons are not the real motives for their events. With this “theory”, you suggest that the official explanation is not true, but yes is used as an instrument of psychological manipulation. The term can be associated with a person who is confused, with a person who lives in a world of imagination, with a room that is seduced by untrue and unrealistic visions of something happening.

We believe that, because of all the above, it is necessary to have reservations about the very term “conspiracy theory” because it does not imply any constructed and consistent theoretical views. This means that it is not the result of intrigue, according to pre-targeted ideas. This term often conceals some other significant phenomena, is the public’s attention is directed towards insignificant events or they are deliberately produced through social engineering. In that, we find a justification to put the phrase “conspiracy theory” among the alleged signs. The “conspiracy theory” is dangerous because it abolishes the idea of doubt, and they place the idea that there are no lies; that political elites work in the general interest, in accordance with the interests of the people they represent, that conspiracy theorists have the ambition to hide the truth. Critics of “conspiracy theory” try to condemn those who have not given up on logical thinking. Michael Parenti in his critical study “Face of imperialism: Responsibility-Taking in the Political World” claims that there are no “conspiracy theories” that there is a practice of conspiracy (Parenti M., 2011). He tries to scientifically base this thesis and prove it with arguments. Perhaps, from an epistemological point of view, one could most correctly speak of “practice of interest”, and not of “conspiracy theory”. In this sense, it can be argued that the world is governed by corporate and financial interests controlling countries, working conditions and exploitation, natural resources and markets.

## CONCLUSION

Problematizing one of the most current global events that has strongly influenced the geopolitical but also the overall economic Planet defined as a pandemic disease COVID-19 caused by coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2), the paper draws attention to numerous explanations of its nature, origin and consequences which will cause. He caused huge public attention and initiated a wide range of theories that seek to explain this phenomenon, among which the so-called “conspiracy theories”. They primarily sought to challenge the official media narrative and impose various theoretical constructs with elements of conspiracy. There are numerous controversies surrounding the very notion of “conspiracy theory” due to ambiguities in the clear definition and determination of precise semantic content. Therefore, we have tried to offer a valid argument for establishing a new concept that would more adequately describe the numerous phenomena and even the phenomenon of coronavirus. Namely, we thought that the very term “conspiracy theory” was insufficiently coherent and therefore semantically and linguistically unsustainable. Therefore, we proposed that, in addition to the already widespread notion of “conspiracy theory”, new conceptual constructs be introduced, such as “conspiracy theory(s)” and “conspiracy theory” (“theoretical conspiracy”, “conspiracy theory”). The term “conspiracy theory” is a synonym for conspiracy theories, which as a scientific discipline deals with the study of the phenomenon of conspiracies in human history. We believe that in this way we would avoid ambiguities and manipulations regarding the understanding of the phenomenon of “conspiracy”, but also numerous confusions about this global plague, which will undoubtedly change the world in which we live.

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