

CONSPIRACY THEORY IN TURKEY

A comparative analysis of the 2013 Gezi Protests and the 2016 Coup Attempt

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Submitted towards the Degree of Doctor in Philosophy, Comparative Politics (October 9th, 2017)

Word Count: 95,718

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Abstract and Short Methodological Overview

‘Conspiracy Theory in Turkey’ can best be described as a philosophical reflection on the Gezi and Coup events, seen through the lens of Conspiracy theory. In particular, this means that both events are considered by virtue of the State response thereto, which in both cases was one of the accusations of conspiracy against the State. In order to ‘compare’ these two events on the level of the emergence of conspiratorial interpretations and ‘paranoid’ narratives, I propose a blend of ‘framing theory’ (as used primarily in the conflict analysis literature), as well as political thought on conspiracy theory (for example, Karl Popper and Charles Pigden¹), with occasional inspiration taken from literary theory (in particular, the notion of ‘reading’ conspiracy for its own logics of power, rather than strictly speaking ‘diagnosing’ the social impact of conspiracy, I look into the conditions from which it arises and according to what logic and narratives it is perpetuated), critiques of post-modernism (Fredric Jameson’s reading of ‘contingency’²), and psychoanalytic theory (mostly Freudian, with some Lacanian concepts borrowed from Slavoj Žižek’s work). I will now briefly break down each of these so as to explain their function within the overall thesis, keeping in mind that they are used to enhance what is at heart a work of comparative politics; that is to say, a comparative account of the role of conspiracy theory in the 2013 Gezi protests and 2016 coup attempt.

1:Framing Theory

Several ideas from what is known as framing theory are employed in this thesis. In particular, I draw upon the ideas of Benford and Snow and their work on the influence of framing in social protest. Subsequently, I draw upon ‘elite’ framing theory, to examine the State response to the Gezi protests and the coup attempt, especially the way in which both were framed within an overarching narrative of conspiracy theory. I also employ the terms ‘peace frame’, ‘frozen frame’, and ‘adversarial frame’ to think about how one might conceptualize accusations of conspiracy as a form of elite framing. My contribution to the field comes in the form of a proposed ‘conspiracy frame’, that manages to posit itself as a peace/frozen/adversarial frame, while also challenging the space from which the ‘legitimacy’ of social protest framing can occur.

2:Philosophy and Political Thought apropos conspiracy theory

The so-called ‘philosophical approach to conspiracy theory’ is what provides the theoretical opening for my thesis. In particular, I look at the way in which following from Karl Popper, to the subsequent rebuttal by Charles Pigden, the study of conspiracy theory has evolved from ‘diagnosing’ conspiracy, to ‘debunking’ conspiracy. In my thesis I have sought to suggest a novel way of examining conspiracy theory, namely as a political strategy, or, in the philosophical terminology, as a ‘politics of truth’. In order to subsequently flesh out this ‘theory of conspiracy theory’ I look into the political conditions from which conspiracy theory emerges as a plausible political strategy. However I also draw upon various theoretical approaches to the nature of truth, and suggest the possibility of a dialectics of conspiracy theory in Turkish politics (where non-factual accusations strengthen ‘real’ political power), or, as I conclude, the more likely option of a (Adornian) negative dialectics of conspiracy.³ In sum, I have employed these various philosophical attitudes to ‘truth’ to think about the logic(s) and possible epistemology of untruths which include, but are not limited to, conspiracy theory and paranoid interpretations of reality.

3:Literary Theory

In referring to ‘literary theory’ what I have in mind is similar to critiques of postmodernism, in which political ‘texts’ are considered within the broader logics of power in which they are produced. This means focusing on what in this thesis I refer to as the ‘conditions for the production of knowledge’. In the thesis I borrow concepts from Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, and Fredric Jameson.⁴ While I do not follow a

¹ Karl Popper, ‘The conspiracy theory of society’, *Conspiracy theories: The philosophical debate* (2006), pp. 13-16; Charles Pigden, ‘Popper revisited, or what is wrong with conspiracy theories?’, *Philosophy of the Social Sciences* (1995), pp. 3-34.

² Fredric Jameson, *A Singular Modernity: Essay on the ontology of the present* (London, 2002).

³Theodor Adorno, *Negative dialectics* (London, 2003).

⁴ Specifically: Jacques Derrida, *Politics of friendship* (London, 2005); Michel Foucault, *Archaeology of knowledge* (London, 2013); Jacques Rancière, *On the shores of politics* (London, 1995); Fredric Jameson, *A Singular Modernity: Essay on the ontology of the present* (London, 2002).

strictly deconstructionist method, I do try to examine the ways in which conspiracy theory becomes institutionalized as a form of narrative 'event' through its signification related to Gezi and the coup. In addition to this, I have drawn upon the work of Fredric Jameson, one of the leading scholars of postmodernism (and the critique thereof) in order to think about how conspiracy theory revolves around the antinomy of contingency/legitimacy, i.e. that conspiracy theory is used as a form of narrative sabotage by which to both delegitimize, as well as, curtail 'new' forms of emancipatory, counter-hegemonic narratives, such as that of the Gezi protests.

4:Psychoanalytic Theory

Finally, I draw upon various psychoanalytic terms, many of which feature also in literary theory. These are mostly terms and themes that feature in the works of Jacques Lacan, for example the notion of a 'constitutive lack' and a 'constitutive other' (although the latter is also engrained in certain theories of the political, such as in the works of Carl Schmitt or Chantal Mouffe⁵). I also use the term 'objet petit a' and 'big other' to describe the way in which the idea of conspiracy theory comes to loom large as a form of master-frame, when employed in the way I examine in Turkish politics. I also employ Freudian terminology. In the chapter on strongman politics I borrow certain ideas from 'totem and taboo' on the notion of symbolic leadership, and I also refer to the politics of conspiracy as a form of 'uncanny' politics, therein drawing upon Freud's 'theory of the uncanny'. Finally, I refer sporadically to Slavoj Žižek's application of psychoanalysis to contemporary politics, citing primarily those instances in which he refers to conspiracy theory.

In sum, I have sought to theorize how conspiracy theory has emerged as such a potent force in contemporary Turkish politics. Examining the various ways in which political narratives of conspiracy theory emerge, are constituted, and how they enforce existing power structures, I have attempted to suggest a novel way of examining the problem of conspiracy theory in Turkish politics. This means, finally, that I am also indebted to Turkish scholar who have studied Gezi, the coup, and conspiracy theory. In particular I have been inspired by the work of Turkey Salim Nefes, who has written extensively on Turkish conspiracy theories, to posit a theory of conspiracy theory of my own; one that is strongly informed by philosophical notions of 'truth and falsehood', psychoanalytic notions of paranoia and various forms of 'untruths' (or non-truths), as well as employing devices from literary theory to consider conspiratorial and paranoid politics as a form of 'text'. These, in turn, have been integrated in a broadly comparative analysis of the role of conspiracy in the Gezi protests and coup attempt.

⁵ Carl Schmitt, *The concept of the political: Expanded edition* (Chicago, 2008); Chantal Mouffe, *The return of the political* (London, 2005); Chantal Mouffe, *The democratic paradox* (London, 2000).

Introduction

In this thesis I analyze the 2013 Gezi protests and the 2016 coup attempt through the lens of conspiracy theory and elite framing. Specifically I defend the claim that elite accusations of conspiracy constitute a systemic form of disinformation as part of a state response to divergent manifestations of political resistance. Conspiracy theories are therefore employed to justify increased political repression, the silencing and marginalization of political opponents, and the manufacture of political paranoia among an increasingly divided Turkish public.

The central sub-claims I make in the thesis are the following: (1) Conspiracy theory should be taken seriously as a discursive tactic of political ‘winners’ rather than ‘losers’. (2) Conspiracy theory in Turkey constitutes an elite framing strategy in Turkey. (3) The growing impact of conspiracy theories as justification for political repression in Turkish politics between 2013 and 2016 suggests a conspiratorial ‘praxis’ beyond the confines of the so-called paranoid style as a mere idiosyncrasy of antagonistic rhetoric. The thesis focuses on the changing nature of conspiratorial rhetoric among the Turkish political elite between 2013 and 2016, and makes the claims that Turkey’s current President, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, systemically employs paranoid narratives for political gain, the silencing of opponents, and the consolidation of state power.

The objectives of the research are as follows: (1) to help navigate the contradictory and confusing manifestations and mechanisms of antagonistic and conspiratorial political rhetoric in contemporary Turkish politics; (2) to situate the debate on conspiracy theory in Turkey within the wider framework of theoretical approaches to conspiracy theory, elite framing strategies, and the social movement literature on Turkey; (3) to provide one of the first post-coup studies of the links between conspiratorial rhetoric and growing authoritarian tendencies in Modern Turkey. As such, my research question can be formulated in the following manner: How does conspiratorial framing of the Gezi protests and the coup attempt consolidate state power? This then leads to the following sub-question: Under what conditions and according to what mechanisms can the ruling party employ conspiratorial framing as a means by which to silence opposition?

The key findings can be summarized as follows: (1) Conspiracy theory in Turkish politics underwent a shift in the post-Gezi political landscape towards emphasizing internal rather than external enemies. (2) In the years between the Gezi protests and the failed coup attempt, the Turkish political elite systemically invoked accusations of conspiracy as a polarizing strategy. (3) The current state of the theory of conspiracy theory suggests that accusations of conspiracy are an expression of political 'losers'. The thesis demonstrates that, on the contrary, political 'winners' employ accusations of conspiracy to consolidate state power.

(4) The thesis demonstrates that the failed coup attempt, and the conspiratorial interpretations thereof, can best be understood in light of the rise of conspiracy theories in Turkish politics since Gezi. While conspiracy theory is often employed as a form of adversarial framing, not exclusively in Turkish politics, the case studies of Gezi and the coup suggest a new development, in which so-called ‘in-groups’ are targeted, rather than focusing on pejorative ‘outside’ conspirators or minority groups. This presents an opportunity to formulate a novel argument on the discursive practices of conspiratorial framing in Turkish politics, that could also be extended beyond the scope of Turkey.

Conspiracy Theory in Turkey therefore fulfils multiple and interrelated conceptual, analytical, empirical, and policy objectives. Building on contemporary and historical evidence, the thesis situates Turkey within the broader literature of conspiracy theory and elite framing studies and puts forward a novel explanation of why and how leaders make certain choices to either make accessions to or vilify protestors.⁶ In this thesis I

⁶ Charles Pigden, ‘Complots of Mischief’, in David Coady (ed.), *Conspiracy Theories* (Farnham, 2006). See also Susan Feldman, ‘Counterfactual Conspiracy Theories’, *International Journal of Applied Philosophy* 1 (2011), pp. 15–24; Neil Levy, ‘Radically Socialized Knowledge and Conspiracy Theories’, *Episteme* 2 (2007), pp. 181–92; Juha Räikkä, ‘On Political Conspiracy Theories’, *Journal of Political Philosophy* 2 (2009), pp. 185–201; S. Clarke, ‘Conspiracy Theories and Conspiracy Theorizing’, *Philosophy of the Social Sciences* 2 (2002), pp.131–150. David Snow and Robert Benford, ‘Master Frames and Cycles of Protest’, in Aldon D. Morris and Carol McClurg Mueller (eds), *Frontiers in Social Movement Theory* (New Haven, CT, 1992), pp. 133–152; Neophytos G. Loizides, ‘Elite framing and conflict transformation in Turkey’, *Parliamentary Affairs* 62.2 (2008),

set Turkey within the post-Gezi landscape to study, on the one hand, the endurance of socio-political divides in Erdoğan's New Turkey, and on the other, the relative absence of successful integration mechanisms and opportunity structures among social movements and other forms of opposition.

The thesis offers a puzzle-driven analysis by assessing conspiratorial rhetoric in Turkey that could be further applied across issues and policies as well as other conflict-prone areas such as the changing media landscape, the integration of religion into politics, and resurgent forms of nationalism. Finally, it investigates how elites and social movements challenge and frame the language of resistance and conspiracy and identifies a set of analytic concepts to use when negotiating and understanding the intricacies of local and national grievances and State response.

My research questions emerged as follows: (1) I questioned one of the core assumptions in the conspiracy literature (winners versus losers), then (2) applied this question to elite framing studies, that is, 'how does the political elite (winners) frame conspiracy theory for political benefit?' And finally, I took this question and sought to answer it within the framework of critical theories of resistance. From this followed the more

pp. 278-297; Robert M. Entman, 'Framing: Toward clarification of a fractured paradigm', *Journal of communication* 43.4 (1993), pp. 51-58; Porismita Borah, 'Conceptual issues in framing theory: A systematic examination of a decade's literature', *Journal of communication* 61.2 (2011), pp. 246-263.

holistic question (3) ‘how can the notion of non-real political action influence real political action?’, or, in other words, is conspiracy theory in Turkish politics essentially a ‘vanishing mediator’ between real and perceived threats to the status quo?⁷

Case Selection and Within Case Variation

Conspiracy theories in Turkey abound. Ranging from the historical to the ideological, from the religious to the mundane, politics in modern Turkey is undeniably inundated with accusations of conspiracy. The polarization and high visibility of social tensions that have marked the last years have only led to an increase in such rhetoric. Amidst the ongoing purge of both real and imagined adversaries, the Turkish political elite readily employ accusations of conspiracy as an interpretative and framing lens for all manner of opposition to the ruling party. As a result, conspiracy theories have become a mainstay of Turkish political rhetoric, and are used to

⁷ I borrow a concept from the psychoanalytic literature here, which was described by Fredric Jameson in 1973, but in this case refers to the way in which Zizek applied it to the study of social movements and their evolving ‘meaning’ vis-à-vis their own purpose and the relative longevity of their resistance to the (perceived) status quo: Fredric Jameson, ‘The vanishing mediator: narrative structure in Max Weber’, *New German Critique* 1 (1973), pp. 52-89. Slavoj Zizek, *For They Know Not What They Do: Enjoyment as a Political Factor*, (London, 1991), p. 182.

justify the implementation of increasingly harsh repression, and indeed persecution, of any form of political opposition.⁸

Turkey stands at a crucial juncture vis-à-vis its democratic future and the consolidation of the democratic advancements that its leaders have made since the 1990s. The dramatic events of Gezi and the coup attempt, including the increasingly repressive state response to opposition situate Turkish democracy on a tipping point. This makes Turkey a fascinating case study of the relative effectiveness of elite framing of conspiracy. And in turn, it imbues the case with a sense of urgency, regarding the high stakes of social protest, civic inclusion, and democratic opposition to the limitation of freedom of speech and the dilemma of resisting and diverting conspiratorial framing of such efforts. Turkey, however, is not necessarily a ‘crucial case’ selection.⁹ Nor, for that matter are the sub-cases of Gezi and coup crucial case studies. Instead, my case selection

⁸ In addition, the intensity of the Turkish state response to the 2013 Gezi protests and the 2016 coup attempt has radically challenged the international consensus on Turkish politics. The optimism with which commentators formerly greeted the so-called ‘Turkish model’ as proof of the compatibility of secular democracy and religious conservatism has ceded to pessimism regarding the future of Turkish democracy and concern regarding the increasingly authoritarian measures employed to curb opposition, freedom of speech and civil liberties.

⁹ I refer here to Harry Eckstein’s conceptualization of the term: Harry Eckstein, ‘Case study and theory in political science’, *Case study method* (2000), p. 148. For the reason why I deem it unsuitable to describe the current case, I adhere to: John Gerring, ‘Is there a (viable) crucial-case method?’, *Comparative Political Studies* 40.3 (2007), pp. 231-253.

can best be understood as part of a so-called ‘pathway analysis’ in which both Gezi and the coup are employed as part of a mixed-methods research design by which to identify causal mechanisms of conspiratorial framing.¹⁰ It is, however, important to note that both case studies are not in and of themselves directly causal with regard to conspiratorial framing, but instead form part of a wider process of conspiratorial discourse. This makes them both highly interesting as case studies, but difficult to establish concrete variables, which would otherwise be required for the identification of causal mechanisms.¹¹

I have therefore chosen the Gezi and coup cases because they share characteristics that make them particularly fruitful for comparison. Both cases are demonstrative of the elite framing process of conspiracy because they exhibit interpretation of opposition framing that is rendered conspiratorial. To varying degrees both cases are influenced by the idea of resistance to the status quo and different forms of mobilization of

¹⁰ Nicholas Weller and Jeb Barnes, ‘Pathway Analysis and the Search for Causal Mechanisms’, *Sociological Methods & Research* 45.3 (2016), pp. 424-457.

¹¹ For contrasting arguments on the relative importance of such mechanisms, see: Jon Elster, ‘A plea for mechanisms’, *Social mechanisms: An analytical approach to social theory* 49 (1998), pp. 45-71; John Gerring, ‘Causal mechanisms: Yes, but...’, *Comparative Political Studies* 43.11 (2010), pp. 1499-1526. For an overview of the debate, see: James J. Heckman and Jeffrey A. Smith, ‘Assessing the case for social experiments’, *The Journal of Economic Perspectives* 9.2 (1995), pp. 85-110; Peter Hedström and Petri Ylikoski, ‘Causal mechanisms in the social sciences’, *Annual review of sociology* 36 (2010), pp. 49-67.

government opposition outside the state's institutions. Both cases are considered 'tipping points' for Turkey's democratization as they constitute events that drastically changed the way in which both opposition to the status quo and the legitimacy of the ruling party were to be interpreted. This does not mean that I consider Gezi and the coup to be comparable instances of mobilization. Nor for that matter, do they appear to share overarching ideological or political goals, methods, or proposed solutions. Instead, the case studies are selected within their interpretation as part of a state response seeking to link them to broader evidence of conspiracy.

Simply put, I present the case studies of Gezi and the coup attempt as they exist in the framing of conspiracy, or, in the elite framing of their relative legitimacy vis-à-vis the status quo. In this, it is important to emphasize that both events, while of historic significance to the political destiny of Turkey, are here considered within their conceptualization as conspiratorial events. In other words, not as bona fide occurring social phenomena, but rather in their imagined forms in the state response thereto. This means that although the cases differ in crucial aspects, the way in which they have been integrated into a broader narrative of conspiratorial resistance makes them uniquely suited for an analysis of conspiratorial discursive practice. The fact that both were such seismic events makes them even more suitable, considering the radical difficulty of incorporating their import into any pre-existing hegemonic framing

process, which the events arose to resist in the first place. Below follows a short introduction to both the Gezi and the Coup cases.

How did the Gezi Protests start and unfold?

Gezi Park is not a particularly large park. Yet it occupies one of Istanbul's most visible public spaces, nestled adjacent to Taksim Square and Istiklal Avenue. As part of a broader redevelopment of the Taksim Square area, the municipality had received approval from the Government to begin reconstructing an Ottoman-style military barracks on the site of Gezi Park. Despite attempts to receive a court order to prevent the project, a relatively small group of activists persisted in their attempts to save the park. On May 27, bulldozers began tearing up the first trees on site. Research into the 'early' participants of the Gezi protests has indicated that the majority of participants were either 'veteran' activists, or 'locals' living close to the park.¹² Interestingly, the latter group identified as being otherwise non-political and unaware of broader socio-political issues. This would contradict the accusation that the 'initial' protestors were foreign conspirators. However it also suggests that the first protestors did not demonstrate the strong anti-governmental message that the movement would later adopt as its central message. This emphasis on public policy and a growing dissatisfaction with the AK party's social policy is one way in which it has been argued that Turkey should be considered as a unique

¹² Mert, Ayşem. "The trees in Gezi Park: environmental policy as the focus of democratic protests." *Journal of Environmental Policy & Planning* (2016): 1-15.

case, separate from the Arab Spring or the Occupy movements.¹³ It has also been suggested that the events of 2013 were the culmination of a longer governmental attempt to curb public protest, union mobilization (including the May Day protests) and opposition rallies.¹⁴ In addition, the theme of the proposed redevelopment project –that of a reconstructed Ottoman military barracks- is commonly cited as a unique feature of the Turkish protests; that is to say, the particular blend of resistance towards social policy, and the rejection of neo-ottoman and Islamist overtures in what Nikos Modouros has called ‘Turkey’s ‘social reality’.¹⁵ So already at the outset of the protests we can determine both a practical and a symbolic form of resistance, which becomes a key feature both in the exponential growth of the protests and the strongly antagonistic State response.

The first Gezi activists were able to delay the demolition of the park for some time. The next day, further activists, including students and members of the parliamentary opposition, joined them. Tents were erected, allowing the occupation, however small, to remain overnight. On the morning of the 29th of May, police violently attacked the protestors, seeking to put an end to the occupation. The images of police brutality went viral among Turkish social media users and sparked a surge of

¹³ Seckinelgin, Hakan. "Social policy and conflict: the Gezi Park–Taksim demonstrations and uses of social policy for reimagining Turkey." *Third World Quarterly* 37.2 (2016): 267.

¹⁴ Yörük, Erdem. "The long summer of Turkey: The Gezi uprising and its historical roots." *South Atlantic Quarterly* 113.2 (2014): 419-426.

¹⁵ Moudouros, Nikos. "Rethinking Islamic Hegemony in Turkey through Gezi Park." *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies* 16.2 (2014): 181-195.

popular support and drove hundreds to support the Gezi activists. This, in turn, elicited the first official response from then Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan, who denounced the protestors and announced his intentions to ‘clean’ supposed ‘terrorists’ out of Gezi Park. He also stood defiant against those in the EU who had expressed criticism of the violent police response, stating ‘who do you think you are? He also issued a ‘final warning’ to protestors and stated that Gezi Park belonged now to ‘occupying forces’ rather than ‘the people’.¹⁶ Similar to the US student protests against gun violence and the 2018 ‘Great March of Return’ in Gaza, the manner in which the protests were reported became itself an issue of contention. As Gezi protestors were vilified either as terrorists or accused of being foreign hired actors, the media contention surrounding Gezi rendered the movement in apocalyptic terms. As images of police violence spread further on social media, hundreds, thousands, and ultimately hundreds of thousands took to the streets occupying the area around Taksim Square, Gezi Park, and Istiklal Avenue, with barricades stretching to the neighborhood of Besiktas. As the local Gezi protests transformed into what some referred to as the “Gezi Commune”, fieldwork has shown that the protests went through four ‘stages’, evolving from (1) local resistance to neoliberal development policies; (2) the social and communicative formation of a Gezi ‘collective’; (3) the online mobilization of sympathizers and protests beyond Gezi; and finally (4) the

¹⁶ Paul Owen and David Batty, Turkey: Erdogan threatens to ‘clean’ Gezi Park of ‘terrorists’: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/middle-east-live/2013/jun/13/turkey-referendum-plan-mooted-as-erdo-an-sets-protesters-deadline-live-coverage> (Last accessed on 02.08.18.)

‘experimental’ alternative strategies by which the Gezi protestors organized life in the Gezi occupied space.¹⁷ The movement from a single-issue protest to a ‘mass’ revolt is commonly termed a ‘scale-shift’ in the social movement literature, and is not unique to the Turkish case.¹⁸

The protests quickly spread both throughout the city and across the country. In a dramatic march, thousands of protestors crossed the Bosphorus bridge in the early hours of June 1st and erected makeshift barricades along the waterfront. Similar uprisings occurred across the country, most notably in Turkey’s second-largest cities, Ankara and Izmir. As this point, Istanbul’s Sixth Administrative Court granted a stay of execution on the shopping-mall project, seemingly ceding a victory to the protestors. (However, an administrative court was to unanimously overturn the ruling shortly after¹⁹). But at this stage the uprising had already transformed into a nationwide movement against the ruling party, and no longer focused simply on the park.

Clashes continued day and night at Gezi Park, injuring nearly a thousand protestors and killing four. Yet in the interludes between fighting a community of activists began to emerge in the park, with Gezi taking on a festival atmosphere, including soup kitchens, libraries, and performances.

¹⁷ Farro, Antimo L., and Deniz Günce Demirhisar. "The Gezi Park movement: a Turkish experience of the twenty-first-century collective movements." *International Review of Sociology* 24.1 (2014): 176-189.

¹⁸ Mcadam et al. (2008) *Dynamics of Contention*, 331.

¹⁹ <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkish-court-annuls-stay-of-execution-on-istanbuls-gezi-park-construction-51164>

As more barricades were created by the protestors, Gezi seemed to be fully occupied, and the ‘Taksim commune’—in which food, drink, medicine (etc.) were shared collectively- emerged as a grassroots collective in the manner of the youth revolt of 1968, but inspired by contemporary anti-globalist, anarchist, anti-neoliberal movements (this lack of single origin is often cited as ‘evidence’ for the movement’s conspiratorial backing).²⁰ It is estimated that 16 percent (1.5 million) of Istanbul’s population joined the protests in the days that followed.²¹ In Izmir, for example, half a million people took to the streets.

Finally, on June 11th, police were able to retake the park, forcing protestors out in coordinated waves of assault, employing tear gas, water cannons and thousands of police officers, many of whom had been brought in from outside the city. Smaller protest continued throughout the city, as the Turkish Government began to round up those it suspected of leading or contributing to the proliferation of the protests. Both as a symbol and as a historical event, ‘Gezi’ lives on as a deeply polemical feature in Turkish (political) life. While the protests may not have resulted in a change of power, nor –perhaps- in the long term delay of future such development projects, the Gezi uprising radically shifting the narrative on

²⁰ Evren, Süreyya. "Gezi resistance in Istanbul: something in between Tahrir, occupy and a late Turkish 1968." *Anarchist Studies* 21.2 (2013): 7.

²¹

Turkey's democratic stability, and presenting an unprecedented challenge to Erdogan's model of a so-called 'New Turkey'.

Following the Gezi protests, the final casualty count had risen to eight. The final victim was 14 year-old Berkin Elvan, who was struck by a tear gas canister while walking near the protests, supposedly to buy bread for his family. As Berkin lay in a coma for nearly a year (268 days), the fight for his life became a symbol of the opposing Gezi narratives. For many he was the tragic victim of police brutality, whereas according to the pro-government press he had been a child manipulated by protestors for their purposes. The news of his death on March 11 sparked a further wave of small-scale demonstrations and renewed clashes with police. In addition to the eight civilians killed, 104 were seriously injured (The Guardian estimates that in total 8000 were injured) – 11 of them permanently losing their eyesight following excessive exposure to teargas and pepper spray – and police 5000 arrested during the month of June 2013. According to HRFT (Human Rights Foundation of Turkey) data, the initial arrests consisted of 3653 individuals, yet was brought down to 126 (by July 2013).²² However, since these are only the official accounts, the estimate (see above) is considered to be at least 5000. The charges brought include but are not limited to 'being a member of an illegal organization', 'sedition', and 'destroying public property'.

²² Fact Sheet: <https://www.fidh.org/en/region/europe-central-asia/turkey/fact-sheet-on-gezi-park-protests-13704>

It should also be noted that these numbers, when compared to the post-coup purges, appear significantly lower. In just nine months following the coup attempt, Turkish police arrested 110,000 individuals, with nearly half (50,000) being further held on official charges. The Turkish Medical Association estimated that 11155 people were directly exposed to chemical riot control agents (there has also been discussion of whether the Turkish police employed illegal chemical substances to make up for a deficit of available tear gas). At the time of writing, post-coup purges continue, with the website 'Turkey-purge.com' accumulating data since 2016.²³ The current estimate, as of July 22nd, 2018, is that since 2016 141,558 individuals have been detained, with a total of 170,372 dismissed from their professional positions (state officials, bureaucrats, teachers, academics). 80,147 have officially been charged, many of which fall under laws accusing them of conspiracy against the state. The government has also issued 31 decrees granting it special powers to persecute those it believes culpable for the coup attempt. In this thesis I attempt to demonstrate how this escalation can be seen as part of a broader escalation of an accusation of conspiracy and a strong persecution of dissent, beginning (in its current form) with the Gezi protests.

Who led Gezi and what were the decisions made?

²³ see: www.Turkeypurge.com

One of the key questions surrounding the Gezi protests was that of their leadership structures. And, perhaps in a more straightforward sense, who were its participants? The predominant critical interpretation of the Gezi protests, voiced for example by the Turkish scholar Caglar Keyder, was that the protests had resulted from a new middle class of Turkish society, predominately university-educated youth, demonstrating strong dissatisfaction with the AK party's neoliberal politics.²⁴ In other words, this was a largely class-based analysis. However, the class-oriented narrative – such as argued by the Turkish Marxist scholar Korkut Boratav, does not tell the full story.²⁵ While there may have been what he refers to as a 'mass class uprising', data suggests that the picture was a slightly more diverse and divergent one. If anything one might therefore consider separating the 'mass' and the 'class' components, to study on the one hand how such 'mass' groupings emerged, and to question subsequently what role 'class' had to play in this emergence.

In an attempt to investigate these various claims of a class or 'mass class' uprising, Erdem Yörük and Murat Yüksel have published a sequence of data-driven responses to the question of Gezi social formation.²⁶ The research was conducted to explore three basic questions: (1) who were the Gezi protestors, in the broadest sense of the word?; (2) What was their class composition (3) and finally, What was their ideology, or, in the terms of the social analysis: 'what ideology did they espouse'. Their

²⁴ Caglar Keyder

²⁵ Korkut Boratav

²⁶ Yörük New Left Review

definition of 'new middle class is' employs categories of the proletariat similar to those suggested by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, in 'Empire'.²⁷ The idea of the 'new middle class' as found in commentaries on Gezi is therefore summarized as the "non-manual formal proletariat (salaried technicians and white-collar employees), professionals (university-trained, salaried professionals in the public service and large or medium-sized private firms)". This means that the manual formal proletariat and the informal proletariat were largely considered outside this definition. What is also important to note, is that the initial goal was to test the social formation of Gezi against that of the general population of Istanbul and Izmir. So not just to look at protest participation, but also to reflect this back onto the overall urban population to test the idea of new and politically active middle class.

First, despite their relatively low participation, 'executives' (5%) and 'capitalists'(4) formed in by comparison a larger fraction of the protestors than they do in general society. In other words, by percentage, there were more 'elite' class participants in the protests than in society writ large. However, this should not obscure the fact that the large majority of participants were from the 'manual formal proletariat', i.e. working class (36%) followed by the non-manual proletariat (20%) and non-formal proletariat (18%) as well as the 'petty bourgeoisie' –a form of 'lower middle class' (11%) and professionals (6%). The conclusion of these initial

²⁷ Hardt, Michael, and Antonio Negri. *Empire*. Harvard University Press, 2001.

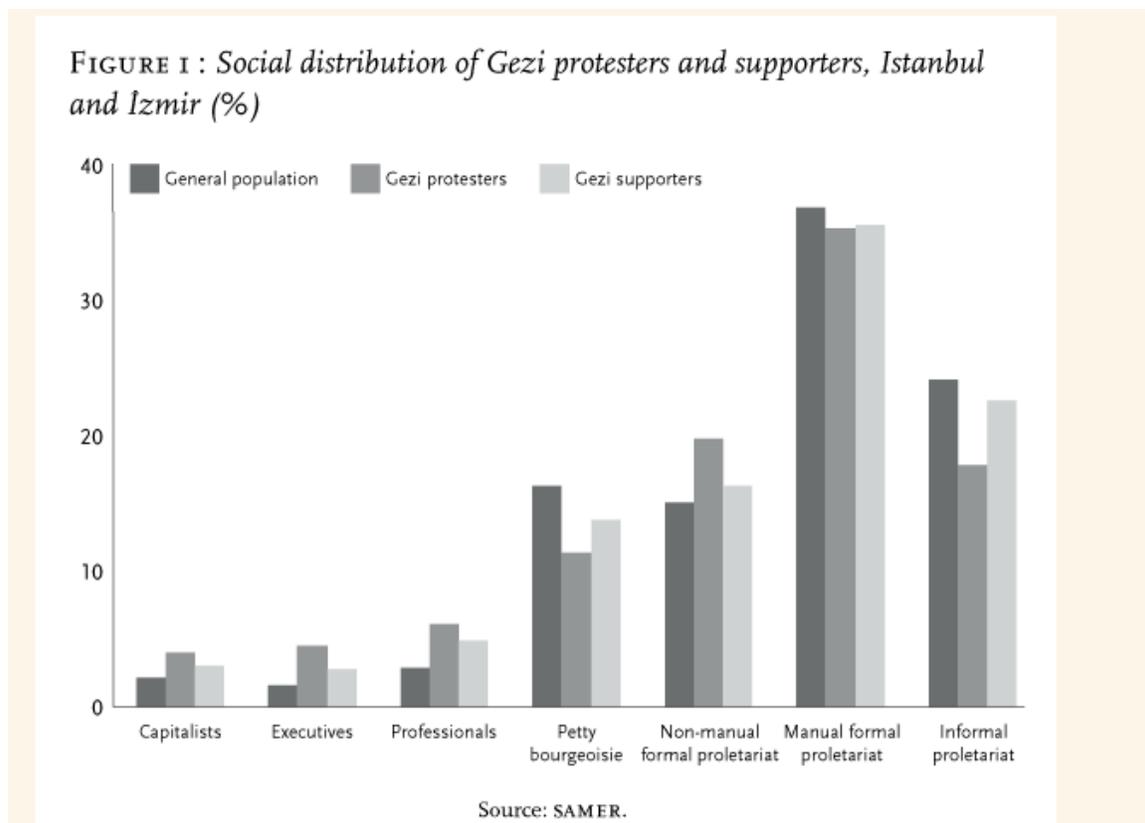
findings was therefore one that seemed to contradict the claim of a new middle class, with a higher rate of proletarian participation, although a relative high likelihood of 'elite' participation drawing from a smaller group. As Yöruk and Yüksel write:

“Adding the non-manual formal proletarians, i.e. white-collar employees and technicians, increases the proletarian participation rate to 74 per cent. At the same time, the upper classes had a higher representation among Gezi protesters than among the population as a whole: in other words, the likelihood of an individual having participated increased if he or she was from a higher class location. This does not, however, erase the fact that the absolute majority of protesters came from a proletarian background.”²⁸

When these findings were then analyzed strictly in terms of participation in the Gezi protests, the survey suggested that 31% of protestors conformed to the above definition of 'new middle class', whereas the majority (54%) were proletarian, 11% petty bourgeois and 4% capitalist. In other words, both in direct participation and in contrast to social formation in the city, there appeared to be no evidence to support the emergence of a new middle class theory. While the theory itself appears to be invalid, the emergence of the theory itself can be explained with the survey. After all, what emerged was that the middle class, in comparison to society at large, had a higher participation rate (the authors also

²⁸ Ibidem

speculate that since it is easier for non-working class participants to take time off, their support is more visible. Indeed, the findings suggest that while the majority of participants were working class, that compared to the overall population, there was a higher participation rate among the middle classes; therefore lending credence to the theory that these groups were newly politicized, although not larger or indeed entirely newly emergent compared to the proletariat.



Another popular conceptualization of the occurrence of the Gezi protests revolves around a tendency to compare it to the Arab Spring. Yet apart from the generalized narrative comparison in much of the Western media,

in which Turkey is seen as a participant to the Arab Spring by virtue of its majority Muslim population, the two ‘uprisings’ have rather less in common than one might think. However, there are two main points of convergence. First, there was a strong display of police violence, which led to an escalation of the initial protests. And secondly, both movements were marked by an emphasis on ‘networked’ grassroots mobilization through social media in a manner that suggested an innovation in popular mobilization strategies from the past.²⁹ However, when one examines the social formation of the Gezi protestors, it becomes apparent that the grievances, while perhaps linked to the global dissonance of neoliberal exploitation, nevertheless take on a distinctly ‘Turkish’ range of issues. For example, in their study ‘The Gezi Movement and the Networked Public Sphere’ Vatikiotis and Yörük argue that Gezi consisted of various intersecting socio-political grievances, for which the Gezi protests became an umbrella network.³⁰ They list these as being: “Labor and Oppressive Neo-Liberal Reconstruction, “Right to the City” and Green Activism, The Uprooted” Urban Poor and Youth Activism, Social Media Censorship and the Frustrated Youth, The Syrian Civil War, Sunni Authoritarianism, Selefi Terrorism, and the Alevi Identity, Soccer Fans, Women, LGBTT, and the Kurds.” On the other hand, one can make the following two counter-claims to these ‘unique’ facets in the Turkish case. First, the process by

²⁹ Ozturkcan, Selcen, et al. "An analysis of the Gezi Park social movement tweets." *Aslib Journal of Information Management* 69.4 (2017): 426-440.

³⁰ Vatikiotis, Pantelis, and Zafer F. Yörük. "Gezi Movement and the networked public sphere: A comparative analysis in global context." *Social Media+ Society* 2.3 (2016): 2056305116662184.

which Turkey became more repressive and hence less open to social mobilization and an embrace of the social sphere can be traced back to the period following the Arab Spring. Therefore, in an indirect sense, the protests might be considered a form of backlash to the internalization of the Arab Spring rather than a participatory feature. Secondly, if one examines the above categories, then it becomes apparent that their interrelation is precisely that of the limitation of social expression under the guise of continued urban growth. So this is not a direct challenge to an autocratic regime (such as in Tunisia), nor for that matter, a revolt against a corrupt and dictatorial leadership structure (Egypt), but rather a more contemporary display of dissent against the 'hidden' costs of Turkey's economic and democratic success story. In turn, these contentions were all played out under the relatively more visible (and binary) narrative of 'secular' versus religious social formations. Therefore the study concludes that,

“Overall, the Gezi uprising was a comprehensive expression of various existing and deepening antagonisms. Among them, the polarization between Islamism and secularism can be identified as the most visible of these antagonisms. Beneath this surface, however, there are a number of significant structural issues, including the consolidation of neoliberal policies, centralization of power (along with allegations of cronyism and

authoritarianism), urban gentrification and environmental destruction, and a neo-Ottoman shift of orientation in foreign affairs.”³¹

An alternative international comparison can be found in the movement’s affiliation with the so-called ‘occupy’ movements. While in this thesis I compare some of the challenges faced by the Gezi protestors with those of the 1968 youth movements in Western Europe, the most direct link to ‘Western’ social movements is evidently in the form of the ‘occupy’ slogan. The occupation of Gezi park, in its banners, slogans, and even early organizational identification sought to strongly align itself with the Occupy movement that began with the 2011 occupation of Zucotti park in New York city. The main point of convergence should however not be considered strictly speaking in terms of the ‘occupation’ of a public space. After all this was also the main feature of many of the Arab Spring protests, notably Tahrir Square in Cairo. Instead, research suggests that the overlap between Gezi and Occupy can be identified in the ways in which the organizational strategy developed as a post-68 ‘horizontal’ form of mobilization and communication. ‘Horizontal’ refers here to those forms of leadership that do not employ a top-down hierarchy, nor feature any one specific demand, goal, or policy change. This fluidity of the movement’s ‘intent’ becomes its central emancipatory feature, similar to the ‘cultural’ movement of the 1960s, in which the main slogan was

³¹ Ibidem, 6.

‘enough is enough’ (*Ca suffit*) and ‘be realistic, demand the impossible’ (*Soyez réalistes, demandez l'impossible*). This seemingly contradictory function, in which all forms of positivist or ‘productive’ change are dismissed in favor of a radical pluralism or a symbolic non-demand, can be seen as a wholesale rejection of the status quo, rather than as a specific grievance-oriented issue. In this sense, one can identify a similar overlap between the ‘spirit of 68’, European anti-globalization (and Leftist movements such as the Spanish *os Liberados*) in the Gezi refusal to be identified according to one specific demand. In particular, the Turkish activist collective ‘Academics for Peace’ has been vilified and persecuted for its open dissent towards the Turkish Government’s policies. In that regard, one might for example also think of how the group compares to ‘Pussy Riot’ in Russia. Although the two collectives differ greatly, they face similar challenges with regards to a conspiratorial state response in the wake of their relative popularity and impact in shaping Western opinions of their home countries. In this thesis I have sought to expand upon this notion to demonstrate how this ‘spirit’ makes the movement both vulnerable to accusations of conspiracy (what some researchers call ‘vilification as counter-mobilization), yet also strengthens it against being co-opted within the government it contests.

What was the broader societal support for Gezi, and what was the response to the accusation(s) of conspiracy theory?

It is interesting in this case to examine a mass survey conducted by KONDA on July 6-7, 2013, shortly after the Gezi protests. Among the many questions put to the 2629 participants, more than half responded that they believed Gezi to be the result of a plot against Turkey, rather than citizens demanding rights. However, when asked to identify who or what was exactly behind this foreign conspiracy, more than half of respondents could not point to a single country or actor. This allows for two interpretations. Either the notion of 'foreign conspirators' was simply a rhetorical trope invoked so frequently by Erdogan that it became a symbolic concept for a broader dismissal of the protests as illegitimate; or, on the other hand, the belief may well have been 'genuine' and that many people believed in a fully-fledged foreign operation to undermine Turkish influence. As I will suggest in my thesis, I believe that these two interpretations are not mutually exclusive, and may well in fact reinforce another in a dialectical sense: that is to say, that both the relevant legitimacy and 'foreign' influence of the Gezi protests are come to be considered entirely on the level of conspiracy rather than on the level of social resistance or political representation. One must also take into account that according to the survey 14,7% of respondents identified the protestors directly (as opposed to a general question as to what 'started' the protests) as 'foreign conspirators', and 4,2% identified the Gezi participants as traitors. This makes 'foreign conspirators' the third most frequent chosen response, ahead of –for example- 'youth' or

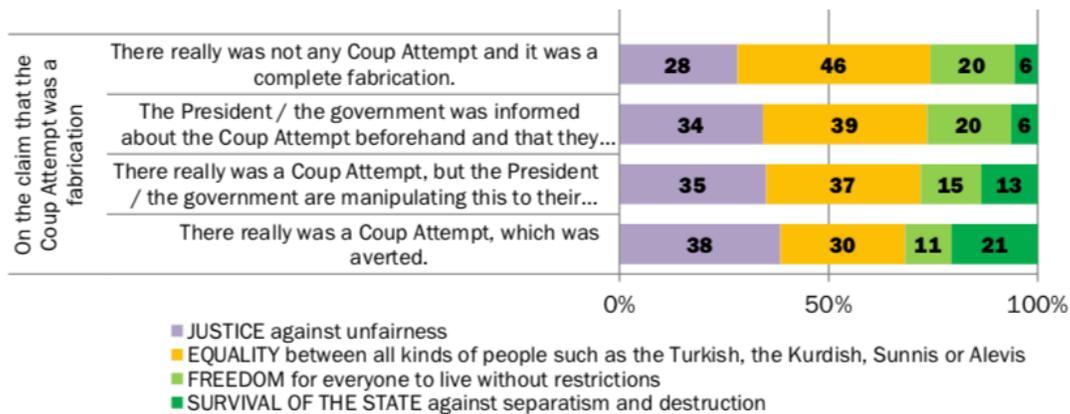
‘environmentalists’. (The most frequent response was ‘citizens demanding their rights (30,6%) and ‘AK party opponents (22,4%)’). Below I have included the two most relevant graphs from the KONDA Gezi survey appertaining to conspiracy theory.

Since the beginning of the Gezi protests, the government and the Prime Minister have been using the expression 'foreign conspirators'. Who do you think the 'foreign conspirators' are? Who are included in this group? Can you briefly identify?	Percentage
U.S.	7.8
U.S., Israel	3.5
Israel	3.7
European countries	3.8
Foreign countries	14.1
Foreign conspirators	6.6
Domestic powers	11.6
Opponents/enemies of Turkey	1.9
Other	5.2
There is no such thing as foreign conspirators	6.6
I do not know	8.6
No answer	26.6
Total	100

There is an interesting distinction here between the decision to (1) refrain from answering; (2) to declare ‘I do not know’; and (3) to declare that there were no foreign conspirators. First, this suggests a high level of doubt and ambiguity as to the possibility of foreign conspirators. It is possible that those who did not respond at all did not want to contradict Erdogan, but this cannot be proven based on the data alone. There also appears to be a strong belief in a domestic plot to destabilize Turkey. By

and large, however, the second most popular response is to identify ‘foreign countries’ as those who are meant by the expression ‘foreign conspirators’. This, however, is also where a problem in the survey becomes apparent, in particular with regards to the way in which the question is framed. After all, the question ‘Who do you think the ‘foreign conspirators are’?’ does not inquire into the personal conspiratorial beliefs of the respondents themselves, but rather asks them to ‘define’ what is meant when Erdogan uses the ‘expression’ foreign conspirators. Still, when compared to the response to the coup (see following section), it is apparent that a much larger segment of the respondents identified Gezi as a foreign conspiracy, relative to how many considered the coup a false-flag attempt. This suggests at the very least that accusations of conspiracy are not strictly speaking the majority opinion, but that they are largely dependent on political polarization. As a final note, the dominant conspiratorial interpretation of the coup attempt is not one that finds foreign conspirators at fault, but rather points towards the suspicion (or paranoia) that the Turkish Government itself had orchestrated the coup. So we see here an interesting mirroring effect between a certain level of ‘political convenience’ for the ruling party in the coup (distasteful as this may seem in light of the coup fatalities) and the political inconvenience of the Gezi protests.

The final questions posed by the coup survey revolve around shifting attitudes towards political freedoms. In light of conspiratorial interpretations of the coup, these show an interesting trend towards those who believe the false-flag theory and more liberal interpretations of the State, and more conservative emphasis on ‘justice’ among those who do not adhere to a conspiratorial interpretation of the coup. See, for example, the graph below:



This demonstrates that those who adhere to the conspiratorial option (‘the coup was a complete fabrication’) also emphasize the necessity of equality (a key characteristic of the liberal attitude to society), and that those who think there was no conspiracy whatsoever other than the coup itself, emphasize ‘justice’. This is also the group that features the highest response rate for the ‘survival of the State’ option. The emphasis here on justice and state power lends credence to the notion that the conspiratorial view –or lack thereof- is here strongly associated with

support of the AK party (The link between the justice for the coup and the justice contained within the name of the party being an additional semantic overlap).

While these results evidently do not tell the whole story of how the coup was organized, and what it means for the future of Turkish democracy, I believe that the survey gives us insight into at least two significant factors, which in turn have bearing upon the notion of conspiracy theory. First, the results suggest that one of the central narratives of the protests has been largely overlooked, and this is the extent to which religious (grassroots) mobilization motivated the people's resistance to the coup. Secondly, although somewhat less surprising, is the indication that the coup was interpreted along strongly polarized lines, with AK party supporters championing the notion of a peoples resistance movement, and opposition parties favoring conspiratorial interpretations. While the survey cannot tell us this, I think it reasonable to suggest that this polarization increased due to the State response to the Gezi protests. In the main body of the thesis I will further contrast the shift that occurs between the Gezi mobilization and the anti-coup mobilization as an evolving 'spirit' of social resistance.

How did the coup emerge/unfold?

Among the many contradictions of the July 15, 2016 coup attempt in Turkey, one must stand out in tragic detail. Of all the coups in Turkey it was the most bloody, despite –or perhaps because of- its immanent failure to create a surge of public momentum in its favor.

The opening moments of the coup began just before ten p.m. on Friday the 16th of July. The first assault came in the form of Turkish Air Force jets, flying low over Ankara. In Istanbul several tanks blocked bridges between the European and Asian sides of the city. Meanwhile, foot soldiers conducted raids on various military targets. Most notably, they took the General Staff headquarters in Ankara, as well as a special police force base outside the capital. Various civilian areas were also targeted, including Istanbul's Atatürk Airport and City hall. As part of an attempt to take over the media, soldiers briefly seized the public broadcasting station and various other facilities related to telecommunications and Turkish satellite systems.

The coup attempt went live around 10 p.m. (all times are local) on Friday, 15 July 2016. At that hour, Turkish Air Force fighter jets took to the skies over Ankara while, 325 kilometers to the west, tanks of the Turkish Army stopped traffic on the bridges that tie together the European and Asian portions of Istanbul. The putschists launched simultaneous raids aimed at seizing a number of key objectives. These included the General Staff

Headquarters in Ankara plus the police special-forces base at Gölbaşı near the capital. Also targeted for takeover were military high schools, Istanbul's Ataturk Airport and city hall, the national public-broadcasting station, and facilities critical to controlling the national telecommunications and satellite systems.

Within an hour Prime Minister Binali Yıldırım made an official televised statement, denouncing the coup. As Erdogan did not appear in the recording there was much initial speculation as to his whereabouts (from which, in turn, stemmed various conspiracy theories). An hour later, shortly after midnight, first images of Erdogan emerged, recorded on the mobile video application 'face time'. In his statement, apparently recorded from an airplane, he accused the Turkish armed forces of being led by the cleric Fetullah Gülen in a Gülenist plot to 'invade' Turkey. (The term invade here resonates with the fact that Gülen himself lives in self-imposed exile in the United States). In addition, Erdogan made a public appeal to the Turkish people to take to the streets and to fight the coup attempt. As a result, thousands of government loyalists took to the street, risking their lives to oppose the tanks and armed soldiers. 173 civilians died in these skirmishes. However, indiscriminate violence occurred on both sides, with images –for example- emerging of Turkish civilians beheading a soldier participating in the coup. Equally graphic images were broadcast on various media, showing the mutilated bodies of civilians who had died in

the assault. In the final moments of the coup attempt, further military escalation followed, with jets attacking the national parliament and dropping bombs on the National Intelligence Agency. In the early hours of July 17th, the coup attempt came to an end, with many of the remaining participants surrendering. In the following days coup-soldiers were reported to have been beaten, starved and sexually assaulted. In all respects the coup was among the most deadly and chaotic instance of violent escalation in Turkey's modern history. This, in turn, has contributed to the difficulty posed by seeking to interpret the conditions that gave rise to its emergence, and indeed, its execution.

One of the factors that contributed to the confusion as to the culprits of the coup was the apparent lack of any unified leadership. Nor, for that matter, was there a single figure to emerge who declared the coup on television, social media, or radio. The only statement to be released came shortly after the seizure of the public broadcasting station. In the name of the so-called 'Peace at Home Council' (itself a reference to Kemal Ataturk's mantra of 'Peace at Home, Peace in the World') a group of soldiers read out a written statement accusing the Government of failing to combat terrorism as well as citing its disregard of the constitution and the courts. While Erdogan was not named directly, they accused the Turkish political leadership of corruption, and promised to initiate constitutional and legal reforms. At gunpoint, the Turkish broadcaster

Tijen Karas was made to announce the new governing council of Turkey. The council, however, never made any further proclamations, nor did it take power, following the failure of the coup attempt. The lack of clarity as to the leaders of the council has since led to speculation –for which there is no evidence- that the coup attempt was staged by the AK party to consolidate existing power. On the other hand, the overtones in the statement to Ataturk’s ‘Statement to Youth’ has led alternately to interpretations that this was to obscure a Gülenist agenda; or, for that matter, to argue that the coup was not Gülenist. As with so many conspiracy theories in Turkey, the evidence is sufficiently scant so as to allow for either interpretation. The government account, despite being contradicted by European intelligence agencies, continues to be that Fettulah Gülen organized the coup. However, as no evidence to the contrary has emerged, and indeed various members of the coup (see the following section on leadership) were Gülenists, we still cannot say with any certainty who masterminded the coup attempt.

That being said, for the purposes of this thesis, three factors of the coup are directly relevant to the topic of conspiracy theory. First, the significant mobilization of populist counter-coup forces is considered as a unique characteristic of the 2016 coup attempt. Indeed one of the most notable reasons why the coup appeared to fail was this wave of popular resistance by civilian forces. Secondly, the very fact that the coup has

remained so poorly interpreted –indeed the fact that it resists interpretation- has resulted in the proliferation of both a conspiratorial State response and very harsh counter-measures, commonly referred to as a ‘purge’ of military, governmental and civilian institutions in Turkey. Finally, when seen in the light of Gezi (but as I shall argue, not directly ‘comparable’ to Gezi) the State response to the coup continues a form of challenges to (a) the notion of the necessity/contingency of popular resistance, (b) the idea of conspiratorial forces seeking to undermine Turkey from within and without, and finally (c) the way in which the AK party has sought to create a form of anti-revolutionary momentum, by which consolidate its powers in a distinctly revolutionary (that is to say, non-consensual and non-traditional) manner of its own.

Who were the coup leaders and what were the decisions made?

The question of leadership during the military coup, its relative lack of coherent messaging or coordination, as well as the ongoing accusations against the Gülenist Fetö organization, have led to an unprecedented amount of confusion regarding the organization of the coup attempt. Shortly after the coup, the Government released reports that accused a group of senior military figures –including both active and retired generals- as well as lieutenants were responsible for the kidnapping and removal of several senior general loyal to the Government. The most significant

attribute of these reports was that they suggested that the military was internally divided. In addition, the Government ordered the arrest of 2,839 military officials on July 16th, the morning after the coup attempt. (The speed at which the government ordered these arrests has since led to conspiratorial musing regarding the origins, and specifically the date at which this list was drawn up, leading some to believe that the Government had anticipated making these arrests in advance). The most senior member to be named directly was General Adem Huduti and Major General Avni Angun. Another individual to be singled out as a leader was the former Air force commander General Akin Öztürk, who initially is reported to have alternately (or either, depending on what one believes) to have confessed to being the mastermind behind the coup, or, to have been on the airbase by accident visiting his grandchildren and son-in-law who were stationed there.

While I do not intend to provide an in-depth account of the criminal proceedings that followed, I do want to address three points which I believe are pertinent to understanding the role the coup has played apropos conspiracy theory and political decision-making conducted under the rhetorical umbrella thereof. In this it might be useful to think of Ian Angus' notion of rhetoric as the 'ceremonial confirmation of the institution through the saying. In particular, the way in which the State responded to a 'genuine' conspiratorial event -i.e.- the coup was to emphasize the importance of the popular mobilization and the public response to the

coup attempt. In this, the rhetoric was the exact opposite of the response to the Gezi protests. Here, the rapid mobilization of protestors was touted as evidence of a historic popular sensibility in favor of the Government, and indeed of Turkish democracy. Soon, however, more details of the counter-coup mobilization began to emerge.

For example, reports emerged that the Turkish Directorate of Religious Affairs (Diyanet) had issued an order for minarets to broadcast a message urging people to take to the streets. The conflict with the military was here directly phrased as being that of a religious confrontation with non-believers. In a subsequent statement the head of Diyanet declared the coup plotters to have enacted ‘the greatest betrayal of our exalted religion’.³² Furthermore, once the coup attempt had ended, Prime Minister Yildirim addressed the civilian protestors (and vigilantes), urging them that their work was not done, and to keep fighting to democracy, in what he called a ‘democracy-vigil’. Perhaps the problem here begins with referring to these groups as ‘protestors’. What exactly were they protesting? Or were they simply groups of vigilantes mobilized by the government to engage in a pitched battle with the military? The answer, I would say, lies somewhere in the middle as needs to be seen in the context of the Gezi legacy. For example, as pro-Government protestors took to Kizilay Square on July 16th, the contextual knowledge required to understand the symbolism of this act, is that the square had been off limits for public

³² https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2016/07/21/popular-mobilizations-dark-side-against-turkeys-coup/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.a73e2107bb99

gatherings since the Gezi protests. Popular hash tags such as #nobetteyiz (we are on vigil) were reappropriated from the Gezi protests, and in Yildirim's' speech he made various linkages between the fight against the military and the fight against 'hooligans' and 'terrorists' similar to the way in which the Gezi protestors had been described. Perhaps the most extreme message came in the form of a massive banner on the Ataturk cultural center adjacent to Taksim Square (also a site from which Gezi protestors hung banners) alluding to Gülen as 'Dog of Satan' and 'We will hang you and your dogs by your own leashes.'

Challenging the notion that most post-Arab Spring grassroots efforts consist of secular mobilization, a group of researchers published a study in foreign affairs, in which they mapped the way in which mosques across Istanbul had coordinated a response to the coup. Interestingly, their study also showed that much of this mobilization was seemingly spontaneous, thereby suggesting that the religious community in Turkey –and indeed the religious leadership- felt strongly that supporting the government and resisting the military to be in their favor. This suggests that the AK party's pro-Islamic message has been firmly rooted within the leadership structures of the Islamic community in Turkey. This also contradicts the idea that Erdogan and Yildirim were personally responsible for the mass anti-coup mobilization, rather fanning on the flames than igniting them. The mapping research –combined with data from a KONDA poll- also demonstrated that those areas with the highest concentration of Mosques

saw the highest level of participation in the anti-coup demonstrations. This does not mean that the men who went to fight the soldiers were radical extremists, but it does suggest that the confrontation between the coup and the ‘protestors’ was a fight tinted by secularism versus religiosity, not just a statement of pro-or anti-Government sympathies. Soner Capagtay, writer and expert on Turkey described the coup as the ‘victory of the digital age over an analogue coup’, but it seems that the response to the coup may itself have benefitted precisely from a particular blend of analog and digital technologies, calling both upon pre-existing social formations, communication and new online communities to spread the call to the streets of Istanbul and Ankara.

What was the broader participation and societal support for the coup, in particular with regards to accusations of conspiracy?

Again I would refer here to a subsequent (yet separate) KONDA survey, in which 2676 face-to-face interviews were conducted across 160 neighborhoods and villages across Turkey following the coup attempt. The survey was conducted three weeks following the coup attempt and sought to explain what people’s opinions and beliefs were regarding the ‘reality’ of the coup attempt, what their perceived role of the public is/was in preventing coups, and whether or not they expected a future coup attempt. The results were in turn categorized according to education,

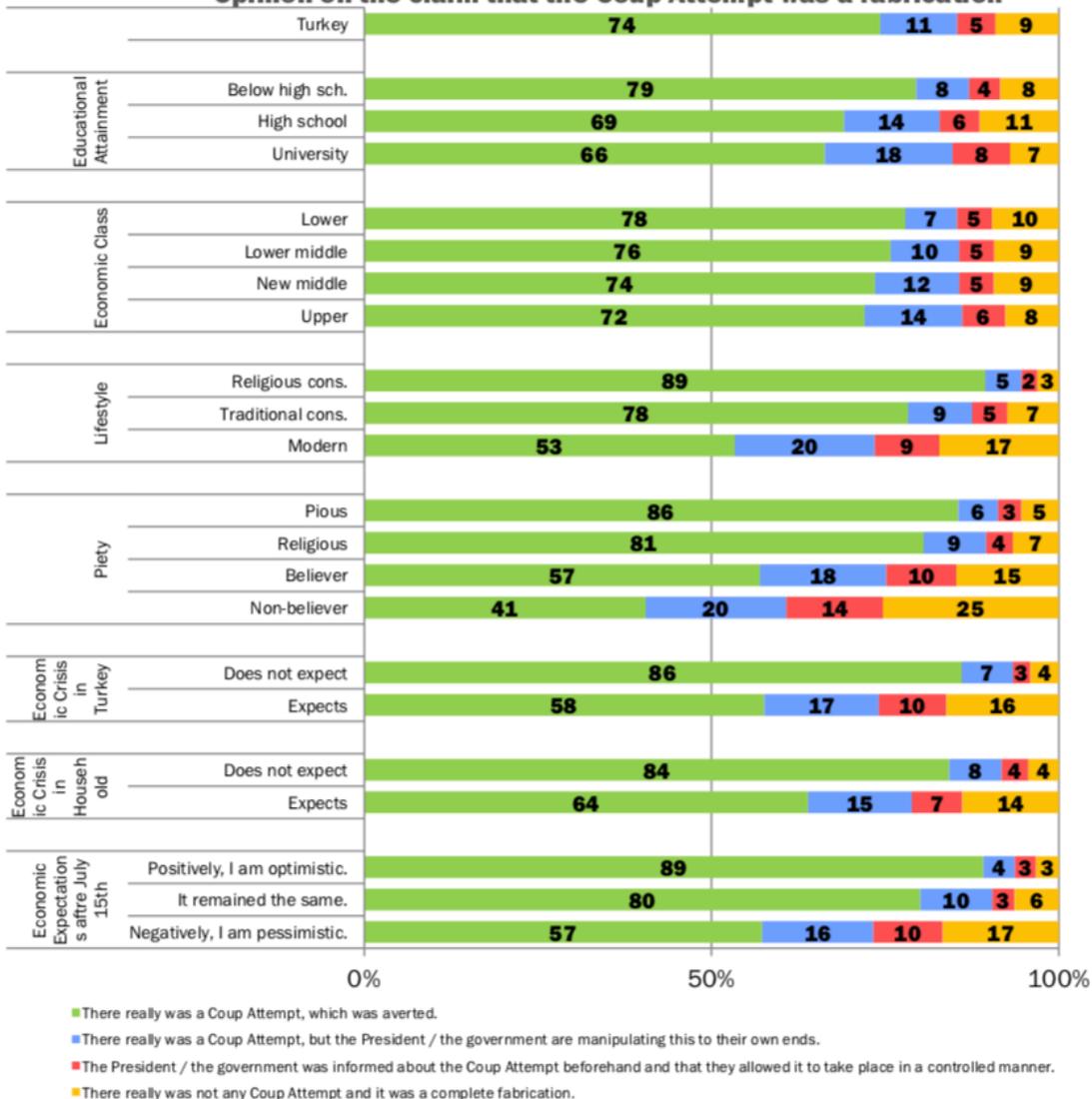
income, religion, and party-affiliation. The results were striking, leading researchers to identify that a majority of interview participants believes that the people should be the primary force to resist coup attempts (note that 50% of respondents did not take to the streets during or after the coup) and protect democracy in Turkey, as well as suggesting that the most conspiratorial interpretations of the coup (in other words, that the event was fabricated by the Government) existed among non-religious, mostly HDP voting individuals. In contrast, 85% of interviewees stated that they were AK party voters. Seeming to contradict the findings from the Foreign Affairs article, only 2,2% of respondents said that they had heard of the coup through mosques. Although this could be due to the fact that they heard the news first on television, and subsequently heard the mosques' call to action. Although 27% claimed to have taken to the streets before Erdogan made the public call to action. This, in turn, seems to confirm the Foreign Affairs report, and suggests again the importance of non-governmental mobilization. It also suggested a limited initial response through social media, with only 8,8 of respondents claiming to have seen the news first on social media. This differs starkly from the Gezi protests – which KONDA researched as well- in which most of the initial reports surfaced online rather than on (state) television. In the response to the coup however, 65% of respondents said they had first heard about the coup on television. One might also speculate that this high rate is due to the coup occurring at night, when there is a higher TV-audience. In fact,

an overwhelming percentage of respondents (77,6%) said they had followed the events on television, whereas only 10,3% said they had followed it primarily on social media. This suggests a difference with the Gezi protests, which following the governmental media-ban were largely followed online. Interestingly, the report also demonstrated that a vast majority of people who had taken to the streets (77,4%) claimed to have never participated in any protests or demonstrations prior to the coup. (Although the report does not confirm this, it does suggest that the coup signaled an unusual surge in otherwise non-political, conservative participants; thereby lending credence to the notion that the response was largely organized as a religious resistance to the coup.)

For the purposes of this thesis the most interesting aspect of the data is that revolving around the different interpretations of culpability in the coup attempt, in particular those that are conspiratorial interpretations. In other words, these are conspiratorial interpretations of a conspiratorial event. The question of culpability is therefore one of whether the coup was a 'real' conspiracy, or a false-flag initiative of the Government. In their question, the respondents were also offered a middle ground answer, which suggested that the Government may have known in advance of the coup attempt and did not act to prevent it, or alternately, that it was taken by surprise but used the coup to its advantage (this option was chosen most frequently by university students). The overall results showed that 74% believe that the coup was a 'real' uprising. 11,1%

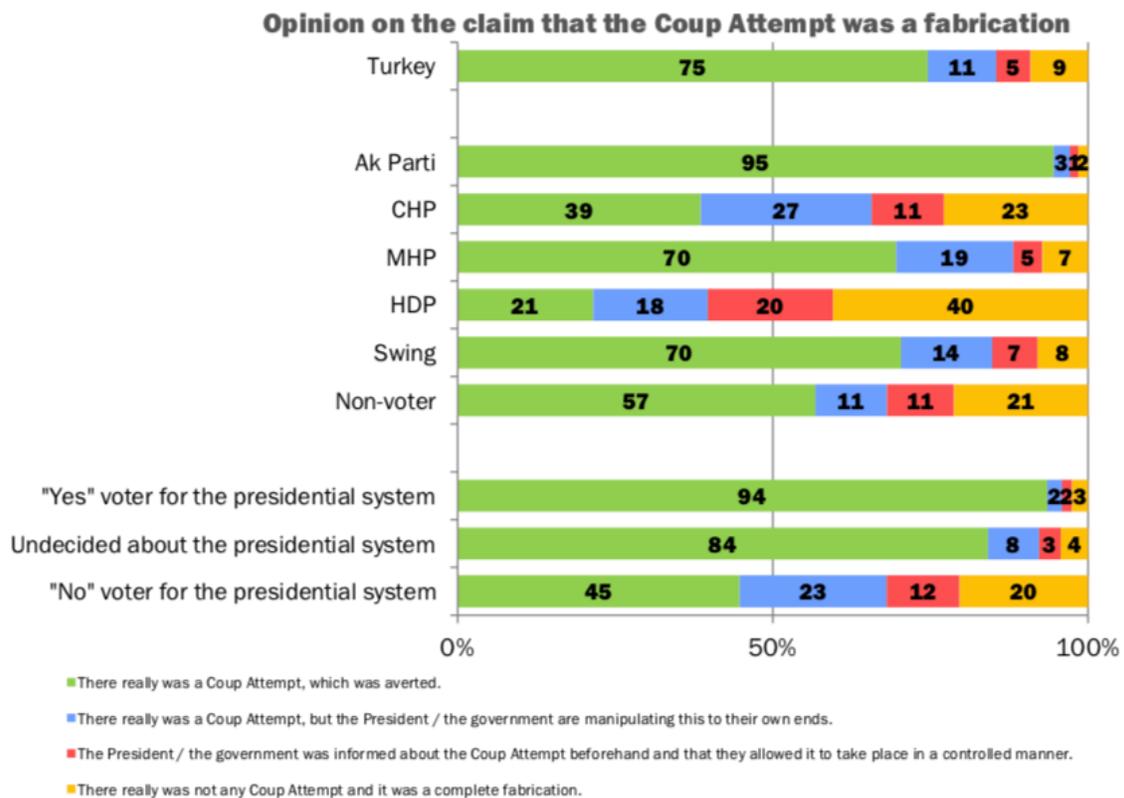
responded that the coup was real but that the Government had manipulated it to their own ends. In third place, 9,2% believed the coup attempt was a complete fabrication, and the remaining 5,5 percent believed that the Government had advance warning of the coup yet had chosen not to act to prevent it. Below is a graph from the study detailing the response partitions appertaining to the belief in whether or not the coup was a fabrication.

Opinion on the claim that the Coup Attempt was a fabrication



The chart suggests an overlap between secularism and conspiratorial belief. That is to say, the largest demographic that exhibited a completely conspiratorial interpretation of the coup was among those who described themselves as ‘non-believers’. In turn, this belief resonated also with strongly pessimistic views about the economic situation in Turkey. The

educational spread is fairly equal, yet suggesting a slight propensity among high-school students to adhere to a conspiratorial interpretation of the events. We can also see that the most paranoid, or let us say ‘critical’ interpretations of the coup come from those categorized under a ‘modern’ lifestyle, whereas religious conservatives cite the most certain attitude towards the coup and display the most optimism about Turkey’s economic stability. This is not strictly speaking surprising, but demonstrates some interesting results, when the question is further detailed into party-affiliation (see below):



In this chart we can identify a strong spread of suspicion regarding the coup primarily among non-voters and the political opposition (CHP, HDP).

The extreme outlier is here the faction of HDP voters, who have the most strongly conspiratorial interpretation of the coup. It seems also that this suspicion fuels those voters who are against the introduction of the presidential system, with a small majority claiming to have suspicions regarding the role of the Government in the coup. When measured for geographic spread, the survey result also “confirms that responses that reflect a critical opinion speak to a different social base and are located away from the region where the majority of society are present.” This means that the accusation of conspiracy functions as an indicator of polarization across a broad variety of issues, which the KONTA report indicates could also be used to “to measure political polarization, questions on subjects such as opinions on the Ergenekon trial or the Gezi protests, as well as the evaluations on the general state of affairs in the country.”

Beyond Erdogan: Moving towards systemic considerations of elite framing rather than polemical accusations

Defiant in the face of unprecedented popular challenges, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has emerged as a populist and innovative, yet equally polarizing and enigmatic, political leader. Under his leadership, political crackdowns and nationwide purges of public institutions, higher education and the civil service have sown the confusion surrounding legitimate versus illegitimate resistance to the status quo. Commentators express

growing concern for the vitality of Turkish democracy, pointing towards a deteriorating record on civil liberties and human rights, increasingly authoritarian leadership, and the unstable prospects for continued economic growth.

Many attribute these issues specifically to Erdoğan's distinctive leadership style. Both friend of the people, and pursuer of perceived enemies, his distinctive political persona is one that cultivates opponents and allies both real and imagined. As such, there exists an understandable propensity in the academic literature towards focusing on Erdoğan as the chief culprit for Turkey's political turmoil.³³ While Erdoğan is indeed central to the popularization and successful exploitation of paranoid politics in Turkey today, this thesis argues instead that conspiratorial rhetoric and political framing of narratives of conspiracy warrant a much more systemic, and indeed holistic, analysis of what is essentially a system of contentions and contradictions appertaining to the idea of the friend/enemy in Turkish democracy amidst its uncertain future. This means that the changing way in which conspiratorial discourse in contemporary Turkey situates the 'conspiratorial Other' as inherently part of the 'in-group' of Turkish politics, rather than as an external other,

³³ Soner Cagaptay, *The New Sultan: Erdoğan and the Crisis of Modern Turkey* (London, 2017).; Halil Caraveli, 'Erdoğan's Journey: Conservatism and Authoritarianism in Turkey', *Foreign Affairs* 121 (2016); Heper, Metin, and Şule Toktaş. 'Islam, modernity, and democracy in contemporary Turkey: The case of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan' *The Muslim World* 93.2 (2003), pp.157-185.

suggests the formation of new discursive practices beyond mere adversarial or paranoid framing.

The thesis makes the case that the experience of Turkish democracy in its current guise cannot, and should not, be boiled down to the theatrics of one antagonistic leader, no matter how contentious. Instead, the thesis suggests a critical reading of the impact and forces brought to bear through, in reference to, and deriving from conspiracy theory. Or, to be precise, the thesis juxtaposes the academic literature theory on conspiracy theory with the political impact of conspiracy theory in contemporary Turkish politics as evidenced by the post-Gezi and post-coup elite framing strategies.

That is to say, I use the case studies to examine the extent to which such framing can be seen as symptomatic, and indeed strategic, of the Turkish state response to opposition and the consolidation of increasing powers both democratic and autocratic in nature. The thesis provides an urgent yet balanced account of the escalating tensions in Erdoğan's 'New Turkey' by focusing on paranoid politicians, conspiracy theories, inside agitators, and accused coup-plotters, activists, academics, and journalists. The goal is to explore the relative merits, or lack thereof, of the discussion of conspiracy theory in Turkey, and to contrast both the resistance and pro-government interpretations of the post-Gezi and post-Coup Turkish political experiment within a critical discussion of the role of conspiracy theory in Turkish politics.

In Turkey, where it has become difficult to distinguish fact from fiction, allies from enemies, and democracy from autocracy, the rise of conspiracy theory in Turkish political rhetoric is readily apparent. This, however also makes it difficult to identify what type of data can be collected on such conspiratorial discourse.

That is to say, to understand whether or not Turkish democracy can evade the clutches of a paranoid politics and what has popularly come to be known as a 'post-truth' politics (although the term remains problematically ill-defined), we must first question the ideas, fears, hopes and dreams with which such a politics is either sustained or combated. In this thesis I set out to provide a critical and comprehensive framework of the processes of conspiracy theory in Turkey today, so as to lay the groundwork for a better understanding of the impact of real versus non-real political narratives, and in turn, to provide those seeking to understand, negotiate, and facilitate Turkey's integration within the wider international community with a toolkit of sorts by which to make better sense of Turkey's oftentimes fantastical political rhetoric.

The geopolitical dimensions of Gezi and the Coup

The rapid rate at which Turkey has reverted from being a model of democratization towards a more authoritarian society, has been dubbed

the Turkish 'exit' from democracy.³⁴ This raises an interesting question regarding the manner in which the notion of 'democracy' functions in Turkish politics today. Is it simply a matter of leaving democracy behind, or is there something integral to the democratic process itself that allows for a certain type of manipulation characterized by Erdogan's paranoid brand of populist politics? The question is also whether Turkey presents a special case, or whether the erosion of democratic norms and the rise of conspiratorial and paranoid interpretations of politics simply conforms to a wider, perhaps global, trend in neo-liberal political societies; societies which have become increasingly decentralized, focused on the entrepreneurial and individualized attitude towards self-fulfillment and the competitive pursuit of non-communitarian advantage(s).

The term 'exit' is employed most commonly to describe the process of departure from democratic norms following the 'repeat elections' of November 2016. Specifically, the AK party failed in regular elections to secure a majority or to form a coalition. During this period, between June and November, Turkey did not form a government and the time was marked by increased violence and attacks both in the Eastern provinces and against the HDP. This led to a resurgence of conflict with the PKK (Kurdistan Worker's Party) and a stronger focus by Erdogan both internal and external enemies (indeed, this occurred during the continuing State of Emergency, which ended only in July 2018). Supporting the AK party, now

President Erdogan declared that only he could keep Turkey safe. In the subsequent November (re)elections the AK party secured a sufficient majority for a one-party rule. Today, of course, it is more apt to refer to a more permanent Turkish 'exit' in light of the 2017 referendum that granted Erdogan unprecedented powers to change the constitution, effectively rendering the country a Presidential system that allows the President, among other things, to appoint members of the judiciary and sign executive orders into law.

The idea of the Turkish model as a geopolitical project –rather than just a rhetorical device- suggests that there are specific instances in which Turkey stands out as an exemplary case. According to Kerem Öktem and Karabekir Akkoyunlu, Turkey does correspond to broader challenges that fall within the critique of neo-liberalism (such as the erosion of democratic norms under the auspices of free speech and rightwing populism), but that these are subject to two unique conditions: The first regards what they call 'the conduct of a revisionist project of regime change', or, in other words, the ideological component underlying a deliberate campaign towards the consolidation of elite power in Turkey. And the second is that of Turkey's 'fluid' geopolitical environment, that both weakens and strengthens the government's capacity to consolidate such power.³⁵ This second category falls within a broader trend in so-called 'critical

³⁵ Öktem, Kerem, and Karabekir Akkoyunlu. "Exit from Democracy: Illiberal Governance in Turkey and Beyond." (2016); 469-480.

geopolitical studies’, that reads geopolitics as a form of discourse.³⁶

Consider, for example, Leslie Hepple’s interpretation of the narrative force wielded by means of geopolitics. Choosing to read geopolitics as a ‘text’, she argues that, ‘the texts of geopolitical discourse are not free-floating, innocent contributions to an ‘objective’ knowledge.³⁷ The element of ‘knowledge production’ suggests here a potential link between the way in which paranoid and conspiratorial narratives are formed, and the manner in which the (Turkish) State can employ them to fit, or draw inspiration from, geopolitical prejudices and contradictions; for example, between that of both a European and Ottoman Turkey, an Islamic and Modern Turkey, and more recently, a democratic yet autocratic Turkey.

To stay for a moment with Hepple -and this falls within a wider critical ‘revival’ of geopolitics in the post Cold-War environ, in which a particularly counter-intuitive danger emerges- ‘geopolitics always risk having the subject’s past used against them’ writes Hepple, inferring that, for example, while Americans may well see in the future of geopolitics evidence for the ‘end of history’, the Russian perspective regards it as a potential return, and a token of legitimacy, by which to restore its perceived historical significance. In this sense, geopolitics always blends the old with the new, mythology with the creation of knowledge, and risks confusing historical agency with manifest destiny. What this means is that

³⁶ discourse (Campbell 1992, Ó Tuathail & Agnew 1992; Hepple 1992).

³⁷ Hepple, 139

one way to understand the strong contradictory dynamic of accusations of conspiracy theory –for example in Turkey- is to see this as an extension of the same sort of mythologizing to which geopolitics becomes subject; a narrative in which Turkey is both inside and outside, and both victim and victor. The idea of historical purpose becomes legitimized through an institutionalized form of knowledge in turn derived from systematizing certain geopolitical narratives, as well as conspiratorial forms of historical thinking commonly referred to as the Sevres-Syndrome.

This, in turn, can be seen to have bearing on the coup attempt, as the Turkish military is seen as integrally linked to the way in which Turkish society blends narratives of civil society and democracy with the geopolitical resonance of its role towards its neighbors, notably in the Middle East. Geopolitics therefore functions as a means by which the military can make a claim to a special perspective on statecraft, rather than just being employed to protect the borders. The overlap between the production of knowledge and the military institutions is particularly evident in the realm of geopolitics in Turkey, with the majority of the early geopolitical literature stemming from either military outlets or authors with a background in the military.³⁸ It is also vital to understand the way in which the Turkish military considers itself through this form of knowledge production as the ‘protector’ and guarantor of Turkish democracy, both to

³⁸ The authors mentioned above are all published through military outlets. (Bilge 1959; Eren 1964; Turfan 1965; Öngör 1963) Since then the literature has developed much further, with notable authors including İlhan 1971/2002, Sezgin & Yılmaz, Tarakci 2003, Tezkan 2000),

understand the coup attempt, as well as to see how it differs from Turkey's previous coups. To make an even stronger connection between the critical study of geopolitics and the 'politics of truth' in the Foucauldian conception of power/knowledge or Walker's 'inside/outside', one might therefore cite Pinar Bilgin's work, on the employment of 'geopolitical truths' in Turkey to justify strongman tactics as necessary for the survival of Turkish sovereignty.³⁹

When one views the political narratives of the Gezi protestors, there is an attempt to provide a counter-form of geopolitical narrative, or resistance, that revolves around more emancipatory models of 'Turkishness'.

Consider, for example, that research has demonstrated that half of the Gezi demonstrators were women.⁴⁰ This means that the image of the 'woman in the red dress' (Ceyda Sungur) being pepper-sprayed, was not only symbolic of the movement (linking it to other revolutionary imagery), but in fact a very real representation of the large female participation, and indeed instigation and organization, of the protests. This clashes with the male-dominated narrative of the 'looter', 'conspirator', or 'violent youth' that the media and the government sought to disseminate. It has even been argued that the way in which the protests moves around various sites, in particular Taksim Square and Gezi park, but also through the area between the park and Besiktas, created a certain 'geopolitics' of

³⁹ See: Walker 1993 and Pinar Bilgin

⁴⁰ Konda Gezi Raporu, 2014 5-10, as cited in Jim Kuras, (2015)

the city; a space in which the contestation fluctuated between both the stasis of an occupation and the more militant aspects of nearby confrontations with police. This means that the meaning of Gezi park went through various symbolic stages, from the original site of a sit-in protest, to a contested space of active confrontation, to an alternative form of communal space, and finally, upon its eviction, to a site of non-violent resistance. The mixing of the spatial functions of Gezi was also reflected in the variety of practices and communications evidences by the differing factions that gathered in and around the park; including, but not limited to nationalists, feminists, Leftists, anarchists, and LGBT activists (Of course these groups are not necessarily mutually exclusive).

If anything, the geopolitical element of the protests became part and parcel of the non-Turkish media narrative. This, in turn presented certain challenges as well as opportunities for the burgeoning Gezi movement. The dominant interpretation of Gezi took on either a left, or a rightwing narrative in which the Gezi protestors were either seen as some form of continuation of the Arab Spring, or, on the other hand, as a revolt against the dubious idea of 'Islamofascism'. In other words, the narrative of the Gezi protests was not just subject to domestic political (mis)conceptions and prejudices that features also in a broader, and indeed global suspicion of Turkey's role in the world. The two above interpretations, therefore, corresponded with two further geopolitical assumptions: First, the idea

that, if Gezi was indeed a further instance of the Gezi Spring, then this would mean that the Erdogan regime was by proxy as oppressive as, say, Gaddafi or Assad (evidently untrue, but with a kernel of truth); or, that the protests were a secular resistance against a Muslim take-over of an otherwise promisingly secular Turkish democracy (again, evidently untrue, although with a kernel of truth).

My own interpretation is that these two categories function together in a dialectical sense. The ruling party in Turkey successfully plays off both its role as a leader in the region, as well as its more victimized stance towards the West. In so doing, it shapes a narrative in which it is both the 'enfant terrible' and the role model in a region that remains largely undemocratic. Specifically, I will look at the way in which conspiracy theory, as both a symbolic concept and a narrative practice, creates a system, a closed loop as it were, in which the potency of this particular paradox is harnessed to great political advantage.

Understanding Conspiracy Theory in light of the Turkish context

Conspiracy Theory, and accusations of conspiracy have emerged as one of the primary justifications for an increasingly repressive and antagonistic politics in Turkey. The challenge is then, how to take the idea of conspiracy theory seriously, not by engaging in the practice of debunking, or fact-checking, but instead by understanding the mechanisms,

contradictions, and processes that fuel the logic and (un)reason underlying such a paranoid politics.⁴¹

What can conspiracy theory tell us about the political turmoil in Turkey? Does it not merely reflect the imaginary, or perhaps even strategic, adversaries invoked by the government and opposition alike? In other words, how does one study something that is by its very definition dependent on the impossibility of its successful verification?

One way to approach this dilemma is to direct attention from Erdoğan's distinctly antagonistic leadership style, to instead emphasize the characteristics, processes, and forces that come into play in Turkish politics. In the popular conception of the term, such a politics is marked by accusations of conspiracy, paranoid leadership, and a media war on (perceived) opposition.⁴²

This thesis argues that conspiracy theories, whether invoked by the opposition or by the Government, serve as a primary tool for mobilizing and reconsolidating the public across pre-existing social and ideological divides. I address these issues by looking at the political processes of conspiracy theory in Turkey as indicative of deeper divides, as well as a

⁴¹ Alessandro Bessi et al, 'Science vs conspiracy: Collective narratives in the age of misinformation', *PIOS* one 10.2 (2015); Michelle A. Amazeen, 'Revisiting the epistemology of fact-checking', *Critical Review* 27.1 (2015), pp. 1-22.

⁴² The term was popularized following the unexpected outcome of the British EU referendum and the 2016 US Presidential campaign. In both instances, the word became a blanket-term for supposed strategies of disinformation and the apparent lack of factuality in public discourse surrounding either event.

conscious or intuitive framing strategy to place the experience of social protest and resistance outside the wider responsibilities of the State.

In his description of Conspiracy as a zero-sum game, Charles Pigden suggests that the politico's knack for paranoia constitutes a professional hazard. He describes paranoid politicians as 'The real devotees of conspiracy' who 'try to frustrate those conspiracies with counterplots of their own'⁴³ On the other hand, if we embrace Popper's definition of conspiracy as lying in the act of discovery (since a truly hidden conspiracy can't be identified – in the same way in which a true secret is not longer thus once it becomes known) as 'the discovery of the men or groups who are interested in the occurrence of this phenomenon (sometimes it is a hidden interest which has first to be revealed) and who have planned and conspired to bring it about' it becomes clear that the very visibility of protest, which at first sight seems to make it lack the necessary secretiveness of conspiracy, in fact makes it an ideal candidate to be accused of conspiratorial scheming.⁴⁴

The current study rejects Popper's notion of conspiracy as a subjective paranoia, and instead relocates conspiracy both as political strategy and socio-political phenomenon. It uses the case study of modern Turkish politics, specifically in the post-Gezi era, to provide a more nuanced

⁴³ Charles Pigden, 'Popper revisited, or what is wrong with conspiracy theories' Conspiracy Theories: the Philosophical Debate, Coady D (ed) (2006), p. 21.

⁴⁴ Karl Popper, The open society and its enemies, (new edn, London, 2012), pp. 352.

analysis of the forces that shape conspiratorial rhetoric than the ‘debunking’ approach to Conspiracy to be found in Popper and Pigden’s work. In doing so it seeks to provide a conceptual framework for the study of conspiracy as both narrative process and political calculation.

This brings us to a question that has already been brought forth by critics of Popperian conspiracy theory:⁴⁵ is it in fact only unsuccessful conspiracies that we are aware of? I argue that such a claim should be revised to ask instead ‘is it the non-existent conspiracies that fuel real political action’? In this case, for example, the question of the veracity of online conspiracies against Turkey is relatively insignificant. It is the claim of conspiracy that makes it real, in that it justifies the reactionary measures, which the government initiated after the protests to curb these imaginary threats. Instead of accepting the protest movement as a legitimate popular challenge to social inequalities and dissatisfaction, the Government responded by rallying its own supporters and dismissing the protestors as malignant conspirators, or even more dismissively, as the unwitting victims of secret conspiracies.

This situates the use of conspiratorial rhetoric within social movement studies, as well as touching upon issues of nationalism and ethnicity, and federal and institutional failures in Turkey, and philosophy and political

⁴⁵Ibidem, pp. 17-46; See also: Cass R. Sunstein and Adrian Vermeule, ‘Conspiracy theories: Causes and cures’, *Journal of Political Philosophy* 17.2 (2009), pp. 202-227; Ashutosh Jogalekar, ‘Falsification and its Discontents’, *Scientific American*, January 24, (2014).

thought in the literature on conspiracy theory. I aim to initiate a debate on the under-emphasized linkages between State response and targeted use of conspiracy theory as a political mobilizing tool. My work investigates how political leaders choose to respond to seemingly contingent manifestations of opposition and protest, focusing in particular on elite framing and the mutual capacity of government and opposition to use conspiracy as an integrating or isolating rhetorical device.

Determining what the merit or relative impact is of increasingly paranoid and conspiratorial rhetoric in Turkish politics can be a puzzle. This thesis hopes to shed some light on the processes in which accusations of conspiracy relate to a systemic relationship of forces; to examine the extent to which such accusations drive real political action, rather than treating them as the mere theatrics of antagonistic rhetoric or evasive discursive tactics.

My motivation in writing this thesis has therefore been to provide an innovative study of the role that conspiracy theories play in contemporary Turkish politics, that is to say between 2013 and 2017, and to contribute to the literature on conspiracy theory, elite framing and Turkish studies in contemporary Turkey in a fashion that contributes to the emergent transnational discussion on conspiratorial framing of political discourse.

Relationship to Existing Literature

The literature on conspiracy theory has previously proven a fruitful subject for Turkish studies and philosophical inquiries into the nature of truth in politics.⁴⁶ While the two have not necessarily been merged, the separate literatures fall roughly into two categories. First, there are studies of specific social contentions in Turkey, most notably the Kurdish issue and the Armenian Genocide issue.⁴⁷ Secondly, and with a stronger focus on conspiracy theory in Turkey, there has also been an emphasis on the so-called 'Dönme Conspiracy', as well as the 'interest-rate lobby', including various iterations of EU- and US-themed conspiracy theories.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Kenneth Fidel, 'Military organization and conspiracy in Turkey', *Studies in Comparative International Development (SCID)* 6.2 (1970), pp. 19-43.

⁴⁷ Henri J. Barkey and Graham E. Fuller, *Turkey's Kurdish question* (Boston, 1998); Henri J. Barkey, 'Why is Turkey Accusing Me of Plotting a Coup?', *New York Times*, 1 September 2016; Vahakn N. Dadrian, *The history of the Armenian genocide: Ethnic conflict from the Balkans to Anatolia to the Caucasus* (Oxford, 2003); Richard G. Hovannisian, (ed.) *Remembrance and denial: The case of the Armenian genocide* (Detroit, 1998); Johanna Nykänen, 'Identity, Narrative and Frames: Assessing Turkey's Kurdish Initiatives', *Insight Turkey* 15.2 (2013) pp. 85-101. For an analysis of issues within the Kurdish quest for national identity, including an interview that refers to a 'masculine conspiracy' of female oppression, see: Yaniv Voller, *From rebellion to de facto statehood: International and transnational sources of the transformation of the Kurdish national liberation movement in Iraq into the Kurdistan regional government*. (Diss) The London School of Economics and Political Science (2012), p, 272.

⁴⁸ Rifat N. Bali, *A Scapegoat for All Seasons: The Dönmes or Crypto-Jews of Turkey* (Istanbul, 2008); Turkey Salim Nefes, 'Scrutinizing impacts of conspiracy theories on readers' political views: a rational choice perspective on anti-semitic rhetoric in Turkey', *The British journal of sociology* 66.3 (2015), pp. 557-575; Türkay S. Nefes, 'The function of secrecy in anti-Semitic conspiracy theories: the case of Dönmes in Turkey',

Finally, there exists an abundance of work on the Gülenist organization (Fetö) and its relative infiltration of Turkish institutions both preceding and following the 2017 coup attempt, which the Turkish Government attributes to military factions associated with Gülenism.⁴⁹

With regard to historical studies of conspiracy theory in Turkey, the literature focuses largely on anti-Semitic conspiracy theories, and Ottoman anti-Western grand narratives of colonial contestation, many of which are based on existing historical grievances and traumatic events such as the 1683 battle of Vienna.⁵⁰ There also exist a multitude of studies on conspiracy theories in the Middle East, although relatively little work has focused specifically on Turkish theories.⁵¹ By and large there

Conspiracy Theories in the United States and the Middle East: A Comparative Approach (2014), pp. 139-156.

⁴⁹ Helen Rose Ebaugh, *The Gülen movement: A sociological analysis of a civic movement rooted in moderate Islam* (New York, 2009); M. Hakan Yavuz, *Toward an Islamic Enlightenment: The Gülen Movement* (Oxford, 2013); M. Hakan Yavuz and John L. Esposito, eds. *Turkish Islam and the secular state: The Gülen Movement* (Syracuse, 2003); Reuven Firestone, 'Conspiracy to Prove a Conspiracy: My Meeting with Fethullah Gülen', *Occasional Papers on Religion in Eastern Europe* 37.2 (2017), pp. 4; Loye Ashton and Tamer Balci, 'A Contextual Analysis of the Supporters and Critics of the Gülen/Hizmet Movement', *Proceedings of the conference Islam in the age of global challenges: Alternative perspectives of the Gülen Movement*, November (2008)

⁵⁰ Esther Webman (ed.), *The global impact of the Protocols of the elders of Zion: a century-old myth* (London 2012); Türkay Salim Nefes, 'Political parties' perceptions and uses of anti-Semitic conspiracy theories in Turkey', *The Sociological Review* 61.2 (2013), pp. 247-264.

⁵¹ Daniel Pipes, *The hidden hand: Middle East fears of conspiracy* (London, 1996); Arndt Graf (ed.), *Orientalism and Conspiracy: Politics and Conspiracy Theory in the Islamic*

does appear to be a somewhat Orientalist assumption in the literature on conspiracy theory that non-Western nations are particularly prone to conspiratorial politics, despite much evidence suggesting that conspiracy theories are in equal measure a feature of so-called consolidated democracies in the West.

Of course there exists a wide range of literature on conspiracy that goes beyond Turkish or Middle Eastern studies. Such research can be roughly grouped into three categories: (1) the Popperian approach to conspiracy theory regards it as an aberration of reason, a threat to scientific certainty, and a corruption of society. In this approach, the accusation of conspiracy theory is often aligned with critiques of historicist interpretations, and commonly used as a pejorative for material determinism. (2) There exists a growing philosophical approach to conspiracy theory, both in the English and Continental schools of thought –that is to say, both in positivist or Cartesian and (post)structuralist interpretations thereof.⁵²

World (London, 2010); Marvin Zonis and Craig M. Joseph, 'Conspiracy thinking in the Middle East', *Political Psychology* (1994), pp. 443-459.

⁵² Although existentialism and phenomenology are equally constitutive of the above (continental philosophy) it is also worth pointing out that the term 'continental philosophy' is commonly regarded with skepticism by European scholars. In this context, I simply mean to invoke the term in isolation from analytic philosophy, which has been more dominant among British Universities. However, as the reader of this thesis will be aware, the arguments contained her-within may be seen to suggest that there is room for overlap between the 'schools', owing to my own predilection for such approaches formed as a former student in cultural studies.

While the former is more aligned with psychological and political accounts of the functioning and circulation of conspiracy theory, the latter group feeds into a growing interest in conspiracy theory in cultural Studies, psychology, and comparative literature.⁵³ What unites all these approaches is the growing consensus that conspiracy theory is a topic that merits serious scholarly attention. (3) And finally, a key part of the conspiracy literature has derived from psychological studies engaging to with either the verification or so-called debunking of conspiracy theories and the impact of the 'belief' in conspiracy theory.⁵⁴ It should also be added, that perhaps the most predominant texts on conspiracy theory are those that catalogue or summarize the most popular conspiratorial interpretations of historical and contemporary events. Many of these are political in nature, and include but are not limited to, revisionist histories ranging from the crusades to the 9/11 attacks.⁵⁵

⁵³ George E. Marcus (ed.), *Paranoia within reason: A casebook on conspiracy as explanation* (Chicago, 1999); Svetlana Boym, 'Conspiracy Theories and Literary Ethics: Umberto Eco, Danilo Kiš and The Protocols of Zion', *Comparative literature* (1999), pp. 97-122; Bruce Grant, 'Transparency and Conspiracy: Ethnographies of Suspicion in the New World Order', *American Anthropologist* 106.4 (2004), pp. 782-783; Ted Goertzel, 'Belief in conspiracy theories', *Political Psychology* (1994), pp. 731-742; Carl F. Graumann, 'Conspiracy: History and social psychology - a synopsis', *Changing conceptions of conspiracy* (1987), pp. 245-251.

⁵⁴ For example: Michal Bilewicz et al (eds.), *The psychology of conspiracy* (London 2015).

⁵⁵ For example: David Aaronovitch, *Voodoo Histories: The Role of Conspiracy Theory in Shaping Modern History* (London, 2010).

As such, the consideration of accusations of conspiracy can be seen as a way to move beyond the strong focus on social movements as organizational structures, to instead accentuate the significance of strategic state response in determining the relative success of mass public demonstrations and other forms of resistance. It has been argued that the extent to which conspiracy theories can be seen as relevant political mobilizing tools depends on a variety of factors, as proposed by David Coady, who has put forward that the level of expected scepticism regarding the veracity of conspiracy theories depends on the following factors in society: first, the effectiveness, or existence of, freedom of information legislation; secondly, the diversity of media ownership, followed closely by the independence of public services from government influence, and finally, the relative independence of different branches of government. ⁵⁶ *Conspiracy Theory in Turkey* describes a political sphere in which the aforementioned conditions are readily met, and explores how conspiracy theory functions as both catalyst and outcome of what is therefore essentially a ‘conspiratorial society’ rather than a conspiracy theory of society.

This means that the thesis effectively distances itself from and moves beyond Popper’s critique of the so-called ‘conspiracy theory of society’ in which he argues that conspiracy theory is a simple-minded way to

⁵⁶ David Coady (ed.), *Conspiracy Theories: The Philosophical Debate* (Farnham, 2006), p. 10.

rationalize the complexities of the political process.⁵⁷ This conviction is then deftly repackaged in his footnotes to facilitate a rather underhanded critique of a supposed Marxist conspiracy of society, in which everything is interpreted in terms of capital and economic relations. Popper is here conflating too much, even if he is on the face of it simply predated a commonplace pejorative (even within Post-Marxism) of so-called ‘vulgar Marxists’. On the one hand, he dismisses the notion of determinism –in this case, economic determinism- as conspiratorial, and on the other he argues that conspiracy theory is a vehicle for those lacking the cognitive facilities to comprehend the ‘true’ nature of the political.

This is somewhat ironic, considering Popper’s own aversion to what he called essentialist knowledge, or other forms of the pursuit of the pure knowledge of nature. Yet, more gravely, it posits a paradox of sorts (again, the identification of which Popper sees as the central goal of the philosopher, and hence a further irony), which is that the idea of conspiracy theory is here both the outcome of foolish thinking, that is, the temptation to see organized forces where there are none; and the idea of the ‘true’ meaning of any given system –in this case political or societal- as being so enormous and difficult to comprehend that it evades common understanding.

⁵⁷ Karl Popper, ‘The Conspiracy Theory of Society’, *Conspiracy Theories: The Philosophical Debate* (Coady ed., 2006).

In other words, Popper suggests both that conspiracy theory is the mental equivalent of grasping at straws, while at the same time positing a seemingly overarching, sublime system that evades being interpreted by the common man. We can forgive Popper this inconsistency, to the extent that it arises precisely out of the contradictions surrounding the premise of conspiracy itself, its double visibility and invisibility, its reason and unreason. To put this in its proper context thus requires that we take a step back from our persistent obsession with the ‘falsity’ of conspiracy theory, to instead begin to posit how conspiracy theory contains a contestation of truth through strategic misinformation.

Thinking of conspiracy theory in Turkey as a form of ‘popular knowledge’ through the lens of the national psyche

Gezi can also be seen through the lens of mounting historical dissidence and social protest since the 1960s. Consider, for example, the following description from Arzu Özturkmen, a Turkish academic who studied the performative aspects of the Gezi protests:

“For those of us born in the 1960s, Turkey’s traumatic political events have been inextricable from our daily lives. From 1960 up to the late 1970s, student and labor protests along with anticommunist demonstrations were widespread, not only in urban centers, but across

Turkey as well. In the post-military coup years of the 1980s, however, our generation grew up away from street terror, holding nevertheless a strong awareness about Turkey's insecure international status. Though they were not explicit activists, the youth of the 1980s had a solid memory and awareness of a political past. For my generation, these were also the years to enjoy consumerism, as a long-awaited outcome of new liberal policies, while at the same time feeling defensive about Turkey's poor human rights records, the Armenian genocide issue, and the oppression of women."⁵⁸

This memory is shaped not just by the mere realization that the Turkish authorities had covered up these crimes, but that despite the availability of the facts, even the truth could not touch the forces that upheld the State. This leads to the popular suspicion of a deep State.

“Many of these murders remained unsolved, not because it was impossible to get the facts on them, but because official authorities stopped pursuing the cases at a certain point during the investigations. This made people skeptical about the state's involvement in the process, often referred to as the “deep state,” meaning a hidden structural unit within the state.”

This tension between the remembered experience of political turmoil and

⁵⁸ Öztürkmen, Arzu. "The Park, the Penguin, and the Gas: Performance in Progress in Gezi Park." *TDR/The Drama Review* 58.3 (2014): 39-68.

the enduring futility of justice, in particular the ways in which a paranoid interpretation of the State's role begins to emerge, provides what to me seems like the most accurate description of the stage that had been set for the Gezi protests. It is not just that Gezi existed on the level of political resistance to both current and historical political injustices or outrages, but rather that Gezi contained within it already an internalized notion of the futility of fact, or, of the ways in which institutional resistance could no longer stand up to the government. The reason I begin with this quote, is therefore not to reject the more common interpretation that Gezi occurred as a particular blend of concerns regarding urban spaces, environmentalism, and the creeping religion/authoritarianism of the ruling party, but rather it is to say that the history underlining Gezi was already one in which the regular modes of democratic and institutional dissent had proven to be unfruitful. This insight should help us to avoid overly normative assessments of the 'uniqueness' of a 'Gezi Generation', and allow us instead to think of Gezi as both distinctly new and yet mired in the 'history' of Turkish resistance in the lead up thereto. This will have important bearings on the thesis as well, since it can help us understand both how Gezi becomes attributed with certain transformative, as well as antagonistic, features. This is related to the way(s) in which Gezi is taken either as a historical continuation, or as a radical contingency (I will argue later that it is in fact both); in other words, Gezi as both a likely and unlikely event.

There are however also accounts of the Gezi protests that are more critical of the idea of a ‘convergence’ theory of the Gezi protests. In their eyes, Gezi may have presented a surprising political event, but cannot be attributed to phenomenological factors, overarching solidarities, and hence should not be considered as a so-called ‘rainbow movement’ at all. These arguments do not only stem from anti-Gezi authors and pro-government opinions, but revolve rather around a debate on the (false) attribution of force to the mobilization of the movement. In other words, the question is not just ‘who’ participated in Gezi, nor ‘why’, but rather how the interpretation of Gezi itself retroactively shapes the way the uprising is known. One such argument comes from Siyaves Azeri, who emphasizes Gezi primarily as class struggle. He writes “The June 2013 uprising in Turkey that shook the foundations of the AKP ‘moderate’ political Islamic government in Turkey was not a rainbow movement consisting of heterogeneous elements; rather, it was an all-encompassing political movement and the manifestation of class struggle in Turkey.”⁵⁹ The main crux of this argument revolves around the tension between the ‘essence’ and the ‘appearance’ of the movement. The critique is here therefore one of the ways in which Gezi has been conceptualized in either a normative, or phenomenal sense, in which the complexities of Gezi are generalized to fit into a predictable narrative of generational revolt. Employing the Marxist idea of historical explanation, Azeri writes on the correct –

⁵⁹ Azeri

according to him- relationship between theory and practice:

“Theory is not conceptualization in the sense of forming a mere ‘reflection/image’ of the real, rather it is a reflection upon the real; thus, it is the logical reconstruction of the real that inevitably amounts to changing reality. Similarly, revolutionary politics is not a reflection of the physical reality of a revolutionary class; rather, it is the reflecting upon the revolutionary conditions that emancipates the class and the society in general. Just as reality of the society should strive to reach up to the point of theory, so the same can be said with regard to revolutionary politics and practices.”⁶⁰

This argument needs to be taken in two ways. First, it is a criticism of the sociological and anthropological approach to studying Gezi. The accusation is that what is being studied occurs on the level of experience, but not on explanation; or, in other words, that the root conditions of the event are being left unexplained, while the outward manifestations (discourse, strategies, mobilization etc.) are heralded as the keys to understanding Gezi. (To be fair, one might here also observe that Azeri’s own approach, and in particular the focus on a ‘continuing’ class struggle, may well fall prey to an overtly determinist interpretation of Gezi, which might be remedied precisely by those ‘outward’ accounts). Secondly, we can determine here an attempt to conceptualize the idea of the

⁶⁰ Azeri

‘reflection/image of the real’, neither just in the way in which Gezi both holds up a mirror to the ruling party, nor in the warping of reality that occurs through the Gezi disruption: Instead, the ‘real’ is here subject to various assaults. First, the protests that challenge the ‘real’ narrative of the exponentially successful Turkish model; secondly, the new reality within the performative and politicized (utopian) spaces during Gezi’s occupation; and finally, the ‘real’ of the way in which Gezi becomes ‘history’, that is, subject to historical and sociological interpretation rather than as an event in being as such. In this thesis, I intend to add another level or layer of the ‘real’ relating to Gezi, and this takes on the counterintuitive function of the seeming ‘unreal’. In other words, I want to take into consideration the way in which the State response, and in particular the accusations of conspiracy against Gezi, mark yet another way in which the ‘reality’ of Gezi park becomes contested.

To put this in a somewhat less abstract sense, this also means that in order to understand the political function of conspiracy theory in Turkey we must consider the ways in which forms of ‘popular thought’ can have very real political outcomes, or indeed become embraced by the political elite. In this sense Turkey may not be a unique case. Alfred Moore suggests that ‘internal’ conspiracy theories have become popularized in the 20th century above ‘external’ ones. In other words, conspiracy theory

becomes more integrated into the popular interpretation of the State and less used as a means by which to antagonize ‘foreign’ conspirators.⁶¹

In order to think of conspiracy theory in Turkey along the lines of ‘popular knowledge’ production one might think of Clare Birchall’s book ‘Knowledge Goes Pop’ she introduces a chart of sorts by which to create a cross-section of the various ways in which (popular) knowledge becomes legitimized. I would like to use the same graph here, so as to suggest some alterations and to think about how it might be applicable to the Turkish case.

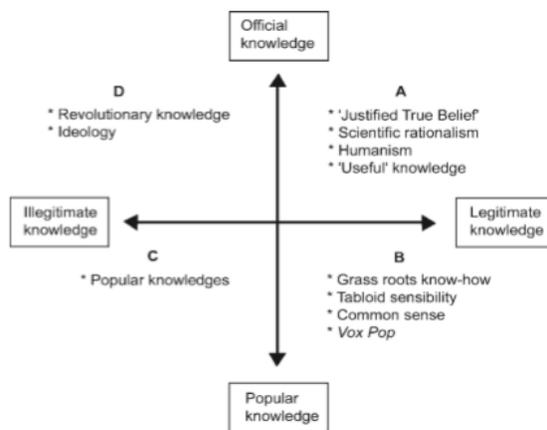


Figure 1 Knowledge-scape

In the above chart, there is a distinction between four ‘types’ of knowledge: Official, Popular, Legitimate and Illegitimate. These are divided into two axes, one revolving around the antinomies between

⁶¹ Moore, Alfred. "Conspiracies, Conspiracy Theories and Democracy." *Political Studies Review* 16.1 (2018): 2-12.

popular/official knowledge, and the other divided between illegitimate/legitimate knowledge. The implication is that knowledge can therefore exist as a form of 'illegitimate/legitimate popular knowledge' or as 'illegitimate/legitimate official knowledge. The question, then, is where to place conspiracy theory. According to the above chart, it might be best located in the grey zone of 'C'; that is to say, between illegitimate and popular knowledge. However this is where I think one can best see conspiracy theory as a type of knowledge that subverts the illegitimate/legitimate antinomy, being rather by its very nature intensely occupied with the notion of a contested –and anticipated- refutation of its own legitimacy, thereby achieving a sort of non-sanctioned, consensual legitimacy. In this sense, conspiracy theory plays the binaries of official/popular knowledge against each other. This is particularly true when conspiracy theory takes on the mantle of a paranoid form of 'official knowledge'. Such narratives almost always build on the perception of contested legitimacy, diminished sovereignty, and of –dare we say it in this supposedly post-ideological era- a return to the forceful sway of (competing) ideologies. This, in turn, means that conspiracy theory also problematizes the idea of 'ideology' or 'revolutionary knowledge' as situated in the chart between official and illegitimate knowledge. Indeed, this is where the chart is at its least convincing. Official, yet illegitimate forms of knowledge are precisely those that *claim to know of*

revolutionary activity and thereby seek to legitimize forms of political persecution.

As a secondary critique, one might also cite the postmodern attitude that all knowledge is ideological, thereby denying the possibility of ideology as a categorical form of knowledge. The problem therefore is that these narratives are all too readily repackaged as xenophobic, discriminatory and racist accusations; usually against already vulnerable sections of the population. That is to say, conspiracy theory is all too often a weapon used by the strong to persecute the weak. Conspiracy theory therefore functions on a similar level as populist rhetoric. It is both employed as a form of elite framing (official knowledge) as well as bowing towards popular fears and anxieties (popular knowledge). What this means is that when we speak here of ‘knowledge’, what is really meant is a signifier (or, to put this in the post-structuralist terminology, as a ‘floating signifier’⁶²), detached from the sign, and deriving resonance from this uncertain truth-content. In sum, it can mean many things to many people, yet meanwhile remains nigh on indeterminable in any positive sense.

To apply the above chart to the Turkish case requires a certain level of generalization. In terms of official knowledge one might cite, for example, the educational tools distributed by the government following the coup, so as to ensure that schools will begin historicizing the coup attempt as a historical instance of Turkish martyrdom to preserve democracy. Yet in

⁶² although the term derives from Claude Levi-Strauss’ structuralist thought, the manner in which I employ it here has more in common with the poststructuralist critique of (cultural) concepts rather than strictly speaking linguistic systems.

this case such an attempt deliberately tries to render the coup into a symbolic rather than purely descriptive event, thereby quickly merging towards a form of illegitimate knowledge (or, according to the logic of the chart, ideological or revolutionary knowledge). On the other hand, we can identify in a popular response to the coup –for example the notion that the Government may have orchestrated it- two different iterations of popular knowledge. The illegitimate version being that which is strictly speaking conspiratorial; the other, that of ‘common sense’ or ‘tabloid’ knowledge, which lauds the Government for its decisive action to purge society from those it believes associated with the coup.

One might achieve a similar such split when regarding the Gezi protests. The official narrative, and hence knowledge, (or at least attempt to produce a form of knowledge) holds that Gezi is either the result of nefarious conspirators (illegitimate official knowledge), or, that it was the result of a youth-revolt which may have had its reasons but nevertheless was repressed for political reasons (legitimate official knowledge). On the other hand, one can identify two forms of popular knowledge of Gezi, one which identifies Gezi as being the result of grassroots organizing mixed with a common-sense revulsion towards the police violence (legitimate popular knowledge), or alternately, to view Gezi as an unidentifiable, multifaceted, purely contingent –perhaps even conspiratorial-event (illegitimate popular knowledge). Again, these four categories are by no means in and of themselves sufficient. But as a starting point they can

help us set out the conditions by which to demonstrate how the notion of conspiracy theory –and the framing of conspiracy theory- blurs the lines, and benefits from the ultimate disparity of such lines, to create alternate forms of the ‘reality’ of these events.

In order to trace how these four points of knowledge can be related to the case-specific knowledge production in Turkey following Gezi and the coup, I would like to employ another table; again inspired by what Birchall refers to as a ‘knowledge-scape’ of competing forms of truth.

In the second application of the knowledge-scape chart, Birchall begins to break down the various ways in which popular knowledge is produced, legitimized and disseminated. This final element is categorized as ‘criteria’, which examines the use function (i.e. the motivation for its production); hence also giving us an insight into the conditions of its (anticipated) dissemination. Below I have included Birchall’s version of this table, so that we can think of how this might be applied to the Turkish case. To begin with, she distinguished between four categories of knowledge: (1) the knowledge economy; (2) knowledge within the humanities; (3) popular knowledge; (4) and indigenous knowledge. This final form of knowledge is part of a ‘localized’ knowledge, that is to say, regional or culturally specific forms of knowledge, which can also include certain prejudices, and (historical) paranoia of given communities.

<i>Form of Knowledge</i>	<i>Site of Production and Circulation</i>	<i>Means of Legitimation</i>	<i>Criteria</i>
Knowledge economy	Industry; commerce; government policy; the economy; economics; management theory; sociology; the media	Free market economy; neoliberal/neoconservative capitalism; appeal to new and 'inevitable' economic phase; the media	Commercial use and profitability; design and innovation; tacit knowledge with codified technical knowledge
Knowledge within the humanities	The university	Appeals to 'the university'; university endorsed awards; grants and bursaries; tradition	Intellectual use; internally established measures such as reason and scientific rationalism; that which yields cultural capital
Popular knowledge	Relatively unofficial and unregulated sites (e.g. Internet; face-to-face interaction)	Insider knowledge; paradoxical reliance upon 'official' accreditation; degree of risk or perseverance required to obtain information	Whether it has been dismissed, excluded or suppressed by any of the above.
Indigenous knowledge	Localized sites; 'home'	Tradition; culture; claims on the land	Repetition; that which is revered; often dogmatic; spiritually or agriculturally useful

Let us briefly summarize. The general category of the knowledge economy is that which produces knowledge within the private sector. It legitimizes this knowledge through the process of dissemination, which is therefore the criterion of 'commercial use'. This is unique to this category. That is to say, only in the knowledge economy is the legitimacy of the knowledge produced by means of the dissemination through commercial means itself. This is the stark opposite of knowledge in the humanities (i.e. universities), in which the legitimization occurs entirely within the interior institution and the affiliated gatekeepers; through which then a hierarchy emerges that produces certain criteria. This can therefore occur to a high degree with

relatively low dissemination. Dissemination therefore often being a result rather than a precondition of legitimized work.

Popular knowledge functions differently again. Here there is no clearly defined site of production, although the internet may be one of the broadest areas from which popular knowledge stems. This means that a different sort of knowledge 'currency' has to legitimize the production of knowledge without the existence of an overarching institution. The way this takes place is through (press) accreditation, expert opinions, online personalities and various other forms of social legitimization. Oftentimes what this means is that the legitimacy of popular knowledge becomes dependent on its rejection through the other categories of knowledge production. This is where popular knowledge quickly becomes conspiratorial. So, for example, if a particular expression of popular knowledge cannot be expressed in the academe or in the mainstream media, then this makes other avenues –usually the internet- a viable way for it to be (re)produced and disseminated. As we shall see in this thesis, sometimes the fact that a particular form of knowledge (usually conspiratorial) is considered unpublishable within the mainstream, only further lends it credence –its non-consensual, illegitimate information therefore becoming a form of legitimization in and of itself. Finally, Birchall includes 'indigenous knowledge' as an umbrella term for 'localized sites' of knowledge production. In the study of conspiracy theories these forms of

knowledge can be particularly revealing, because they often show generalizable suspicions and prejudices among certain communities.

Of course it is necessary to add here that these four 'spheres' of knowledge production are not necessarily mutually exclusive. For example, it is viable to argue that universities are now also subject to the (neoliberal) knowledge economy, inasmuch as popular knowledge now informs mainstream news (think, for example, how the BBC features tweets from its audience, etc.). And finally, when one considers what media what consumes, often this choice is already to some extent predetermined by various forms of what Birchall terms 'indigenous' knowledge. To that extent none of these sphere can be seen to function in strict isolation. The separation of each of these categories allows rather for a higher degree of specificity within the broader examination of knowledge production. In the first chapter I will further theorize these sphere of knowledge production by employing the Foucauldian approach to different conditions for the production of knowledge (in her own book, Birchall also follows this table with a discussion of Foucault's formulation of the signifier power/knowledge to examine how certain knowledge's flourish why others remain relatively marginal. I will return to this in chapter one, in which I provide a more in-depth theoretical account of the theories of conspiracy theory.

For now the question is whether these fairly general categories can be applied to the Turkish case, and whether this can tell us anything about

the functioning of conspiracy theory as a political narrative. Interestingly, in the Turkish case we can see conspiratorial narratives being produced in all four of these categories barring one: Turkish universities. This is not to say that there is absolutely no evidence of conspiratorial or paranoid narratives within Turkish universities. However, universities do not by and large appear to distribute conspiratorial ‘content’. This may be due to the highly internal, and circular dissemination of information and knowledge production within the academe. In other words, it is not just that universities have higher standards of verification and gate keeping, but since their dissemination does not influence their legitimacy and there is no direct financial incentive for enhanced dissemination (as, say, in the media), conspiracy theories remain relatively rare. That is to say, we can identify conspiratorial narratives proliferating in the knowledge economy, in popular knowledge, and in indigenous knowledge(s).⁶³

Adding to this, the thesis situates conspiracy theory within the broader contentions of social movements, resistance, and state response, which begets the question where one might choose to locate a correlation between the literature on conspiracy theory and social protest. Among rationalist scholars of social movements, such as Zald and McCarthy, who based their ideas on the 1960s understanding of ‘value-added’ theory’,

the main focus of social and political mobilization was grievance-based.⁶⁴ With the evolution of social movements in the 1980s and '90s, the influence of formal Social Movement Organizations (SMO) and transnational issues incorporated issues of global strategic mobilization beyond clear grievances. This resulted in the closer study of networks, contentious action, and resource mobilization.⁶⁵ One can identify a similar development, a broadening of scope as it were, in the study of conspiracy theory. In this case, conspiracy theory goes from constituting specific case-oriented grievances, prejudices, and suspicions, towards a more holistic understanding of the way in which conspiracy theories serve to underline shifting opportunity structures and perceived inequalities/uncertainties with regards to the production of knowledge, which in turn, is closely associated with access to power.

There has also been a revision of the strategy-heavy approach of SMO analysis with inclusive views of SMOs re-emphasizing the cultural, ideological and identity-driven processes that shape SMO interaction and

⁶⁴ Neil J. Smelser, 'Theoretical issues of scope and problems', *The Sociological Quarterly* 5.2 (1964), pp. 116-122. See also: Neil J. Smelser, *Theory of collective behavior*. (new edn, New Orleans, 2011).

⁶⁵ J. Craig Jenkins, *The politics of social protest: Comparative perspectives on states and social movements* (Minneapolis, 1995); For a useful overview of the developments between the 1980s and '90s, see: John Lofland, *Social movement organizations: Guide to research on insurgent realities* (New Jersey, 1996).

development.⁶⁶ Moving away from the idea of movement activities as purely voluntary need-based associations, the study of SMOs argued that the characteristics, variations, in formalization and professionalization including paid leadership and formal structures were vital to understanding SMOs. What these studies failed to take into consideration was how state response itself also underwent significant changes, particularly in regard to framing and international expectations. State response is not a mere normative issue, and is vital to the culture, symbolism, and success of social movements. The inclusion of categories of state response should therefore be considered as a logical addition to the continuation of social movement theory, instead of being treated as a static phenomenon. The attempt to bring the state back into the core literature, beyond the traditional focus on three forms of state repression - state-sponsored terrorism, human rights violations, and political purges - builds upon scholarship regarding the so-called 'repression decision process' but is deserving of a broader analytical consideration.⁶⁷

⁶⁶ Doug, McAdam, John D. McCarthy, and Mayer N. Zald (eds.), *Comparative perspectives on social movements: Political opportunities, mobilizing structures, and cultural framings* (Cambridge, 1996); Jack L. Walker, *Mobilizing interest groups in America: Patrons, professions, and social movements* (Detroit, 1991); Mayer Zald, 'Ideologically structured action: An enlarged agenda for social movement research', *Mobilization: An International Quarterly* 5.1 (2000), pp. 1-16;

⁶⁷ Christian Davenport, 'The weight of the past: Exploring lagged determinants of political repression', *Political Research Quarterly* 49.2 (1996), pp. 377-403; Francesca Polletta and James M. Jasper, 'Collective identity and social movements', *Annual review of Sociology* 27.1 (2001), pp. 283-305; Steven C. Poe and C. Neal Tate, 'Repression of

In this thesis I do not equate the study of conspiracy theory directly with that of social movements, nor for that matter do I provide a taxonomical account of conspiracy narratives appertaining to protest causes and outcomes. Instead I have attempted to situate the study of conspiracy within the interaction and contestation of forces that provide the meaning (or lack thereof) of the state/protest contestation itself. The central innovation here, with regard to studies of resistance and democratization, is an emphasis on conspiracy theory as process, rather than as a distinctive normative phenomenon.

Original Contribution and Research Objectives

My original contribution to research in the area consists of the analysis of conspiracy theory as elite framing in the post-Gezi political landscape in Turkey. My study of conspiracy theory in Turkey differs from others in the field because it looks at conspiracy theory as a mode of elite framing, and as part of a systemic state response to social protest and societal contentions rather than examining it as a one-sided reactionary mechanism to diminishing political opportunity structures or fringe political convictions. In turn, it offers a reversal of sorts of the social-

human rights to personal integrity in the 1980s: A global analysis', *American Political Science Review* 88.4 (1994), pp. 853-872.

movement oriented literature on resistance in Turkey, and instead situates framing as part of a state response to (contingent) resistance.

The topic of conspiracy theory as part of a broader politics of paranoid misinformation has attracted much speculation and popular attention in the past year, but has not merited rigorous scholarly analysis, certainly so far as Turkish politics is concerned. Nor, for that matter, have the existing popular tracts on the idea of ‘post-truth’ given rise to any theoretically consistent definition or application of such a term. My study provides the beginnings of a critical examination of the circumstances under which a conspiracy theory becomes popularized to illustrate a specific form of contentious and/or paranoid politics, and situates this within the case study of contemporary Turkish political rhetoric.

The most original parts of my thesis are those that discuss the 2016 failed coup attempt. While there has been a slow increase in studies acknowledging the impact of the coup attempt on the future of Turkish democracy, my approach here is original to the extent that it links the state response to the Gezi protests with that of the response to the coup attempt to provide original insights into the relationship between the two events, the state response thereto, and the role that conspiracy theory had to play therein.

Chapter 1

Frames and Boundaries of Conspiracy Theory

Turkey is undergoing an era of sustained political upheaval. Amidst divergent manifestations of adversarial framing, conspiracy theories, and political repression, political narratives of the unreal merge with real political decision-making processes. In the first chapter of this thesis I argue that to understand the discursive content of (elite) conspiratorial framing requires us to first examine conspiracy theory's uniquely ambiguous relationship towards the idea of a truly definable truth content. In other words, this chapter begins with an analysis of the relative 'content' of conspiratorial discourse.

An interesting puzzle animates the contemporary discussion of conspiracy theory. On the one hand, the general assumption exists that it is a fringe phenomenon, whose adherents border on the spectrum of derangement or neurosis. Yet on the other hand – as becomes evident from consuming all manner of contemporary media – conspiratorial narratives and interpretations have become a mainstream, even popular, form of rhetoric (or, as this chapter would have it, logic) with which to mobilize support for, or opposition to, seemingly interchangeable political positions. This is certainly true in the Turkish context, where conspiratorial accusations fuel

a veritable political purge of governmental, legislative and academic institutions, but before we delve more deeply into a discussion of conspiracy theory in Turkey, this thesis proposes a rethinking of conspiracy theory that challenges the following assumptions: (1) that it is an interpretative mechanism of the politically marginalized, (2) that it is an illogical system of beliefs, and (3) that it cannot but result in eventual ‘debunking’. In other words, this chapter posits that (a) conspiracy theory is gainfully employed by the political elite in Turkey; (b) that there is a distinctive and discernible ‘logic’ to the functioning of conspiracy theory, and (c), that this belies a system of thought, and even a strategic necessity for the reconsolidation of narrative agency following resistance such as the Gezi protests.

In academic and popular literature the term ‘conspiracy theory’ is associated with the fantastical, the paranoid or even mental illness.⁶⁸ Subscribing to conspiratorial beliefs is seen as a sign of irrationality,

⁶⁸ Charles Pigden, ‘Complots of Mischief’, in David Coady (ed.), *Conspiracy Theories* (Farnham, 2006). See also Susan Feldman, ‘Counterfactual Conspiracy Theories’, *International Journal of Applied Philosophy* 1 (2011), pp. 15–24; Neil Levy, ‘Radically Socialized Knowledge and Conspiracy Theories’, *Episteme* 2 (2007), pp. 181–92; Juha Räikkä, ‘On Political Conspiracy Theories’, *Journal of Political Philosophy* 2 (2009), pp. 185–201; S. Clarke, ‘Conspiracy Theories and Conspiracy Theorizing’, *Philosophy of the Social Sciences* 2 (2002), pp.131–50.

mental instability, social exclusion or even (religious) fundamentalism.⁶⁹ Yet both on a sociological level and in a more theoretical context, this does not seem to make sense. If belief in conspiracy is such a fringe conviction, then why does it enjoy such mass popularity? Cultural studies have already questioned this premise, focusing instead on how conspiracy theories can be read as a reflection of traumatic events and a breakdown of meaning in the body politic. Yet such studies perpetuate the assumption that conspiracy theory can be explained as a reactionary impulse, a coping mechanism as it were, to comprehend a complex global politics.

This type of argument is mired in the mistaken assumption that conspiracy theories are an indicator of the relatively weak cognitive capacities of certain individuals. And by extension, they are seen as indicative of a societal failure to eradicate such irrational beliefs from the public sphere. This is not only an unfair assumption, it is ultimately an invalid one.⁷⁰ This chapter argues that conspiracy theory does not exist primarily as a breakdown of reason in a supposedly confused populace. Instead, conspiracy theory, and conspiratorial politics, should be seen as

⁶⁹ Brian L. Keeley, 'God as the Ultimate Conspiracy Theory', *Episteme* 2 (2007), pp. 135–49. See also Michael Baumann, 'Rational Fundamentalism? An Explanatory Model of Fundamentalist Beliefs', *Episteme* 2 (2007), pp. 150–66.

⁷⁰ David Coady broached a similar argument, when he asked 'are conspiracy theorists irrational?'. See David Coady, 'Are Conspiracy Theorists Irrational?', *Episteme* 2 (2007), pp. 193–204. Here, I propose we go one step further and ask whether conspiracy theory is perhaps even more rational than the supposedly pure empirical ideas upheld against it.

an active agent of authoritarian politics and creeping totalitarianism, a palimpsest in which an ill-informed citizenry have been blamed for their suspension of disbelief, when all evidence points towards a wholesale erasure of rational politics by the political class itself.

There exists indeed an internalized notion in the literature on conspiracy theory that a 'healthy', 'thriving' civil society is one that shares a rational, non-conspiratorial consensus. In other words, mass adherence to conspiratorial beliefs is equated with a failure of civic participation, education, etc. This makes sense when one considers the reverse position, that a conspiratorial society can be a healthy one, begetting vigilant citizens practicing a healthy scepticism about power. But do we take Mill's tract on the value of scepticism as an indicator of the healthy progression of a civil society as an argument in favour of conspiracy theory or against? After all, it is easy to be sceptical as to the veracity of a conspiracy theory. The answer to this question should be that since the conspiracy theory is actively meant to provoke disbelief, the scepticism implicit in such theories is in fact itself the driving force, not the outcome, of the process. To put this somewhat more simply, the idea of conspiracy theory, whether verifiable or not, already contains an explicit challenge to the possibility of agreeable truths, and points towards the agency implicit in 'consensual' forms of truth. In other words, conspiracy theory effectively posits an attack on any given system of truth, but seeks to disrupt and repeal it, not replace it. Conspiracy theory must

therefore always hang in the balance, in anticipation of its fulfillment or disavowal, but pregnant with meaning and impact nonetheless.

The counter-question we might therefore ask ourselves is one that keeps in mind Mill's premise of certainty as requiring absolute certainty.⁷¹ With conspiracy theory, on the other hand, we must keep in mind that it remains forever fixed in a type of reasoning that remains inherent to the doubt-centric Cartesian 'method of doubt', which effectively casts the individual or the human subject as the sole arbiter of his morality, choice and will, demonstrates also the limits of such an approach. In other words, the 'certainty' of the conspiratorial mode of thought derives precisely from its lack of absolute certainty. It is the concept of absolute certainty itself that raises the specter of the conspiratorial possibility. This effect is only increased when the conspiratorial framing occurs as part of an elite framing mechanism. In this, the conspiratorial frame, when employed by political elites, takes on the guise of being both insider and outsider. After all, in our study of conspiracy theory it has proven senseless to simply dismiss conspiracy theorists as outsiders, now that some of Turkey's leading politicians are ardent and vocal supporters of such theories themselves. In this mode, to view the study of conspiracy as one of binary opposites between certainty and doubt means that we remain stuck between scepticism and cynicism, rather than situating the claims themselves within their oppositional relation. Therefore, my suggestion

⁷¹ John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty* (London, 1859), p. 37.

here would be that we should not think of conspiracy as an indicator of the relative 'health' or 'ailment' of any given society. Instead, we should inquire into the power relations that allow such normative assumptions to gain traction in the first place.

To put this figuratively, we would be better served considering conspiracy theory as a primal instinct of the strong, rather than as a last resort of the weak. For if political elites can employ conspiratorial framing to justify the repression of their opponents, then surely it cannot suffice to argue that belief in conspiracy theory is correlative with being a marginalized or irrational member of society.

When the Turkish political elite invokes conspiracy theories, one is supposed to assume the existence of hidden machinations of a de facto hostile intent, the so-called parallel state or anti-Turkish 'lobby'. The idea that the conspiratorial Other is a perpetual antagonist to Turkish politics means it can take on different forms, but is conveniently used to justify ever more repressive political action. This makes it difficult to voice opposition, or to present meaningful resistance within the political system itself. And in turn, when this resistance takes shape outside the political sphere, as it did during the Gezi protests or the coup, it only further perpetuates the idea of a conspiratorial Other. The relationship between conspiracy and reality thus assumes a distinctly circular, closed and self-necessitating logic. The point, then, and this cannot be stressed enough, is that what is most 'real' in conspiracy theory is the theory, not the

conspiracy. One way to think of this is as a system of thought, and not an affliction. In turn, this is borne out through the systematic way in which it becomes incorporated into elite framing of resistance to the status quo.⁷²

This does not mean that the conspiratorial subject is without importance. On the contrary, there remains a necessary dualism between the idea of the friend and the enemy, and the subject–object relationship that endows both with meaning. The conspiracy itself can remain unfulfilled, as long as the theory endows the paranoid politician with the constitutive force of his accusation. If we follow this reasoning to its logical conclusion, it becomes clear that the State and its strongmen have much

⁷² Much like the methodology proposed here, the study of framing emerged in part from the social movement literature (Robert D. Benford and David Snow, 'Framing Processes and Social Movements: An Overview and Assessment', *Annual Review of Sociology* 26 (2000), pp. 611–39), but has been adapted as an analytical tool in conflict resolution and conflict analysis studies. Much of the focus has been on framing ethnic or minority relations in conflict-ridden communities and societies. The focus on framing these groups has been defined as the analysis of a 'conscious strategic effort to shape shared understandings of an ethnic group, its recent memories, grievances, and boundaries' (Neophytos Loizides, *Designing Peace: Cyprus and Institutional Innovations in Divided Societies* (Philadelphia, 2016) p. 54. What stands out here in regard to the study of conspiratorial framing is the 'conscious strategic' element. It is this part of the equation that must be examined in more detail if we are to suggest, as I do, that conspiratorial framing can in fact be a political strategy, or part of one, in its own right. The claim, then, is that the strategic element of conspiratorial framing consists of two levels of strategic benefit. The first is the opportunist manipulation of the protest's success in moving politics into the realm of the symbolic; the second, the capitalization upon this vacuum to reassert a hegemonic narrative of nationalist and majoritarian dominance as part of the state response thereto. This discussion of what I refer to as 'the conspiracy frame' is continued in more detail in Chapter 2.

to gain from the idea of a parallel state, as it necessitates the legitimacy of their power.

In sum the stronger the State, the more aggrieved its opponents will be, and the more strongly they will assert themselves, at least in the majoritarian interpretation of democracy so common in Turkish politics today, in which the begetting of power justifies the repression of opposition, rather than the consensual politics required to sustain legitimacy. To this degree it is easy to see the merits of Pigden's counter-intuitive insight when he describes the politico as 'the true devotee of conspiracy'.⁷³ Not in the sense that an actual conspiracy exists – as we shall see, this is largely, albeit perhaps not necessarily always evidently, irrelevant – but rather that in all conceptualizations of conspiracy, the threat is seen as intrinsically linked to the strength of the State. The politico is not only the true devotee of conspiracy. He is also its main benefactor and even beneficiary.

There is a difference between the theory on conspiracy theory, and the theory implied in conspiracy theory. This is a seemingly evident differentiation at first glance, but one that in the literature on conspiracy has gone largely uncommented upon. In turn, this means that such studies emphasize the former rather than the latter – if the latter is even

⁷³ Charles Pigden, 'Popper Revisited, or What is Wrong with Conspiracy Theories?', *Philosophy of the Social Sciences* 1 (1995), p. 6.

recognized at all. This is understandable. After all, in order to write and think about conspiracy in a way that does not render one's own work conspiratorial, the distinction has to be made that it is a theory on, or of, conspiracy theory. The outcome of such reasoning, in effect, is that it neglects the theory implicit in conspiracy theory and relegates it to a comfortably distant position, seemingly ensuring that under no condition will its untruth and supposed irrationality leak out to contaminate the 'purity' of scholarly analysis.

But conspiracy theory is not toxic, and should not be treated thus. To be sure, I do not wish to discern here how the theory in conspiracy can best be made to fit within rival epistemic (subjective) theories of truth (for example, the correspondence theory of truth, the coherence theory, the evidence theory, and the pragmatic and instrumentalist theories), nor to fit conspiracy within a metalogical subjectivist position of truth. Instead I want to really understand the dynamics of conspiracy theory on its own terms. And for this we need at least to think more critically about the implications of what theory means in conspiracy theory.

But what makes conspiracy theory? For one thing, it is precisely the unlikeliest of theories that are scientifically most viable to us as truth-seekers in the Cartesian mode. After all, if testable, and proven to be (in)correct, they can change the way in which we see the world. So too with conspiracy theory, at least to the extent that it makes a truth contestation. In other words, a conspiracy theory mimics its scientific

namesake to the extent that it beggars belief but is just plausible enough to entertain our desire to know. But it also contends that the given parameters of the production of knowledge are insufficient to determine its veracity.

Ergo, conspiracy theory is less interested in the pursuit of truth than in demonstrating the falsehood of knowledge production. This renders it essentially an anti-theory. A conspiracy theory undermines the premise of scientific verifiability in that it creates what is essentially a win-win dynamic, in which –even if debunked – it can remain true in its capacity as a contestation of the production of knowledge. It is therefore not a matter of determining whether a conspiracy theory is verifiable or not. Rather, we must consider how it becomes parasitic on the very idea of objective truth and its pursuit. In turn, this makes conspiracy theory a radical disorientation of truth, rather than a de facto truth claim. Conspiracy theory thus appears a more deserving object of scrutiny than mere conspiracy theory.

One way to put this is to observe a basic antinomy. Conspiracy theory creates a tension between subjectivist and objectivist interpretations of the production of knowledge. As such, it exists purposefully in a state of possible error, creating a parallax effect and prompting the affect of determining the relative truthlikeness of its position, rather than

necessitating any truth-content (*Wahrheitsgehalt*) as such.⁷⁴ Stephen Jay Gould in his meditations on the necessary untruth of some scientific theories cites Pareto's witticism, 'give me a fruitful error any time, full of seeds, bursting with its own corrections'.⁷⁵ But with conspiracy theory, we may well flip the premise of this quip around to mean the exact reverse. The error is not fruitful because it elicits corrections. It is fruitfully erroneous because it is a correction, not to truth, but to the production of truth.

Its relationship to the truth is therefore not that of being testable, but it is that of testing truth as a regulative idea. This demands of us that we consider conspiracy theory not only as a reaction to the notion of a regulative truth, but acknowledge it as what is essentially a counter-regulative truth. Conspiracy theory posits an untruth, precisely so as to negate any contesting truth that it deems structurally dangerous to its a priori truth claim. What can we glean from this paradox? Conspiracy

⁷⁴ I refer to *Wahrheitsgehalt* here in the Adornian sense, as the allowance of a dialectical aesthetic truth, rather than standard theories of correspondence/coherence/pragmatic truth: Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory* (reprint, London, 2004). See also Simon Jarvis, *Adorno: A Critical Introduction* (London, 1998); Albrecht Wellmer, 'Truth, Semblance and Reconciliation: Adorno's Aesthetic Redemption of Modernity', *Telos: Critical Theory of the Contemporary* 89 (1984), pp. 89–115; Lambert Zuidervaart, *Adorno's Aesthetic Theory: The Redemption of Illusion* (London, 1991).

⁷⁵ Stephen J. Gould, *Hen's Teeth and Horse's Toes: Further Reflections in Natural History* (London, 1994), p. 83.

theories question the production of knowledge, not simply knowledge itself.

Conspiracy of Winners, Not Losers

Even if conspiracy theory is sought as a mental refuge of sorts when a given idea, a tradition, a system of relations, or (imaginary) community is perceived to be under threat, this holds true not just for minority groups. On the contrary, conspiracy theories are invoked just as readily when majority groups, political parties, and even systems, see themselves coming under attack.

For when majority groups, political parties and even entire political systems find their popularity, and even their legitimacy, cast into doubt, conspiratorial politics can become a strategic alternative. We need to take into account the very real possibility that conspiracy theory is as much a narrative of political elites as it is of the politically marginalized. Consider the following: if conspiracy theories are propounded under conditions of erosion, of the collapse of certainties under the pressures of modernity, and the confounding complexities of societal issues and the emerging contradictions of a globalized world, then why should this not also be at least as true for the political elite? Two primary observations can be made regarding conspiracy theory as the praxis of the political elite. One, it forms a contestation not of truth, but of the determining agency implicit

in truth. Second, it posits an (imaginary) antagonistic subject – one part of an imaginary revolutionary – by which to justify its agency as arbiter of said truth, and by proxy solidifies the justification required to secure continued political legitimacy.

Our next premise should therefore be that conspiracy theory and, hence, accusations of conspiracy are in fact employed by ‘winners’, that is, the political elite, as a political strategy by which to isolate and vilify political opposition. As such, conspiracy theory should not be seen as the sole prerogative of political losers, as the literature currently suggests. I do concur with the literature to the extent that it seems evident that participation in the dissemination of conspiracy theories – let us not feign to know whether this constitutes a ‘belief’ – correlates positively with a perceived yet indeterminable threat to a given way of life, or even the idea of unperceived agency, the so-called ‘agency panic’.⁷⁶ But this cannot hold true for politically ‘weak’ groups, political losers, alone.

In the case of the so-called ‘New Turkey’ and the political style pioneered by the Justice and Development (AK) Party, which achieves populist

⁷⁶ Timothy Melly, *Empire of Conspiracy: The Culture of Paranoia in Postwar America* (Ithaca, NY, 2000); See also Daniel Sullivan, Mark J. Landau and K. Zachary, ‘An Existential Function of Enemyship: Evidence That People Attribute Influence to Personal and Political Enemies to Compensate for Threats to Control’, *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 3 (2010), pp. 434–49; Gary J. Krug, ‘Alternate Authenticities and 9/11: The Cultural Conditions Underlying Conspiracy Theories’, in J. Patrick Williams (ed.), *Authenticity in Culture, Self, and Society* (Farnham, 2009).

support through an innovative blend of free market rhetoric, nationalism and religious conservatism,⁷⁷ it is my contention that these attributes can be linked through an overarching idea of framing opposition as conspiracy, and setbacks – be they economic, social or political – as evidence of secret scheming. In a way, there is already a form of misinformation at work in the determinist optimism of the idea of an exponentially successful Turkey; a Turkey that can somehow overcome the seemingly insurmountable contradictions between being on the one hand a global(ized), liberal, free-marketeering force of secular boosterism, and on the other, a conservative, populist and strictly isolationist regional champion of Neo-Ottoman, Kemalist, or perhaps even ‘Erdoğanist’ politics.⁷⁸

⁷⁷ An illustrative account of the emergence of the AK Party, and its optimistic prospects, can be found in Ergu Özbudun, ‘From Political Islam to Conservative Democracy: The Case of the Justice and Development Party in Turkey’, *South European Society and Politics* 3 (2006), pp. 543–57. See also Ahmet Insel, ‘The AKP and Normalizing Democracy in Turkey’, *South Atlantic Quarterly* 3 (2003), pp. 293, 308.

⁷⁸ This admittedly ambiguous term is sometimes used to indicate the possibility of a systematic Erdoğan doctrine of polarization, paranoia and popularism. While it is not commonly used in the analytic sense, I find it interesting because it suggests systemic agency rather than pop-psychological attributes of Erdoğan’s leadership style. The term seems to have become popular around 2015, perhaps following the Turkish general election. A selection of examples in which it is used can be found in Ahmet T. Kuru, ‘Turkey’s Failed Policy Towards the Arab Spring’, *Mediterranean Quarterly* 3 (2015); Çağdas Dedeoğlu and Hasan Aksakal, ‘The Contradictions of Erdoğanism: Political Triumph versus Socio-Cultural Failure’, in Guenes Köc and Harun Aksu (eds), *Another Brick in the Barricade: The Gezi Resistance and Its Aftermath* (Bremen, 2015); Daryl

Of course the strength that derives from this balancing act relies precisely on the fact that these categories are neither mutually exclusive nor, for that matter, particularly clear-cut concepts. Part of the appeal of the conspiracy theory in Turkish politics is therefore due to the fluidity of these changing identities; in the social movement literature these shifts are somewhat ambiguously referred to as shifting 'opportunity structures'. If we except conspiracy theory as (a) a reaction to uncertain circumstances and (b) a questioning of the production of knowledge, then this should point us in the direction of a conspiratorial political elite, not solely a conspiratorial populace.

For now, points 'a' and 'b' require only limited elaboration, but, to avoid any unnecessary confusion, I will try briefly to explain why these two very basic beginning principles are vital to understanding conspiracy theory as a tactic of the political elite. For one, I remain very critical of the merits of a 'coping mechanism' interpretation of conspiracy theory. I reject the idea that they are the sole fancy of marginalized, 'irrational' individuals.

However, if we fixate less on the subject, to instead determine the core of the contextual argument being made in such an assumption, it becomes clear that in any conspiracy theory –and in this case especially when wielded by the political elite – there must be an anticipated

McCann, 'The Sins of Sultan Erdoğan', *Quadrant* 10 (2015), pp. 42–7; Galip Dalay, 'Turkey's 7 June 2015 General Election: Significance versus Narrative', *Al Jazeera Centre for Studies* (2015).

breakdown between the promises of the political class and the societal outcomes thereof.

The first point at which conspiracy theory becomes a viable political strategy is when expectations cannot be met: that is, when the system must seek the cause for its failures within itself, but does not wish to do so, indeed, cannot do so. This is when the first specter of the conspiratorial enemy is brought into being, precisely at the moment that mass resistance begins to form in response to the perceived inadequacies of the current system. Following from this, the questioning referred to in point 'b' is therefore not of the legitimacy of any given system, government or policy, but rather a questioning of the forces necessitated for conceiving what is 'true' in the first place. In other words, when resistance forms that questions the legitimacy of the political elite, the conspiratorial fiction (or untruth) presents itself as a colonization of the space of truth, rather than as a verifiable or rationally plausible entity. Simply put, genuine resistance is not simply dismissed. It is converted into evidence for the existence of the conspiratorial Other.

This questioning is not as simple as it seems. After all, if one considers the Gezi protests (or even the coup for that matter) as themselves an example of a radical act of questioning, then this renders the political elite's conspiratorial politics a form of counter-questioning, a state

response as it were, rather than a constitutive claim.⁷⁹ But can there be such a thing as a pure counter-hegemony, especially when either position suggests an implicit denial of the other's legitimacy, in other words, a relationship of necessity between its truth and the contestation thereof? Luckily for us, the answer to this problem is more straightforward than one might expect. Let me put it this way. If the 'paranoid style' does not consist of a mere questioning of the production of knowledge, but rather constitutes a claim on the power to distinguish truth from falsehood, then this means that it is always a question cast out into nothing, into the ether.⁸⁰

In this sense, conspiracy theory is a pure declarative. It rejects the possibility of dialogue or arguments to the contrary. But this is precisely what renders it a perfect tool of authoritarian politics. It embodies the totalitarian logic in which it exists for itself yet cannot sustain itself from within. It necessitates its implicit rejection, and must strive towards overcoming that which it cannot be, a non-conspiratorial, legitimate system. The totalitarian element of conspiracy theory is thus that it is

⁷⁹ For a critical analysis of Gezi as counter-hegemonic questioning and the radical contingency of Gezi's political identities, see Funda Gencoglu Onbasi, 'Gezi Park Protests in Turkey: From "enough is enough" to Counter-Hegemony?', *Turkish Studies* 2 (2016), pp. 272-94.

⁸⁰ I refer here in a general sense to the term as coined by Richard Hofstadter in his seminal essay, and later book, on the paranoid narratives that shaped the American political discourse of the 1950s and '60s. See: Richard Hofstadter, *The Paranoid Style in American Politics* (New York, 2008).

paradoxically both self-necessitating yet utterly reliant on the disavowal of the supposed ‘other’ system it seeks to reject. The impossibility of this is both inevitable and necessary.

In Turkey this impossibility takes on the form of an optimistic expectation of growth despite a stagnating economy, halting trade and tourism, expanding wars in its southeastern regions, and increased dissatisfaction with the political elite in primarily urban areas. The danger is that this dualism, between on the one hand a progressive and secular political project, and on the other, that of a conservative, religious-leaning and inward-gazing Turkey, becomes conflated in a clichéd binary – a false one – along the lines of that commonly invoked metaphor of Turkey as a bridge between West and East.⁸¹

The East–West divide is held up as reconciliatory promise, a ‘meeting’ of cultures as it were, as much as it is cast as an unalterable opposition. In this sense it may be exactly in the competing forces, in the impossibility of maintaining such a stark dualism, that a breakdown of meaning occurs; a breakdown that, in turn, mirrors some of the distinct warping tropes of the idea of conspiracy theory. To understand conspiracy theory in Turkish

⁸¹ For two excellent critiques (historical and political) of this outmoded East–West bridge metaphor, see Alan M. Greaves, ‘Examining Turkey as a Bridge between East and West’, *Anatolian Studies* 57 (2007), pp. 1–15; Nabil Al-Tikriti, ‘Turkey: A Bridge between East and West?’, *Fair Observer*, 9 March 2011, available at https://www.fairobserver.com/region/middle_east_north_africa/turkey-bridge-between-east-and-west/ (accessed 24 May 2017).

politics, one must also challenge the mythos behind the notion of Turkishness as it exists in the age of Erdoğan. This induces a perpetual contestation that results in paralysis, not progress. In sum, Turkish democracy is not moving either forward or backwards. It is consuming itself. And in so doing, it cannot find explanations befitting of its own paradoxes, other than by locating them in the conspiratorial. Conspiracy theory thus becomes a convenient chrysalis for the State's own contradictions – not to hide them, but to transform them, to emerge fully formed as what might well be referred to as 'managed democracy'.⁸²

In the conspiratorial mode, any resistance to the notion of a Turkish national destiny, or, for that matter, of a Turkish determinism in which even its halting democratization points towards its seemingly inevitable success, becomes merely further evidence of the supposed necessity of maintaining the status quo. As such, the notion of Turkish 'progress' has now become so detached from reality – both in domestic and international perspectives – that the conspiratorial mode, which requires a conspiratorial Other as the renewed and reborn mythos of its own necessity, takes hold. It is therefore not simply a matter of finding a kernel of truth embedded in the premise of conspiracy theory. What is required instead is the tacit acceptance that, in the post-Gezi and post-

⁸² The term is mostly used to refer to the political electioneering associated with Putin's Russia, in which opposition and elections are carefully managed, and in some cases even stage-managed, to suggest a pluralized society and democracy rather than the emergence of an authoritarian state.

coup environment of Turkish politics, what constitutes the government's legitimacy is this very upholding of the failures that warrant resistance to it in the first place.

Consider the almost Leibnizian element to the optimism implied in the idea of conspiracy theory as political praxis: that of the current status quo being the best possible system, evidenced by its many detractors.⁸³ This is a bizarre inversion, a perversion even, of the common idea of conspiracy, in which the State is seen as the puppet-master, not the other way around. But once the conspiratorial state, and by proxy the ensuing conspiratorial society from which it derives its support, finds its justification in such paradoxical optimism, the idea of the hidden enemy is invoked to explain each and every contingency to the State, and all resistance becomes conspiratorial. In sum, once the State takes on conspiracy theory as its *raison d'être*, a self-perpetuating form of (un)reason follows. In this erosion of certainty the conspiratorial state finds its purpose reborn as constitutive, legitimizing and, ultimately, hegemonic. Conspiracy emerges as a language for, and of, political winners.

⁸³ I refer here to the Leibnizian problem of Evil, that is, the necessary compatibility of evil and the almighty. See G.W. Leibniz, *Theodicy: Essays on the Goodness of God, the Freedom of Man and the Origin of Evil* (transl. E.M. Huggard)(New Haven, CT, 2005), available at www.gutenberg.org/files/17147/17147-h/17147-h.htm (accessed 24 May 2017).

Exploring the Logic of Conspiracy

So rather than considering conspiracy theory as a coping mechanism of the marginalized, we should see it as a language of winners, that is, of those strong enough to make conspiratorial enemies out of their opponents. It panders to the idea of a pre-existing, forlorn supremacy, and superimposes a symbolic strongman ideal of the State as a means by which to overcome the fictitious nebulous forces that oppose its resurgence. Ironically, the consensus necessitated for such a form of exclusion can render this conspiratorial politics seemingly consensual, a joining of forces to combat a common enemy. But we must once more try to disentangle ourselves here from a preoccupation with the friend/enemy dynamic. Instead, what I mean to emphasize is the implicit contestation of knowledge, and in turn the production of a conspiratorial knowledge, that such a politics begets.

If conspiracy theory can bring about – and serve to justify – real political decision-making, then what does this mean for the truth content of such a politics? Does conspiracy theory, through its articulation in politics, become essentially real? To explore this requires us to focus on conspiracy as a constitutive truth, not just a fabrication of truth; on a contesting truth-process, which reflects the necessity of its political paranoia by emphasizing the force required to distinguish truth from non-

truth, friend from enemy, and manifest destiny from historical hiccup. In other words, we must examine how conspiracy theory forms its own reality. Let us then descend into the depths of such a politics, the better to explore its spelunkular logic.

Our first encounter in this unknown world can be put in a Popperian sense. The first evident characteristic of the conspiratorial logic is that it seeks to 'secure' truth rather than allowing its pursuit or contestation. The idea that 'truth is often hard to come by, and that once found it may easily be lost again',⁸⁴ hence goes from being an emphasis on the pursuit of knowledge to one on safeguarding knowledge. For conspiracy theory to don the mantle of truth thus requires an emphasis on the elusiveness of truth and so provides a justification for its forceful retention. In turn, the pursuit of truth-detractors who challenge this truth becomes the founding principle of the real itself. A self-perpetuating loop ensues. The truth must be guarded against conspirators, but this truth cannot be questioned.

Thus the truth becomes itself a conspiracy. Such truth is conspiratorial as much as its conspiracy constitutes the truth. What I mean to say is that conspiracy theory when elevated to political praxis warrants a truth implicit in the pursuit of truth itself. Its modus operandi becomes the

⁸⁴ Karl Popper, *Conjectures and Refutations: The Growth of Scientific Knowledge* (London, 2002), p. 10.

truth, rather than constituting a pursuit of truth. For like the proverbial lie that begets many more, so too does any truth imply a counter-truth, even if this is a mere awareness of the momentary exclusions required for any form of consensus. And these, in turn, beget the conditions for a revenant truth to unfold. Conspiracy as truth is thus so only to the extent that it emphasizes the securing of truth, and the power required to do so.

Before we can move onwards we must resolve an unexpected navigational hazard. For we find ourselves faced with branching pathways, between the real and the contestation of the real. The logic of conspiracy is stuck, and so we, too, cannot move forward without resolving which way to go. To advance, we must consider that conspiracy theory can never be a completed project. It must remain hovering between the premise of its own possibility and its anticipated impossibility. In other words, the idea of conspiracy theory situates its logic perpetually in an implied position of motion or evolution, striving towards its idealistic fulfillment in which it is no longer a suspicion or a paranoid interpretation, but a statement of fact.

But here another antinomy of conspiracy becomes apparent. Consider the following. If the conspiracy theory reaches its logical fulfillment, that is, is proven to be true, then there is indeed a Conspiracy (with a capital C). Yet equally, if it is proven to be true, and hence irrefutable, then it is not so much a conspiracy as it is a Theory (with capital T), that is, a factual observation of relations. What this means is that the notion of conspiracy

is perpetually stuck in its own impossibility, in its negative stance, not towards the truth as such, but towards the agency implied in the legitimization of truth. Standing in front of these divergent pathways, there can be no moving forward without compromising the structural integrity of this delicate logical balance.

In order to solve this we must think of how this contradiction might be reconciled. Luckily for us, there is a way out, and we need not yet turn around. For the resolution of this dilemma, the tension between conspiracy theory as real and unreal can be disentangled with one simple insight, that is, the emergence of a double enemy, a doubling of conspiracy, as it were. This may appear counter-intuitive, but can easily be explained. We have so far neglected an evident problem in the idea of a conspiratorial politics. This is that as soon as the conspiratorial becomes political praxis, it takes on a doubling of real and imagined conspiracy. On the one hand, there is the genuine conspiracy in which increased executive power is sought, and justified by the existence of nebulous enemies along the lines of the anti-Turkey lobby or even the Gülen movement. The true conspiracy is one in which elusive (most likely false) conspiratorial adversaries are invoked to justify expanding political powers. And the second conspiracy is that of the conspiratorial enemy as integral to the justification of the first.

We thus find ourselves facing (1) the genuine conspiracy of the State, that is, the attempt to delegitimize opposition through accusations of

conspiracy, and (2) the false conspiracy made manifest in the pursuit of the nefarious, yet hidden, enemy of the State. But in their interrelation both become part of a conspiratorial dialectic. That is, they reinforce one another, and despite – or because of – their contradictions, they take on an intertwined necessity. This begets, by proxy, a veritable conspiratorial vision of society. Conspiracy theory as praxis thus always creates a necessary double antagonist to its claim: both the conspiratorial enemy and the conspiratorial society required to challenge this foe. Now we can see the two pathways, like the doubling of lenses, converge into one. A third and final chamber reveals itself therein.

Bearing the knowledge of these two interrelated levels of conspiracy, let us venture into the final sphere of conspiratorial logic. As we glance about this open space, the logical conclusion of our journey appears in the form of a question. That is, how can conspiracy theory become first a justification for securing the truth, then take on the form of a double conspiracy, without begetting in turn, a third conspiracy? We must assume that when any form of opposition to the State is cast as conspiratorial, then the only remaining outlet for genuine resistance to the status quo becomes one that can no longer be achieved by means of political engagement, but must instead seek manifestation in other forms. We can now consider how both Gezi and the coup attempt, regardless of their apparent differences in strategy, goal and ideology, both operate in the sphere of the conspiratorial – they become the ‘true’ conspiracy

begotten by the false conspiratorial tension of the conspiratorial society. That is not to say that they are merely causal events. More importantly, they become incorporated into the framing process of the paranoid state, as much as they are its product.

As we review the findings of our exploration, we can now determine that the conspiratorial logic, and the politics it begets, consists of what are essentially three forms of conspiracy: (1) the State's employment of conspiratorial rhetoric to justify increased executive powers, (2) the fictional enemy that it invokes to do so (a false conspiratorial Other), and (3) the reactionary conspiracy, the fulfillment of the conspiratorial society as begetting 'real' conspiratorial dissent along the lines of the Gezi protests or the coup attempt. Having reached this point, we can now safely exit the caverns of conspiratorial logic, bearing with us these precious insights. We are now well equipped to begin to decipher the forces that drive conspiracy theory as political praxis in Turkey today, the better to circumvent the logical traps laid for us by those who seek to capitalize on conspiracy theory.

Contingent Necessity, Necessary Contingency⁸⁵

⁸⁵ The theoretical callisthenics required to make the following constellation of assumptions mix the idea of contingency as conceived of in the social movement literature, which itself borrows from contingency theory in the social sciences, with that

While we can now speak of three tiers of conspiracy, we must be careful to avoid regarding them as distinctly separate entities. Our primary interest should be in examining their causes and the relationship that exists between them, and from what (contradictory) forces they acquire their potency, lest the competing affects of conspiracy disintegrate into their own contradictions. Their dissection is a delicate process, and one must be careful to avoid skipping steps out of eagerness to reach satisfying conclusions. I would suggest, therefore, that before we begin to think of the practical manifestations of this triumvirate of conspiratorial politics, and indeed their framing mechanisms, we must first consider what holds these three levels of conspiracy together.

The glue that binds them is one of competing forces, of a tension between the ideas of necessity and contingency, between that of supposedly expected, that is, inevitable, resistance, and the necessity of such resistance to sustain the controls against it. Let me proffer a starting point. The fictional resistance invoked by the first layer of conspiracy (the conspiratorial enemy) contains an attempt to control the otherwise contingent episode of genuine resistance, while the second conspiracy (that of the State's bid for power) brings about truly contingent uprisings such as the coup attempt, which in turn forms a

of contingency in literary theory. This is not to be confused with contingency theory in biology, otherwise known as the 'wonderful life theory', which employs an altogether different ontology of the contingent which emphasizes the unknowable and the accidental of life-forms, in stark contrast to the focus on intentional framing and subjectivity explored here.

necessity for the secondary conspiracy, that is, the paranoid state's, fulfilment.

In all three 'stages', for lack of a better word, the idea of conspiracy revolves around capturing a form of the imaginary revolutionary. It seeks to find a way to control what is essentially an inassimilable idea, that of contingent resistance, and to this extent it imposes fictional renderings thereof to create a system of relations in which the framer can seek to harness otherwise contingent forces. I realize that the debate on contingency and its role in political thought and philosophy is a longstanding one. Yet for the purpose of this chapter I aim to employ a definition that fits within a somewhat unorthodox conceptualization. So when I refer to contingency, I am drawing upon what Fredric Jameson has described as a particular characteristic of modernist, and indeed realist, affect, a play on the sense of the real, popularized in modernist art and literature.⁸⁶

⁸⁶ Fredric Jameson, *The Antinomies of Realism* (London, 2013). Here it is important to point out that in Jameson's previous work on post-modernism, he had claimed the 'waning of affect'. Yet here, Jameson seemingly restores the idea of affect to a central position, i.e. that of constituting an antinomy to realism. For a detailed account of the evolving idea of affect in Jameson's work, see Conall Cash, 'The Antinomies of Realism, Review', *Affirmations: of the Modern* 1, available at <http://affirmations.arts.unsw.edu.au/index.php?journal=aom&page=article&op=view&path%5B%5D=59&path%5B%5D=112> (accessed 24 May 2017). See also Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (London 1991).

While this may appear at first glance an unusual entry point into the concept of the contingent, it strikes me as useful to appropriate this particular form of contingency, as it fits neatly within this thesis's balancing act between framing theory and conspiracy theory, both of which are, after all, processes of constructing a narrative agency, precisely where there is a perceived flexibility in meaning and interpretation. In this vein, Jameson describes contingency as 'a failure of the idea, the name for what is radically unintelligible'. Clearly, the notion of such a 'failed idea' strongly resembles the equally radical unintelligibility of conspiracy as political practice.

After all, if contingency is invoked somewhat paradoxically to circumvent the contingent idea, then by doing so it allows Jameson's modernist author to grasp 'pure' situations and truths. Whether or not the author, or the framer as it were, is successful in this pursuit is largely irrelevant. What matters is the agency involved in the manipulation of the contingent, and the realization that the 'meaning' takes root not merely deterministically, but through a contestation of interpretative powers and ideology. This is also where the idea of contingency relates back to that of conspiracy theory. For if seen through such a lens, suddenly the notion of hidden forces that manifest in visible structures seems to take on the same paradoxical features implicit in the tension between the necessary and the contingent. In other words, even if the conspiratorial Other is non-real, its narrative drive can function as a contingent event to

reconsolidate the legitimacy of the state in the face of narratives of resistance, most notably as provided by the Gezi protestors.

What stands out, and here I go beyond the somewhat circular logic implied by Jameson's reading of contingency, is that the use of narrative to evade the inassimilable nature of a truly autonomous idea imbues the framer with the power of subjectivity, and that this allows him to reinforce the legitimacy of the primordial nature of his voice, a process which can be initiated not only by artists, but by politicians as well. In this way, the election adage 'campaign in poetry and govern in prose' is simply a commonplace for what is in essence an inevitability about the act of framing itself; it will always remain equally focused on emotion and reason. The energy, however, derives not from this false dualism itself. For the force of the political frame (be it adversarial or inspirational) lies not in the contrast between poetry and prose, but in the subjective authority cast by the narrative assumption itself, which is that of a singular voice with the power to shape a pluralist reality as supposed universal expression.

In other words, there is a paradox to be observed in the conspiracy frame, in that it always consists of a singular figure, the political leader or spokesperson, seeking to affirm an individual representativeness or mandate, by pointing towards the existence of hidden and secretive multitudes – which, in turn are of course juxtaposed with the sine qua non

of the conspiratorial accusation, the 'true' electoral majority.⁸⁷ This builds upon what is known as the 'paradox of political representation'⁸⁸ by adding a second layer of contradiction. Not only is it the singular subjective figure that claims to represent the true intentions of the masses, but furthermore, these masses are considered a 'silent' majority as opposed to the supposed 'vocal conspirators' taking to the streets in protest. The reason this dynamic is so important is that it goes beyond the assumption in the conspiracy theory literature that conspiratorial beliefs are a feature of political losers, when in fact the essence of conspiratorial framing relies on a subjugation, or attempted subjugation, of the underlying contradictions and hence contentions of the idea of political representation and its relationship to political opportunity structures

Yet for all its congruency, I do not wish to make it seem as if Jameson employs the idea of contingency as a synonym for conspiracy. Quite the contrary, it is in the force implied by such an inassimilable idea that the temptation arises for it to be wielded as a shield against other ideas. It is an idea that forms its own truth that seeks to be immune to the

⁸⁷ This also helps explain the rhetorical redundancy of the so-called 'small minority' of opposition, and the 'large majority' of government supporters. In either case, the adjective points towards an affirmation of agency, or lack thereof, rather than a distinct numeric assessment.

⁸⁸ The quote refers to the title of David Runciman's article on the 'paradox of presence', which he builds upon from Hannah Pitkin's 'concept of representation'. David Runciman, 'The Paradox of Political Representation', *The Journal of Political Philosophy* 1 (2007), pp. 93–114, and Hannah Pitkin, *The Concept of Representation* (Berkeley, CA, 1967).

contamination of other ideas. Therefore, when Jameson refers to the contingent as ‘something that is the failure of modernisms to completely and unequivocally “master” and “appropriate”, the way in which the form of something is juxtaposed with realities outside its spheres of control’, what he is pointing out is that the idea itself, through its internal contradictions, contributes to a dialectic which both enables and detracts from the idea’s legitimacy.

Is this not equally true in the case of conspiracy theory as propounded by the State, that is, the positing of an existential threat precisely so as to reconsolidate the supposed universality of the elite’s power as perpetually re-necessitated? Or is this, in fact, the reverse? Is conspiracy theory the antithesis to the truly contingent idea, one that breaks free from the simplistic antagonisms of paranoid framing, to take on true emancipatory value? I would suggest that perhaps it is both, and that therein lies precisely both the dilemma and the potential for its resolution, but most of all, an indicator of the forceful sway that conspiracy theory holds over the real.

Jameson already hints at this when he explains how, in the modernist mode of writing, one way to circumvent the inevitability of inassimilable ideas, that is, the desire to create something new and of its own kind, without mimicking the past, was to employ a method of ‘aesthetic contingency’ in which the idea becomes unbound of its contingent predecessor. One way this was done was through the use of anecdote.

Here Jameson points to the way in which both Nabokov and Beckett, two modernist writers par excellence, employed the stylistic device of anecdote, metaphor and so-called 'accessible' life-worlds (in contrast to the fantastical life-worlds of utopian or science-fiction writing) to create narratives that they could truly inhabit, and hence seek to control the formation of a style unbound by the parameters of what preceded it.

But the contingent element here is twofold. One, there is the contingency of the anecdote, that is the simulacrum of the manufactured real.

Secondly, there is the narrative space that is now unbound by contingent resistance of interfering stylistic tradition. However, both the disruption of the past and the disruption of the present remain in a relationship of necessity to one another. That is to say, the contingent real of the fictional is invoked only so as to prevent the equally contingent real of the influence of extraneous style. Contingency thus creates a contestation, but a necessary one, in which the real and the fictional coalesce. Might not the same be said of a conspiratorial politics?

I realize this risks confusing the idea of the contingent in the positivist sense (an unexpected turn of events), and the theoretical notion of an inassimilable idea. But both are related when it comes to understanding the genuine contingent resistance that arises of necessity out of the non-contingent enemy figure of conspiratorial politics. The manipulation of the contingent idea can be found in the systemic use of conspiratorial politics to render the oppositional idea obsolete, by supplanting it with false

renderings of a revolutionary imaginary. In other words, if we are to come to fully understand the internal dynamics of Turkey's recent uprisings and the state response it invoked, we must also come to appreciate how the mobilization itself was not the de facto contingent element, but that in the struggle to define the 'meaning' of the event, a contestation of the relative contingency of the protests becomes the central site of contestation.

In sum, this means that the idea of the contingent is not an a priori requirement for the supposedly inexplicable mobilization, but that the contestation as to this inexplicability itself constitutes the true fight over whether or not the movement was one of contingency or necessity. To put this somewhat more clearly, non-contingent resistance (fictional enemies) can bring about contingent resistance (real enemies), yet keeping both within the sphere of a conspiratorial politics.⁸⁹ Think of how the coup was seen as 'proof' of the legitimacy of the paranoid state, and this dynamic becomes evident.

And this is why there is a distinctly disorienting or surreal effect to both the Gezi uprising and the coup. Both seem to physically embody the conspiratorial space, but defy its fiction and fulfil its paranoia by forming genuine resistance. The way this effect manifests in enrage-type protests such as Gezi is that the peaceful mobilization of thousands in public

spaces is not conspiratorial as such, yet in its sheer volume succeeds in staging what is in essence a breakdown of the public sphere.⁹⁰ Whether

⁹⁰ While the term is not much used outside France, it derives from the French Revolution, and the so-called 'Enraged Ones' (les Enragés). But it should be noted that I am using it here in the sense of the New Left's rediscovery of the term among the student populace in the uprising of May 1968. For a historical account, see Le Collectif, *Enragés et situationnistes dans le mouvement des occupations* (Paris, 1968); John McMillian and Paul Buhle (eds.), *The New Left Revisited* (Philadelphia 2003); George Katsiaficas, *The Imagination of the New Left: A Global Analysis of 1968* (Cambridge, 1987), p. 70.

I will refer to the idea of enragé protest frequently throughout the course of the thesis. The general problematic that I mean to describe by borrowing this term from the New Left of the 1960s can be summed up as follows: The problem that the protests face is essentially a paradox that results from their transition from an elusive moment of mass mobilization to the necessity of prolonging their existence without causing further disruption to the collective space they have now occupied. In its very success at disrupting the status quo, by its very definition the movement creates a self-imposed collective otherness that in its very elusiveness and intangibility becomes more visible than the trappings of the state itself. In other words, the spirit is both invisible and highly visible. It is effervescent, yet its resonance creates tangible power in the presence of mobilizing protesters. The reason this becomes a threat to the state is precisely because the representative power from which the government derives its own legitimacy can be seen to rely on its capacity to maintain its exclusive hold on such a status quo. In the very otherness of the movement, the possibility for a disruption begins to take root that not only takes over symbolic spaces, but manages to render visible the symbolic power structures that were at first taken for granted in the idea of political representation. A paradox appears, which is the one courted by this type of movement, and that is the distinct force of an immaterial contestation. In the movement's capacity to stage the unravelling of the symbols of power as secondary to that of the will of the popular collective, it achieves a reversal of the hierarchies implicit in the expectation of traditional, or, in this case, majoritarian governance. The occupation's perceived lack of action is therefore in essence the most radical act. The occupation of a public space becomes uncanny, precisely because it juxtaposed the place as a site of power with that of one of social determination, and from this derives the strength to engage in the

one interprets this as a ‘reclaiming’ of public space, or on the other hand, an attempt to conspire against the State, both accounts of the event revolve around the playful way in which the contingent is incorporated to stage the real as being outside the real, inasmuch as the conspiratorial stages the fictional as within the real.

I have attempted to put this into what might be deemed a ‘Formula of (conspiratorial) Contingency’ in relationship to protest and conspiratorial state response thereto: The formula for such a dynamic, when considered along the lines of a contestation of the necessary/contingent dynamic, takes on the following form, at least in the case of the genuine resistance which one might therefore think of as a ‘third conspiracy’, or at least a third level of the conspiratorial accusation. This can be put as follows: ‘Contingency + Anecdote = subjective reality. (C+A=R), or at least a meaningful ‘claim’ to a ‘pure’ subjectivity (whether or not such a state can be achieved is of course debatable). But if we are to understand how

ultimate impossibility: achieving change derived a state of being that is essentially immobile. In sum, the possibility of implementing change precisely by refusing to articulate the parameters of such a change is in and of itself a deeply unsettling act of resistance. In this light, one can see the so-called ‘standing man’ protests at Taksim as a further manifestation and escalation of this dynamic, taking a site of mass energy and transit and transforming it into a frozen display of immobile resistance. The use of the continuous tense in the notion of the ‘stand-ing’ is here vital. The protestor is not frozen, but instead actively engaged in non-movement. While this may appear relative to the observer, the dynamic is crucial towards achieving the unsettling potential of this sort of disruption, and hence its capacity to elicit such forceful response.

this formula features similarly in the process of enraged politics, we must add the contesting force to our equation: that in which the state response challenges the truth claim implicit in the successful mobilization of the Gezi protests. Seen in this light, the formula for the protest comes as a result of the contingency formula, $P = (C+A=R)$, but becomes so only by opening up the interpretation of 'P' as either a result of necessary (N) or contingent (C) forces.

In other words, the nature of 'P=R' can be challenged by means of a conspiracy frame, which calls into question the contingent element of the protest by emphasizing its conspiratorial and hence structured nature, rather than granting it the validation of its truth claim by engaging with its aims directly. In sum, the contestation of the contingent element in the protest serves to deny the movement its authenticity, thereby suggesting that its motives stem not from a legitimate set of grievances, but are instead conspiratorial and hostile to the survival of the system itself. To a degree, this is of course correct, at least to the extent that the movement intends to challenge the status quo. Therefore, what finally occurs in such a contestation is that the contingent element in the protest is used to create the idea of necessity (legitimate grievance), whereas the State calls upon the non-contingent element (conspiracy – which of course is paradoxically a fiction, and thus another 'contingent' reality) to argue for its own necessity. This relationship can be seen to be paradoxical, arising out of the counter-intuitive dynamic of the contingent

strategy, that is, the idea that through a false contingent a pure objectivity could arise. This of course was already an evident dilemma in the modernist literature. When added to the contestation implicit in the state vs. protest challenge, the breakdown of meaning takes on further complications; these in turn foment weaknesses that the conspiracy frame actively preys upon.

In other words, in seeking to achieve a sense of the 'new' in a way untainted by the influence of the past, the contingent effect requires an invocation of a contingent reality, which in turn would not exist or even be necessary without the initial attempt to contain resistance within a conspiratorial frame. In essence, however, these tensions all revolve around the structural way in which the idea of a conspiratorial politics both begets uprisings and re-contextualizes these as proof for its own paranoia. The circularity that ensues, is one in which even genuine resistance comes to exist within the parameters of this relationship of contingency/necessity.

The result of this conspiratorial triumvirate of sorts is that even genuinely contingent resistance, such as the Gezi uprising and the coup attempt, begets further consolidation of the paranoid society. As the government calls into question the contingent element of the protest by emphasizing its conspiratorial and hence structured nature, rather than granting it the validation of contestation by engaging with its aims directly, it draws it into its own conspiratorial logic. In sum, the contestation of the necessity

implicit in such resistance serves to deny the movement its authenticity, thereby suggesting that its motives stem not from a legitimate set of grievances, but are instead conspiratorial and hostile to the survival of the system itself.

To a degree, this is of course correct, at least to the extent that the movement intends to challenge the status quo. Therefore, what finally occurs in such a contestation is that the contingent element in the resistance is used to distract from its necessity (legitimate grievance), whereas the State calls upon the non-contingent element of its fictional conspiracy to argue for its own necessity. This relationship can be seen to be paradoxical. Thus, contingent resistance arises out of necessity. But this necessity is denied when the government responds to the contingency of resistance as evidence of conspiracy. The conspiratorial society becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. It is precisely in this way that even radically different resistance movements, such as Gezi and the coup, can come to be framed as part of an overarching conspiracy, despite their opposite aims and methods.

This creates a seemingly confusing situation in which the contingency of the uprisings derives from the necessity of its relationship towards the conspiratorial state. In turn, the state response must emphasize the contingency of the uprisings as evidence of their illegitimacy. To put this in terms articulated by one of today's most enigmatic thinkers, the

convergence point of this contestation is akin to what Slavoj Žižek refers to as a 'contingent mechanism' in the idea of conspiracy itself.

He writes, 'at the social level, this is what the notion of [...] conspiracy conceals: the horror of society as a contingent mechanism blindly following its path, caught in the vicious cycle of antagonisms'.⁹¹ Yet this is exactly, where the conspiratorial state, and by proxy the conspiratorial society, goes beyond this anxiety, by elevating it to the *modus operandi* underlying its legitimacy. When the State creates figures of contingent resistance, framed as secretly structured, in order to justify an increasing level of repression of its own citizens, this, in turn allows it to respond to genuine forms of resistance by accusing them of being aligned with the anticipated conspiratorial forces it already sought to invoke before the occasion of genuine conspiracy. In this confusion, both sides seek to achieve their own necessity, by inverting the relations of necessity and contingency in their relation to each other. The uprisings seek to challenge the conspiratorial society by conspiring against it, and the state response sees in their resistance the evidence of its paranoia fulfilled. When viewed in this way, the coup attempt, for example, can be considered as part of an escalation already set in motion by the Gezi protests. In other words, the coup provides the perceived fulfilment of

⁹¹ Slavoj Žižek, *The Plague of Fantasies* (London, 1997), p. 40.

the conspiratorial interpretation of (and state response to) the largely peaceful resistance of the Gezi protestors.

Building upon this, we can thus articulate three steps that correspond to the contingency/necessity antinomy underlying the three stages of conspiracy identified earlier. These steps can be summarized as follows: first, the formal identification of the categories in their most unrelated form; secondly, the concretely 'real' way in which the categories exist in relation to each other; and thirdly, the 'absolute' attempt to understand the relation from which emerges that necessity, and that this, instead of being in contrast with contingency, can instead realize itself by means of contingency – therefore emerging in the form of a double contingency as it were.

The necessary and contingent as such form a totality. What emerges is that for the necessary to take the form of the contingent, a struggle is required (adding another necessity) that manifests itself through the interpretation of the meaning, and hence historical import, of the impact of the uprising itself. As we shall see, it is at this juncture that the idea of elite framing provides an insightful intersection for the practical requirements of such a process. The contestation between resistance and the status quo, between the State and the uprisings (whether Gezi or the coup), must go through a conspiratorial process in order to become legitimate and frame the other as conspiratorial. The state response holds that Gezi and the coup were evidence of conspiracy, whereas for the

participants in Gezi and the coup (again, I must emphasize that I am comparing their relation in the conspiratorial logic, not a de facto comparison as such), the repression of civil society and the crackdown on opposition constituted a state conspiracy against the people.

Any formulation to resolve this tension must therefore seek to reconcile what is essentially a dialectical relationship: a system of contradictions in which the only possible way to reconcile between necessity and contingency in conspiracy theory is to observe the necessity of contingency itself, and in turn, the contingency of the conspiratorial necessity. While at first glance this may appear a mere trick of Hegelian sophistry, dissection of this relationship and its mechanisms can help us solve some of the key practical dilemmas facing the idea of paranoid politics in Turkey today, as well as shed light on alternatives to such a politics.

Without a doubt, the military uprising consisted of a bloody breakdown of the freedoms and safety a democracy should guarantee its citizens. The Gezi protests, on the other hand, were an emancipatory contestation of the conspiratorial society. Yet both attempts to disrupt the status quo were seamlessly integrated, folded back into the paranoid politics that has now come to be emblematic of the Erdoğan doctrine. But how can resistance to the State be organized so that it does not fall prey to this circular and self-fulfilling conspiratorial agency? If we are to imagine a more legitimately progressive politics in Turkey, we must begin by asking

ourselves the following. Can there be a contingency that does not collapse into its own necessity, that is, an opposition which isn't reduced to conspiratorial treason? Can there be a stand-alone momentum, a comprehensive shift away from the paranoid zeitgeist that can reject the premise of a conspiratorial politics and the society it begets?

To begin with, we have already taken steps towards fulfilling this goal by beginning to understand the way in which conspiracy theory can form a veritable strategy by which the political elite in Turkey can justify increased executive powers, and consolidate their popularity and representative legitimacy despite waning progress, deteriorating democratic norms, and increased restriction of civil society. In addition, the extent to which such a politics drives the development of false enemy figures and even leads to the rise of genuine conspiracies has indicated the extent to which such legitimacy must be always on the brink of its own collapse. The final challenge then is for us to recognize the extent to which this conspiratorial politics constitutes in essence a contestation, not of conspiracy as such, but of its negative counter-image, of the real. That is, in the final theoretical consideration, we must take into account the somewhat counter-intuitive, yet vital, characteristic of the contestation of conspiracy theory as essentially a fight for what may well be deemed the conspiracy of the real, or, the imaginary revolutionary.

Conclusion: Real Conspiracy, Conspiracy of the Real

This fear of the uncanny, of the ‘parallel state’, of the conspiratorial enemy lurking in the recesses of Turkish politics and its politicians’ minds, is thus simply another way to seize upon such a revolutionary imaginary. That is to say, it denies genuine resistance the embodiment of such a spirit, precisely by filling the space with its own paranoid conceptions. Of course there is no strict limit to such a concept. After all, it is hardly a physical space. Yet while the imaginary revolutionary exists in the conspiratorial mode, the very idea of resistance becomes subject to the State’s conceptualization thereof as conspiratorial, rather than forming the possibility of a genuine, autonomous and emancipatory challenge to the status quo.⁹²

⁹² There is, as such, a strange inversion that occurs when the political elite refer to their practices as being ‘in the real world’, whereas protestors, dissenters and even those participating in the violent military uprising are accused of living in a land of dreams. The notion of conspiracy theory can help us understand how this reversal occurs, and what systematic contradictions underlie its particular appeal in seeking to determine seemingly hegemonic boundaries of the real. This is relevant to the state’s desire to seek control of those boundaries by determining a ‘rational’ plan of view, which in itself means making the distinction not of how things ‘are’ in the transcendental experience, but instead how they ‘seem’ in the empirical world. A revealing interpretation of Kant by Roger Scruton points out that, in this state, man seeks reasons instead of causes, and prefers imperatives to prescriptive laws, and above all (my own prioritizing) not mechanisms but ‘rational ends’. In this we have the above-mentioned ‘end’, the superimposition of the state onto the points of view that society uses ‘in order to conceive itself as practical’, hence assimilating the revolutionary within its own justification of agency and exploiting Kant’s famous problem of the paradox of freedom, that of the self-assumed empirical

As such, both Gezi and the coup, while seeking to make claim to the revolutionary imaginary in order to inspire citizens to rise up against the State in defence of Turkish democracy, were pulled into the conspiratorial framing strategy. We should therefore not become hung up on whether Gezi or the coup presented a genuine model for a return to a progressive politics in Turkey (certainly in the latter case this is hardly likely), but we need to recognize the extent to which the state response to both events was to dismiss them as evidence of an (international) conspiracy, rather than as a genuine display of dissent against an increasingly authoritarian state, as they sought to portray themselves.

Akin to someone who is fireman by day and arsonist by night, the political elite in Turkey has both increased domestic turmoil and subsequently won re-election on a promise to restore order and stability. To posit an end, but perhaps not a means, one might thus think of the imaginary revolutionary as an attempt to colonize what Kant deemed the ‘transcendental object’, in that it constitutes not an object of knowledge, but rather an a priori to knowledge.⁹³ Conspiracy theory as political praxis renders any idea of resistance to the status quo as inherently conspiratorial. And in turn, supposedly ‘non-conspiratorial’ participation in

being, yet transcendently adhering to the imperative of practical reason. In doing so, the state denies the opposition the reason required to prove its necessity.

⁹³ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* (rev. edn, 2007).

such a politics begets the formation of what is no longer a conspiracy theory of society, but a society of conspiracy theory.

But this is of course a perversion of the idea of conspiracy theory, which in its common form questions the role of the State in the production of knowledge, rather than the other way around. A deeply counter-intuitive situation arises: one in which the political elite embraces systematically a form of conspiracy theory that regards its own citizenry as engaged in a vast conspiracy against it. This can hardly be reconciled with the idea of a functioning democracy, one that relies on active civil and political participation in society. Instead, what emerges is a perpetual loop, evidenced by the continued state of emergency in Turkey today, in which the very idea of the real becomes infused with paranoid assumptions about the omnipresence of conspiratorial dissent.

The positing of conspiracy theory as the central premise of Turkish politics also implies that the real is only ever perceived as a field of action, upon which the individual assumes his perspective of what constitutes categorical imperatives by which to justify the reason of acting in a certain way. That is to say, the idea of political engagement becomes that of a game of thrones, of a relentless pursuit of privilege to seize executive power. In the case of a conspiratorial politics, an interesting paradox ensues, which makes it particularly suitable for those participating in this form of contest. After all, it employs the accusation of conspiracy as a means by which to enact its own conspiracy, which is

that of necessitating further executive powers to fight the conspiratorial threat it perceives.

In other words, the accusation of conspiracy serves as an exacerbation of the totalitarian paradox, which is that the more it fails, the more it is reconfirmed in the necessity of its undertaking. The same can be seen with accusations of conspiracy. The more they are derided and dismissed, the more plausible they seem to become. We can identify in this, therefore, a distinct affinity between the requirements for the conspiracy theory and that of the desire for political power. In both cases, it is a desire to wield the constitutive force not only of the status quo, but also to determine the boundaries of resistance thereto. Managed democracy thus entails not simply a staging of its own politics, but also an enacting of the resistance thereto.

To understand how the imaginary revolutionary thus reflects on the status quo as much as on its opposition, one might think instead of what has been called the ‘paradox of political representation’ – in which one elected official must achieve the means by which to represent the totality of the people.⁹⁴ Of course this can never truly be achieved – and should not be, lest a form of authoritarianism emerge.⁹⁵ But what this

⁹⁴ The quote refers to the title of David Runciman’s article on the ‘paradox of presence’, which he builds upon from Hannah Pitkin’s ‘concept of representation’. Runciman, ‘The Paradox of Political Representation’, and Pitkin, *The Concept of Representation*.

impossibility entails, when thought through to its logical conclusion, is that there exists what is essentially a 'dream-work of political representation', an imaginary sphere of legitimate representation as the driving force of a democratic politics. This means that the imaginary revolutionary can serve as a counter-image to this equally imaginary ideal of a representative politics. Together, in the balance between both aspirations, the 'real' contestation of a liberal democracy ensues.

To follow along such lines, and to put this in a normative context, one might refer to politics of conspiracy as that of a nightmare rather than a dreamscape of politics,⁹⁶ a legitimization of political power based not on

⁹⁵ The paradox of political representation is therefore a necessity for democratic practice as much as it contains within it an essentially post-truth premise. The claim to represent the many is strengthened the more the pluralist society is repressed. As a basic premise – and we must still seek to expand more precisely on what then is the actual possibility of 'equality' in the positive sense – this is vital to understanding the dialectical manner in which accusations of conspiracy function as process, not as reaction. Naturally, the strongman's tendency to accuse opposition of conspiracy contains a specific Achilles heel. For one, the insertion of conspiratorial frames could itself very well bring out actual adversaries or, perhaps more likely, unite and raise the stakes for various opposition groups to come together and to play that part, as it were, of consolidated antagonists to the political elite.

⁹⁶ This is useful to the extent that it begins to demonstrate how the conspiratorial accusation is in fact merely a darker positing of the dreamlike quality of the protest event and its possibilities. But, to be precise, there is of course another doubling effect which occurs as soon as one posits this binary opposition between dream and nightmare. For the dream can also refer to the possibility of successful 'true' political representation as such. In other words, and this is truly the most important insight which can be gained from the dream/nightmare opposition, what matters is not the relative normative

democratic unity, or the possibility of legitimate resistance to the status quo. Instead, there emerges a society (and hence a politic, and by proxy a political elite) that hinges on the expectation of its disintegration, and hence its perpetual efforts to detect the agents of its demise. While the saying goes that truth needs not the ornament of words, conspiracy theory on the other hand relies on the omnipresence of words, on the incessant repetition thereof, their eventual loss of meaning, and the perpetual dissemination of their central message: beware the conspiratorial enemy, and protect the State!

This is precisely where the logical fulfilment of the idea of a paranoid politics emerges; that is to say, when both the imaginary revolutionary and the idea of genuinely representative politics no longer form opposite poles, but instead are juxtaposed by a politics of conspiracy theory and

attributes of the unconscious fantasy as such (it matters little if the dream is a nightmare or a pleasant one), but that what remains central is the dreamlike quality of the idea of the collective as such. I will return to this in a more critical fashion in Chapter 4. However, for now, what is central to the acknowledgement of the import of conspiracy theory is that it too, in emphasizing the dreamlike quality of the Event as such, contains within it equally the key to its own unravelling. To put this as simply as possible, in trying to render the protests as conspiratorial, the political becomes focused on the dreamlike elusiveness of representation in which the state seeks to reclaim the narrative momentum from the protest movement. However, in so doing, it creates precisely the conditions under which the protest movement could appear triumphant, if it, in turn, manages to depict the state as being nightmarish. What we can see, therefore, is that as soon as the contestation becomes in essence a symbolic one, the stakes are significantly raised. This then brings us to one of the beginning premises of the thesis, which is that the introduction of the conspiracy frame renders the contestation of protest as a mythological struggle.

the paranoid society such a politics begets. When all political language is rendered inherently antagonistic, conspiratorial and paranoid, then this takes on a very real system of truth, a system of thought, and a system justifying the oppression of genuine forms of resistance or politically integrated opposition. We cannot square the circle of conspiracy theory, lest we recognize the real conspiracy as a conspiracy of the real. That is to say, to emancipate ourselves from the clutches of a paranoid politics, we must first question the conspiratorial rhetoric justifying the repression of free speech in Turkey today.

The deeper issue, and the bigger threat, is that in embracing conspiracy theory as central to the politics of the AK Party, it may have been transformed unalterably into a party that can no longer justify its position in times of peace – and as such will continue to exploit the deepest of divides in Turkish society, no matter the cost. As such, the repeated Western outcry against the worsening state of civil freedoms in Turkey, while no doubt heartfelt, is ultimately too little, too late, if not even somewhat beside the point. After all, it is not the lack of civic freedoms alone that is keeping Turkey back from being a well-functioning democracy. Instead, the internalization of conspiracy theory, the dissemination of fake news, and a conspiracy pandering leadership are indicative of a political sphere that reduces democratic participation to a zero-sum game of malicious dictators, nationalist zealots and leftist (international) conspirators. The most dramatic example of this can be

easily recognized in the total breakdown of democracy and civil order elicited by Turkey's first military coup attempt in decades. A failed attempt, it must be said, but nonetheless, a sequence of dramatic and bloody events that fit squarely within the paranoid political experience. Perhaps one might even go as far as saying that this was Turkey's 'meta' coup. Let us consider this in more detail in the following chapter.

So if it feels as if this chapter concludes with what is in effect a beginning, it is for the simple reason that no matter how precarious it has become to express such critique in Turkey, one must start somewhere. And that somewhere – so this thesis would have it – might well be located in the critical rediscovery of conspiratorial framing, and a renewed appreciation of the systemic attributes of the paranoid style in Turkish politics. Let us therefore conspire to reconcile the conspiratorial knack, the better to challenge its hegemonic potential and return to its deserved centrality the idea of a progressive politics in Turkey. What better way to do this than to consider conspiracy theory not merely as a fringe phenomenon, but as a veritable, if negative, system of thought? That is to say, to situate both the failed coup and Gezi within the wider problematic of conspiratorial thought in Turkey, we must now consider to what extent the production of a paranoid political rhetoric derives from elite framing of conspiracy theory.

Chapter 2

Elite Framing and State Response to the 2013 Gezi Protests

Introduction

In the early summer of 2013 a small group of about 50 environmental activists gathered in downtown Istanbul. Their goal was to obstruct the planned demolition of Gezi Park.⁹⁷ The park, which stands at the heart of Istanbul's now revived downtown area, is situated right next to Taksim Square. Its other neighbor, *Istiklal* Avenue, with its cinemas, Starbucks and supersized department stores, was to set the tone for the re-development of one of Istanbul's last remaining green spaces. The Turkish government had just approved a plan to replace the park with a shopping mall, luxury flats and a replica of an old military barracks. This combination of new and old, a form of 'nostalgic modernity' was typical of the trend towards both free-market enthusiasm and resurgent nationalism that marked Istanbul's many redevelopment projects.⁹⁸ On the morning of

⁹⁷ Murat Gül, John Dee, and Cahide Nur Cünük, 'Istanbul's Taksim Square and Gezi Park: the place of protest and the ideology of place', *Journal of Architecture and Urbanism* 38.1 (2014), pp. 63-72.

⁹⁸ My use of the term 'nostalgic modernity' owes a debt to: Esra Özyürek, *Nostalgia for the modern: State secularism and everyday politics in Turkey* (Durham, 2006), p,18.

28 May, the activists mobilized in the park. The bulldozers were already on sight, as were police with tear gas, ready to forcefully evict those standing in their way. Neither the activists, the construction crew, nor the police who were present that day would have known that within less than twenty-four hours their actions would spark the largest protests in Turkish history. As dramatic images of police violence against the Gezi park activists spread across social media, solidarity groups began to form both spontaneously and based on pre-existing activist organizations.⁹⁹ As a result, unprecedentedly large groups were able to quickly mobilize and occupy Taksim square and Gezi Park. As pitched battles with police forces broke out across Istanbul, what began as an environmental sit-in quickly developed into a citywide movement. A movement that in turn snowballed into a national wave of anti-government mobilization as Turkish citizens across the country expressed their frustration by protesting the increasingly undemocratic and conservative politics of the Turkish ruling party.

Following the occupation of Taksim Square and Gezi Park, Turkey's Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan addressed tens of thousands of supporters in a hastily convened rally at the coastal Black sea town of Samsun. The

⁹⁹Gulizar Hacıyakupoglu and Weiyu Zhang, 'Social media and trust during the Gezi protests in Turkey', *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 20.4 (2015), pp. 450-466; Yeşim Arat, 'Violence, Resistance, and Gezi Park', *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 45.4 (2013), pp. 807-809.

gathering was a show of numbers rather than a conciliatory gesture. In his speech, Erdogan emphasized the relative minority of people who sympathized with the Gezi movement, and sought to frame those protesting in Istanbul as the hapless victims of an international conspiracy to undermine Turkey. During his speech he alluded to the simultaneous outbreak of protest in Brazil (the so-called Free-Fare movement) as evidence of an international conspiracy to undermine both the success of developing nations. In the conspiratorial mode of comparison, he pointed out the similarities of the protests. Interestingly, the very same overlap that protestors used to mobilize as evidence of transnational solidarity, in the conspiratorial frame becomes evidence of mass conspiracy.¹⁰⁰ “The same game is now being played in Brazil. The symbols are the same, the posters are the same, twitter, facebook are the same, the international media is the same. They are being led from the same center.” Erdogan then elaborated on the theme of conspiracy to include the so-called ‘interest-rate lobby’, a mythical target of much conspiratorial rhetoric in Turkey, with undertones of anti-Semitism, and a fairly general reference to ‘foreign agents’. Having identified the perpetrators as belonging to this obscure parallel society, Erdogan concluded “Who won from these three-

¹⁰⁰ Cihan Tuğal, ‘Resistance everywhere: The Cezi revolt in global perspective’, *New Perspectives on Turkey* 49 (2013), pp. 157-172; Erdem Yoruk and Murat Yuksel, ‘Class and Politics in Turkey’s Gezi Protests’, *New Left Review* 89 (2014), pp. 103-123.

week-long demonstrations?”. “The interest lobby won. The enemies of Turkey won.”¹⁰¹

This moment stands out in terms of conspiratorial framing as it presents the first instance in which the state response to Gezi centers directly on the notion of conspiracy theory. That is to say, the primary framing strategy, or the diagnostic framing of Gezi, was from the outset conspiratorial. The narrative themes and contents of such Gezi conspiracy theories are manifold, with the most audacious ones featuring telepathy, demonic guidance, a German plot to destabilize Turkish Airlines, and of course, those involving CIA or Mossad involvement. And that is to name but a few. With regard to the way in which these ‘frames’ constitute the means by which the State acts out its hegemonic positioning vis-à-vis the protestors, the definition of a frame here correlates with that of Snow and Benford, specifically when they write of the so-called ‘misunderstandings and misrepresentations’ that mar the often synonymous employment of the terms ‘frame’ and ‘ideology’.¹⁰² In this regard, while the current chapter emphasizes the strategic element in state response and framing, it sees the frames as a constellation both indicative and constitutive of, but not synonymous with, conspiracy theory.

¹⁰¹ Daniel Dombey, ‘Erdogan says same forces behind Brazil and Turkey protest’, *Financial Times* (2013) June 23.

¹⁰² David Snow and Robert Benford, ‘Master Frames and Cycles of Protest’, in Aldon D. Morris and Carol McClurg Mueller (eds), *Frontiers in Social Movement Theory* (New Haven, CT, 1992), pp. 133–52.

That is to say, they are indicators of a paranoid style and interpretation of contingent resistance, without consisting of a cohesive or coherent conspiracy theory as such. This is important, as it also entails that the conspiracy frame should not simply be considered a vehicle of a systematic conspiracy as such, but is considered in its own right as a distorting and even exacerbating anti-framing attempt. It is a strategy that seeks to disrupt rather than posit a coherent conspiracy theory or, for that matter, to provide even the beginnings of a somewhat plausible, alternative interpretation of events. The conspiracy frame is one of many conspiracies, not one overarching interpretation.

It has good cause to be so. After all, the multitude of exponentially bizarre renditions of the true 'cause' of the Gezi protests deny the protestors the possibility of any genuine grievance or overarching reason to mobilize other than that of conspiracy. The Turkish political elite have resorted to extreme forms of antagonistic framing in an attempt to debase the political discourse to that of straight-out conspiratorial fantasy. Rather than dismissing the protests while acknowledging the protestors' grievances, as would be the mode of response in model liberal democracies, the Turkish political elite chose to fight the protests with absolute impossibilities, that is, fantastical accounts of conspiratorial intent.

This chapter fulfils two functions. First, it comprises a case study of the Gezi protests, and its interpretation in elite framing of the resistance it

presented. As a result, the elite framing as discussed here is already a form of counter-framing (or, as mentioned in the introduction, a form of counter-counter-framing). So what is really happening here? To answer this I would suggest moving beyond the way in which political ideology is considered in the classic social movement literature,¹⁰³ by instead aligning ourselves with a more critical approach to conspiratorial framing and resistance, along the lines of a Gramscian ‘strategic’ employment of hegemonic framing.¹⁰⁴ The only way to make sense of such flagrantly fantastical accusations is to situate them as part of a wider paranoid framing strategy, one that relies on the systemic positing of deliberately implausible untruths, rather than seeking mere adversarial plausible responses to the protests. This perspective therefore considers the preposterous nature of conspiratorial accusations without elevating their veracity, but instead seeks to understand their exponential growth, their

¹⁰³ Rudolf Heberle, *Social Movements: An Introduction to Political Sociology* (New York, 1951). See also John Melbourne and Ogilvy Wilson, *Introduction to Social Movements* (New York, 1973). See also Ralph Herbert Turner and Lewis M. Killian, *Collective Behavior* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ, 1957).

¹⁰⁴ For the concept of (cultural) hegemony, see Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci, 1891–1937* (eds. Quentin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith) (London, 1971). For hegemony and framing, see Cliff Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York, 1973); Cliff Geertz, *Ideology as Cultural System* (New York, 1973).

political impact and the increasingly extreme rhetoric in which such theories are brought to bear.

This requires of us a certain rethinking of the state response to Gezi, one that demonstrates causal mechanisms between the rise of the new masses and the invocation of conspiracy as a deliberately destabilizing and theatrically conspiratorial acting-out of the divides that the protests sought to emphasize as reconcilable. The conspiracy frame is therefore more than an unlikely interpretation of chaotic events, it is a deliberate attempt to superimpose imaginary contentions onto the previously dormant socio-political divides awoken by Gezi, as part of the already much commented-upon polarizing style of the Erdoğan doctrine.¹⁰⁵ Ergo, this chapter employs the Gezi protests as a case study for the arguments put forth in the preceding chapter, that is, of a polarizing strategy deliberately meant to distract from a fragmented society. In sum, the state response to Gezi sought to depict a polarized Turkey, rather than the more accurate portrayal of a fragmented Turkey such as existed in the Gezi narrative. Conspiracy theory functioned as an efficient means by which to achieve this effect.

¹⁰⁵ Metin Gurcan, 'Turkey's New Erdoğan Doctrine', *Al Monitor*, 4 November 2014. available at www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2016/11/turkey-wants-use-its-hard-power-solve-regional-problems.html (accessed 25 May 2017). For a study focusing specifically on polarization and the post-Gezi transformation of the AK Party, see E. Fuat Keyman, 'The AK Party: Dominant Party, New Turkey and Polarization', *Insight Turkey* 2 (2014), available at www.insightturkey.com/the-ak-party-dominant-party-new-turkey-and-polarization/articles/1426 (accessed 25 May 2017).

As a starting point from which to understand this process, we can remain squarely within the commonly accepted definition of elite framing as consisting of two analytical elements, built upon Goffman's initial conceptualization of framing as so-called 'schemata of interpretation'.¹⁰⁶ First, it incorporates what is referred to as 'legitimized framing', frequently interpreted as the diagnostic stage of the event, that is to say, the moment in which the frame consists primarily of an ordering response to the contingency of the event, an acknowledgement of its existence more than an explanation for its occurrence.¹⁰⁷ It is here that we can recognize the very first clues as to the constitutive potential that this stage presents, specifically in terms of countering the opposition's own 'diagnostic' stage, which arguably occurs during the very first instances of protest, before the supposed momentum of mass mobilization.

The Gezi protestors' own framing must remain within this diagnostic stage. The constant re-framing of the 'surprise' element of the protests' occurrence becomes its own form of ontology and reason for its continued existence. The importance here is that even in the first stage of framing, the frame is already one that contains within its conception

¹⁰⁶ Goffman, Erving, *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience* (Cambridge, 1974).

¹⁰⁷ For a more in-depth analysis of the diagnostic frame, see Robert D. Benford and David Snow, 'Framing Processes and Social Movements: An Overview and Assessment', *Annual Review of Sociology* 26 (2000), pp. 611–39.

the expectation of a continuation of framing efforts beyond the first conceptual stage. It is not a static or isolated step, but one that revolves around competing interpretations of the contingency of the event itself. For the protestors, their 'rise' is no surprise yet must be framed as unexpected in order to achieve peak mobilizing success. For the State, on the other hand, the event is perhaps unexpected, but must be initially framed as being within the ordinary, and hence undeserving of (international) attention or coverage. Like the policeman who gestures 'nothing to see here' the diagnostic stage of the elite response to the protests is one that seeks to rob it of its contingent potential.

The idea of a conspiratorial elite framing represents a spin on the basic principle of diagnostic framing. After all, it is normally invoked in the context of conflict resolution. A conflict or contention is 'diagnosed' in order to define the nature of the problem. But this is not necessarily different in terms of the conspiracy frame, except that the desired outcome is a starkly different one. Where, in the conflict resolution literature the diagnostic stage is but the first in a longer process towards resolving the conflict, in the paranoid style, the diagnostic stage already exists as the positing of an antagonism, one that the elite framing mechanism is meant to 'resolve' by diminishing its emancipatory potential and denying it the definition of being a 'real' issue in the first place.

To this extent, when it comes to elite framing of conspiracy, the diagnostic frame is essentially an anti-diagnostic frame, which diagnoses

the non-existence of a real contingency and suggests the positing of non-real contingency (conspiracy) as a superimposition thereupon. The diagnostic stage thus becomes anticipatory of a wider conspiratorial framing response, rather than one that seeks to begin resolving the conflict by acknowledging its underlying grievances. In this sense, a diagnostic frame can be both interpreted as conspiratorial, and in turn, the conspiracy frame itself can be a version of the diagnostic frame.

A good way to think of this is in terms of Turkey's longstanding ethnic conflicts. In one case, the diagnostic frame would begin by acknowledging the existence of what has become known as the 'Kurdish Question'.¹⁰⁸ From there, it would have to define what the Kurdish question is, so as to move towards possible means of resolving it. This can be done without the influence of any conspiratorial framing. After all, both sides acknowledge that there is a genuine conflict between the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) and the Turkish state. In contrast to this, it would be much more unlikely for the Turkish political elite to introduce a

¹⁰⁸ There exists a wealth of literature on the Kurdish Question, spanning from 1946 to the present. For a comprehensive overview over time, see Fevzi Bilgin and Ali Sarihan (eds), *Understanding Turkey's Kurdish Question* (Plymouth, 2013); Henry J. Barkey and Graham E. Fuller, *Turkey's Kurdish Question* (Boston, 1998); W.G. Elphinston, 'The Kurdish Question', *International Affairs* xxii/1 (1946), pp. 91-103. For more recent discussions of the peace process under AK party rule, see: Latif Tas, 'Peace Making or State Breaking? The Turkish-Kurdish Peace processes and the Role of Diasporas', *Review of Social Studies*, Vol 3. No 1 (2016), pp. 25-65; Latif Tas, 'What kind of peace? The case of the Turkish and Kurdish peace process', *Open Democracy* 9 (2015).

diagnostic frame for the Armenian Genocide.¹⁰⁹ On the one hand, that is a conflict that has already ended, but the issue is more complicated than that. First addressing it would require an official acknowledgement of the genocide. Since the Turkish government does not recognize the killings as genocide and actively antagonizes those countries or groups who do, the diagnostic frame cannot be posited, at least not by Turkey's political elite.

In fact, whenever there arises the possibility of a diagnostic frame for the Armenian Genocide, this is readily interpreted as a conspiratorial effort to undermine the Turkish state. Yet finally, between these two modes, we can view the conspiracy frame itself as a diagnostic frame. The case of Gezi would suggest that there exists an elite acknowledgement of the protest event, but not of the protestors' grievances. This means that while there is a diagnostic frame of sorts, it is not one that can lead to a peaceful resolution of the conflict. Gezi therefore elicits an elite framing response, which begins with a diagnostic frame, but it is not one that anticipates successful reconciliation, nor, for that matter, does it actively pursue a reconciliatory dialogue.

Instead it is a distinctly conspiratorial diagnostic frame, one that finds evidence in Gezi for the supposed existence of a mass conspiracy against

¹⁰⁹ For a historical overview of Turkey's elite framing narratives regarding the Armenian Genocide, see Jennifer M. Dixon, 'Defending the Nation? Maintaining Turkey's Narrative of the Armenian Genocide', *South European Society and Politics* 3 (2010), pp. 467–85. And for a comprehensive historical analysis of the Armenian Genocide, see Raymond Kévorkian, *The Armenian Genocide: A Complete History* (London, 2011).

the State. As a result the first stage of the conspiracy frame – being the diagnostic frame – has no need to be based on factual reality, but rather contorts, dispels and delegitimizes the idea of a framing contestation on equal terms. It uses the diagnosis of conspiracy as a way to define the protest contestation on the framer’s terms, thus robbing the Gezi movement of its sole weapon, that of its radical contestation of the status quo. Conspiracy is a convenient vehicle for such a narrative takeover. Fear is a great inventor, but its greatest invention is that of fictional fear. Like Plato’s dreaded copy of a copy, the conspiracy frame mimics the enthusiasm begotten by the successful mobilization of Gezi, to saturate it with its own paranoid double of conspiratorial nationalism.¹¹⁰ Such accusations serve to superimpose fictional resistance upon actual resistance, and juxtapose hope with fear. Therefore, the conspiratorial frame is also a frame that sabotages the framing process itself. It is not simply a manifestation of the framer’s paranoia. It is a rejection of the legitimacy of any contestation of opposing frames. It not only mocks the idea of adversarial framing, it poisons the political debate precisely in order to reconsolidate its own constitutive sphere of politics and drown out the challenge posed by the protest event. It raises the stakes of the conflict, but in so doing alters the very nature of the original contention.

¹¹⁰ In Platonic realism, the idea of the simulacrum is a dreaded distortion of the real. For a theoretical analysis of Plato’s simulacrum and its evolving meaning, see Gilles Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense* (ed. Constantin V. Boundas) (New York, 1990), p. 235.

To this extent, the conspiracy frame can be understood along the lines of what is essentially a Foucauldian frame, that is, a 'position of knowledge', rather than constituting a genuine diagnosis of the event in its own right. This can help us understand how the conspiracy frame takes root in the diagnostic stage, and continues into what is called the prognostic stage, the second tier of elite framing. In this stage, the elite framing strategy moves away from diagnosing the problem towards seeking to formulate a solution to it. But evidently this need not necessarily be a consensual process.

Instead, what becomes a primary characteristic of this way of looking at the conflict is that it must build upon the categorizations introduced in the diagnostic frame. But this also creates an Othering effect, a process by which the conflict is situated as taking place outside the influence of the so-called 'in-group'.¹¹¹ This is meant to enable a supposedly detached and practical solution, but in the case of the Gezi protests, the event took place precisely because there was a sense that such a detachment had already grown without acknowledgement. The only legitimate prognostic frame for the peaceful resolution of the protests would have required at the very least an acknowledgement of the issues around which the movement was based. Yet since the diagnostic frame had already

¹¹¹ William A. Gamson, David Croteau and William Hoynes, 'Media Images and the Social Construction of Reality', *Annual Review of Sociology* 18 (1992), pp. 373–93. See also Bert Klandermans, *The Social Psychology of Protest* (Oxford, 1997).

denoted the resistance as conspiratorial, the only possible prognosis could be one of a violent state response. After all, when the government labeled the protestors as terrorists, conspirators and traitors, this constituted a clear attempt to vilify, but more importantly to isolate, the protestors as resting squarely outside the confines of its political responsibility.

But this exclusion is of course also a constitutive claim. The conspiracy frame – whether in the diagnostic or prognostic stage, achieves a disenfranchisement of the conflict from its very origins. In the case of Gezi, once the diagnostic frame rendered the mass mobilization as an indication of conspiracy rather than a breakdown of civic relations due to an exacerbation of societal tensions, grievances and (economic) injustices, this led to the justification of a violent crackdown. So when we consider how in the social movement literature there exists a somewhat optimistic idea regarding how the prognostic frame can help compile, articulate and bring into focus seemingly incoherent demands made by non-hierarchical, so-called ‘horizontal’ protests, we should be wary of the fact that it can also do the exact opposite.¹¹²

¹¹² For an in-depth theoretical explanation of the Gezi movement’s relationship to anarchism and horizontality, see the interview with the Istanbul anarchist collective ‘Otonom’: ‘The Commune of Gezi: Genealogy, Power, Challenges’, 1 August 2013, available at www.ainfos.ca/04/aug/ainfos00112.html, <http://www.commonware.org/index.php/cartografia/35-the-commune-of-gezi> (accessed 25 May 2017). For an overview of the various anarchist movements and student

In other words, the conspiracy frame distorts, silences and blurs these very narratives by superimposing its own conspiratorial musings. A simple adversarial frame would not achieve this effect, but the accusation of conspiracy does. In other words, when the conspiracy frame takes on the form of both diagnostic and prognostic framing, it situates both within a profoundly paranoid rendering of the real conditions underlying the mass mobilization of anti-government protestors. Yes, the protests took the country by storm, but first they had to take it by surprise. The conspiracy frame manages to effectively mitigate this contingency. And in so doing, conspiracy relocates the narrative axis of the protests.

Protesting the Frame, Framing the Protest

A good way to illustrate this build-up of meaning in frames is with a well-known Picasso anecdote. Picasso is at work in his atelier in occupied Paris. Suddenly, a member of the military police comes barging in. He sees a print of Picasso's *Guernica* standing against the wall. Admiringly, he exclaims 'Did you do that?' 'No,' replies Picasso. 'You did!' The humour of the anecdote lies in the disconnect between the aesthetic experience of the painting and the violence underlying its creation. The intuitive distancing of the officer, who does not recognize his own work in the

organizations in Turkey from 1986 to 2004, see Batur Ozdink, 'Anarchism in Turkey', A-Infos: a multilingual news service by, for and about anarchists (2004) (accessed 25 May 2017).

painting but that of the painter, effectively illustrates the separation of the object of orientation within the confines of the frame.

Simply put, the frame and its content are like the skin of a fish: delicious when cooked together, but better separated before consumption. In other words, the frame as a physical manifestation, as something that can be interpreted, reacted to and re-framed by others does not need to have a strictly synonymous relationship with the content of the frame. What this means for the conspiracy frame is that, despite the evident untruth of its content, the frame itself can take on true meaning in its dissemination. Picasso's response (that the officer was responsible for the event that inspired the painting) illustrates that while the artist is the primary framer, what he is truly framing is not the event depicted, but the implied agency of the event. This is what makes it such a critical painting. It accuses without depicting the accused. One frame builds upon the other, and the framer cannot wield full control over its dissemination. The frame's greatest flaw is also its greatest strength. It cannot be controlled, yet if it becomes hegemonic within the appropriate contextual setting, it is almost impossible to challenge.

This can be applied in reverse to the idea of the conspiracy frame. After all, it manages to occupy a space in which the truth content of all other frames is cast into doubt.¹¹³ The process in which the conspiracy frame

takes on real meaning is one in which all other frames lose their meaning. Paranoid elite framing thus manages to both exploit the frame's weakness by creating a frame that is purposefully fictional, while exploiting its greatest strength, which is the frame's ability to contest, alter and, in this case, obscure other framing efforts such as that of the Gezi protestors. The conspiracy frame becomes parasitic on the idea of framing itself.

¹¹³ The dichotomy between scepticism and cynicism, which I would cautiously suggest is a misleading one (at least in the current context), nonetheless offers an opportune starting point on which to base a theoretical reconsideration of conspiratorial accounts of political processes. The problem, however, that arises when one considers conspiracy theory in such a light is that it situates a certain revolutionary force in the notion of being able to establish a truth that is considered untrue by the status quo; or more precisely, the constitution of a truth that finds its truth content in the positing of an opposition to the status quo. This is in and of itself not necessarily problematic. The contradiction, however, becomes apparent when one argues – as I do here – that conspiracy theory is a language of winners. But how, then, can the winners, i.e. the political elite, consider themselves both revolutionary as well as being part of the status quo? To me, this seeming impossibility is not so much a dilemma as it is the central premise of the force of the conspiracy theory, when propounded by the political elite. For it achieves the positing of a self-internalized contestation to its own status quo, in which it must necessarily come out the winner. So, what the conspiracy theory in this mode allows is for the State to posit both the terms along which the status quo is framed, as well as seeking to define the (fictional) opposition to its own legitimacy. The implicit notion in conspiracy theory, similar to what MacDonald defined as the central characteristic of the revolutionary, is after all that the conspiracy theorist can see the real truth of things precisely because, unlike the realpolitiker, there are no taboos that he is not willing to break. In other words, when the idea of conspiracy theory is deprived of its oppositional value, it does not lose its revolutionary premise. In fact, when employed by the state, the idea of conspiracy theory can allow it to re-imagine itself in ways it could not formerly have legitimized. The suspicion therefore emerges, that there may well be a certain strategic element to the employment of distinctly non-rational antagonistic framing, precisely when framed by members of the political elite.

This means that the conspiracy frame becomes not only, as I put it earlier, a frame that frames the frame, it also distinctly subverts the very idea of a frame. This may seem counter-intuitive, but relies on a fairly simple premise, that the conspiracy frame questions the agency implicit in framing itself. Therefore it is less interested in the content of any given frame (both its own and competing frames) but instead seeks to undermine the legitimacy of framing tout court. In order to understand this better, we should return to Goffman's original concept of framing as what he called a 'schemata of interpretation'.¹¹⁴

In Goffman's conceptualization of the frame, it acts much as a physical picture frame in that it in equal measure reflects and restricts public perceptions. These cognitive frames then become 'realities' in their own right. This means that the frame can be employed strategically to influence not only the interpretation of events, but also the response to them, and even their outcomes. More recent studies expand upon this by moving towards the progressive forces such an act might entail or help bring about. Snow has therefore hinted at the agency inherent in the operationalization of frames as a liberating process, their ability to determine what is 'in frame' and what is 'out of frame' in relation to the object of orientation constituting an emancipation of sorts. In this sense the frame functions both as the 'articulation mechanism' inasmuch as it

¹¹⁴ Erving Goffman, *Frame analysis: An essay on the organization of experience* (New Haven, 1974), p. 21.

performs a ‘transformative function’.¹¹⁵ Once more, the conspiracy frame can achieve this effect in reverse. It becomes a veritable gravitational pull for all other framing attempts.

What Snow calls the ‘object of orientation’ therefore contains a hint as to the breakdown it initiates in competing framing attempts that make it so effective despite its implausibility or even evident untruth. In this, frames are always composites of meaning, both inserting themselves above and sifting behind the underlying construction of the frame’s ‘reality’, and seeking to break out of the confines of the frame at any given moment. Like mildew spreading through a bookshelf, one need but put a non-conspiratorial frame next to a conspiracy frame, and the mould of its untruth will spread throughout. What matters most here is therefore not simply that the frame can be strategically invoked or employed, but that there can never exist a singular frame that dominates the framing process as a whole. This has distinct ramifications for the conspiracy frame. Since it can never achieve full control over the framing process as a whole, that is to say, it cannot eradicate contesting frames entirely (although repression of free speech is one attempt to do so), the closest it can get to achieving its goal is to tarnish the idea of framing itself. In essence, the conspiracy frame poisons the well from which public discourse flows.

¹¹⁵ David A. Snow, ‘Framing and social movements’, *The Wiley-Blackwell Encyclopedia of Social and Political Movements* (2012) p. 470.

This corruption by the conspiracy frame is therefore a distinctly productive one, even if it does not acknowledge the legitimacy of any frames of resistance or even revolve around any possible reality. And in turn, knowing that the conspiracy frame is false does not mean that it can be effectively parried. Instead, all the resources of contesting frames become preoccupied in debating what is already evidently a falsehood. This is not unlike what Foucault refers to as the doubly murderous gesture in the 'death of god', wherein the knowledge that there is no god in and of itself drives the agnostic to seek alternate 'limits' to this nothingness, thereby reproducing and acting out the very forces which the denial of a godly existence sought to abolish in the first place.¹¹⁶

To put this more simply, the conspiracy frame takes on all the hallmarks of the real precisely because of the contesting forces that summon it into existence. The anxiety perpetuated by the conspiracy frame is one of the seeming disintegration of all truths, a relativism of sorts, in which all other frames are pulled into its orbit. It is not the evident falsehood of the accusation of conspiracy itself that does this, but the forces of its own realization, which in turn come about through its contestation. The debate is no longer whether Gezi is based on legitimate or non-legitimate grievances, but whether it constitutes evidence of conspiracy or not. This is no mere red herring. It is a dragnet that pulls all fish in its wake.

¹¹⁶ Michel Foucault, *Method, and Epistemology: Essential Works of Foucault, 1954–1984* (ed. James D. Faubion) (New York, 1998).

But there is an evident danger in such an erosion of meaning. For in the same way in which those who find everything beautiful are in danger of finding nothing beautiful, so too does the paranoid who frames every opposition as treasonous run the risk of neglecting existing dangers. When all framing becomes conspiratorial, this cannot simply be undone by a (counter)-hegemonic frame. Instead, it must be perpetuated. The taint of the conspiracy frame spreads through the political system and its institutions. To this extent, the positing of an elite conspiracy frame is really a scorched earth tactic. If conspiracy theory is to be a successful political framing strategy, there is a heavy price to be paid. All political action comes to be subject to conspiratorial interpretations, and in turn, begets escalating counter-conspiratorial action. In other words, the conspiracy frame's logical conclusion is that it submerges even resistance thereto into what is essentially a master frame of conspiracy.

The emergence of what is therefore essentially a conspiratorial politics (to which the conspiracy frame is integral) eradicates all previous political gains from its path. It severs ties with Turkey's progressive credentials, it undermines fruitful relations with its allies, it corrodes the possibility of a peace process with the Kurds, and it antagonizes the very democratic rights that it sought to provide its people: the right to free speech (effectively the right to dissent), and the right to participate critically in civil society. In this regard, the politico's urgency in sustaining the paranoia of conspiracy evokes Hofstadter's poetic observation that the

conspiratorial framer ‘traffics in the birth and death of whole political orders [...] He constantly lives at a turning point: it is now or never in organizing resistance to conspiracy.’¹¹⁷ Between now and never, there is a perpetual tension, an implied existential threat, but also a welcome opportunity to act out the heroics of the nation state. The conspiracy frame harnesses this distortion to its full theatrical and ultimately destructive effect.

The Paranoiac’s Problematic, Problematizing Paranoia

The paranoiac’s dilemma is thus that the conspiracy theory, that is, the anticipation of contingent resistance, must be sustained precisely so as to detract from ‘genuine’ forms of resistance. To this extent, when the diagnostic and prognostic stages are merged, they become properly dialectical, positing both a means and an end. This means that the conspiracy is both a form of diagnostic and prognostic framing, inasmuch as it links the two in a perpetual loop. It therefore becomes both at once. It is both the proffered diagnosis and the prognostication of a solution. This brings us back to the three modes of conspiracy from the previous chapter. First, the diagnostic frame is that of identifying a conspiratorial other. Second, the prognostic frame is that of expanded state powers to counter this supposed conspiratorial threat. Third is the emergence of

¹¹⁷ Richard Hofstadter, ‘The Paranoid Style in American Politics’, *Harper’s Magazine*, November 1964, available at <https://harpers.org/archive/1964/11/the-paranoid-style-in-american-politics/5/> (accessed 28 May 2017).

new and emergent forms of resistance to the State in the form of post-Gezi contingencies, be they successive protests or even the coup attempt.

To this extent, even the framing of false conspiracy can only ever be but a placeholder for the unstoppable build-up of pressure such a society begets. In turn, this pressure must be released somehow, as the paranoid state begins to consume itself in the hunt for ever-revenant enemies, enemies it now requires for the continued enforcement and legitimization of its counter-conspiratorial measures. The problem this creates is that even otherwise democratic processes, such as the election or referendum vote on enhanced presidential powers, take place under the auspices of strongman tactics and conspiratorial fear-mongering. As Chantal Mouffe warns us in *The Democratic Paradox*, this game, of a conspiratorial democracy – a managed democracy – is not worth the candle. After all, it requires a perpetuation of the conspiratorial mode into what can only become a totalitarian escalation. In her analysis (drawing upon the Derridean notion of the constitutive outside), she argues that antagonism becomes ‘irreducible to a simple process of dialectical reversal: the “them” is not the constitutive opposite of a concrete “us”, but the symbol of what makes any “us” impossible’.¹¹⁸

In other words, the framed and perceived friend/enemy relationship similar to that in the response to the coup attempt becomes inherently

¹¹⁸ Chantal Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox* (London, 2009), p. 12.

destructive, in that it creates a framework in which the 'political' is only so to the extent that it serves to delineate these polarities, rather than seeking to find common ground from which the underlying issues might be resolved. While on the face of it, it may seem a good thing to pull away from consensual or centrist deliberative politics, what happens instead is that any actual political opportunity structures, or what Mouffe calls 'agonistic pluralism', are reduced to a hardening of opposition along increasingly fictional and hyperbolic repercussions of accusatory framing. This can be seen in Turkey, where the premise of any effective parliamentary opposition has become increasingly unfeasible. Not because a consensus has been reached, but because the parameters of contestation, of consent and dissent, can no longer be articulated from a position of political reality, or indeed, from a position of reasonable security.

Instead, the practice of politics takes on a distinctly Protagorean tinge, in which political skill is reduced to the acquisition of political virtue. Yet we must be careful here not to make the common error of attributing to Protagoras the idea that practice equals skill and skills equals practice. The skill evoked in the conspiracy frame's idea of leadership is one, not of democratic principles, but of paranoid intent. This is why it is more interesting to observe how Protagoras' dictum implies essentially a negative acquisition of the capacity to rule. He writes that practice is nothing without skill, and skill is nothing without practice. This quickly

evolves into a proto-Stoic redundancy in which practice is nothing and skill is nothing, lest the two find meaning in their interrelation. This holds equally true for the conspiracy frame's relationship to the truth (apropos its truth content) in the articulation of political practice. So while in conspiratorial framing man is the measure of all things, he is more importantly also the measure of all that is not. In other words, the conspiracy frame is 'true' to the extent that it is the result of a distinct statement of political virtue, as a negative statement of what it is not. In other words, the framer of conspiracy is the one who lays claim to the non-conspiratorial, righteous space. By virtue of delineating conspiracy, the conspiratorial framer is suggesting his own position 'within' virtue, that is, within the parameters of political legitimacy.

The dilemma for the paranoid politician is that this 'virtue', even if translated into political popularity, can still only beget a democracy that is now rendered suspicious, a conspiratorial democracy as it were. This means that even future progress in terms of democratization in Turkey will be tarnished by the paranoid means by which it was achieved. This is a high price, but one that the paranoid politician and the political elite must be willing to pay. The conspiracy frame thus serves at once as the catalyst, the vehicle and the outcome of this antagonistic stance towards political participation (or lack thereof) and the democratic legitimacy with which it wishes to endow its powers. As such, the political process in Turkey is in essence reduced to a perpetual series of votes of confidence

either for or against the strongman position vis-à-vis the idea of opposition, as witnessed by the vote on expanded presidential powers, immediately followed by the suggestion of a possible vote on reinstating the death penalty. This means that it becomes impossible to return to a consensual, parliamentary form of democracy. After all, there is no consensus to be reached, only enemies to be vanquished. Democracy and conspiratorial politics can be wed, but it is hardly a happy marriage.

Framing time: Frozen Conflicts, Peace Frames and Revolutionary Time

At this stage I must address a puzzle that has so far been purposely neglected. The framing of Gezi, be it conspiratorial or on behalf of the protestors, becomes essentially a temporal contestation. This is evident in the typical *enragé* style of protest, which has the disruption of public perceptions of time and space as its main goal. So we would do well to consider the state response to Gezi and the conspiracy frame invoked to do so along similar such lines of temporal manipulation. Simply put, if we are to understand the full impact of the conspiracy frame, this requires an exploration of the central role that its perception of 'time' plays in its bid to regain control over the protest frame.

If even the diagnostic frame is one that suggests a long-lurking conspiracy, this means that there is a contestation of temporality at the

heart of the conspiracy frame. This poses certain challenges. First, the anti-Gezi framing ‘strategy’ is one that exists beyond the temporal boundaries of the event. Its impact continues years after the protests ended. Secondly, it can therefore be seen how the conspiracy frame deliberately warps time and conflates frames of resistance to negate their own temporal contestations. What this means for us is that we need to consider the conspiracy frame not merely as a manipulator of agency, but also of temporality, of the experience of time.

Of course the reason the conspiracy frame situates the protests quite literally as being ‘the greatest battle of our time’ is that it only does so to the extent that the Gezi protest’s framing strategy hinges on a destabilization of temporal elements. The occupation of public spaces and the lengthy and radical exemption from participating in society contributes not only to the emancipatory potential of the movement, but was also instrumental in provoking the conspiracy frame. After all, how could these youthful protestors be anything but conspirators if they could afford to exempt themselves from their professional responsibilities to instead loiter in a park? Or so the state response would have it.

In the previous chapter we briefly touched upon this by considering the contingent element in the idea of conspiratorial resistance, and the extent to which contingency becomes a de facto necessity in the paranoid style. In the following sections, therefore, let us consider this problem through the framing of (1) the ‘frozen’ nature of the Gezi conflict and how this

correlates with and detracts from the technical term in the conflict literature. Then (2) I suggest we consider how the conspiracy frame can posit itself as a so-called 'peace frame'. And finally, (3) we should consider how the notion of 'momentum', that is to say, the escalation of Gezi's grassroots mobilization, both raised and altered the stakes of the conflict in a way that came to be framed as conspiratorial. To add to the list of the conspiracy frame's manifold capabilities, we can now consider it as a time-traveler, a manipulator of time and space. This is not an accidental outcome of conspiratorial framing. Instead, the contestation of time lies at the very heart of its paranoid allure.

So if we are going to think about, for want of a better word, 'conspiratorial time', what better way to begin than with the perceived absence of time altogether? Let us begin by addressing the concept of 'frozen conflict'. There is, of course, already the implication of a certain a priori paradox here. For a conflict to be frozen entails the passing of time without any prospect of its resolution. But this is a continuation of hegemony, an imposed freezing, not a natural state. And in reverse, to do so requires a state of repressed conflict, a society that cannot move forward without resolving the contention that lies seemingly dormant. This means that the very idea of a frozen conflict contains conflicting interpretations of its relationship with time. For a conflict to be frozen, it must be actively kept frozen, which in turn implies a state of rigor mortis for the progression of the society preoccupied with so doing.

A conflict can never simply be frozen, in a pure state of suspension. It must either actively be kept frozen, or be unfrozen. It is not a neutral state. This implies agency, which in turn implies temporality. Even a frozen conflict is a contested one. The conflict we speak of here, that of the Gezi protests, is of itself an attempt to ‘unfreeze’ a society: a frozen state, as it were. In frozen conflict, temporality emerges as problem and solution, both means and end. In this, it is not unlike the paralysis induced by the conspiracy frame, in which the perceived unpredictability and irrationality of political behaviour renders the political suspended yet exposed to perpetual turmoil.

The way this works is simple, but relies to a great degree on whether or not one considers Gezi a ‘conflict’. On the one hand, the social movement and conflict literature posit – rather optimistically to my mind – that protest can serve as a means by which frozen conflicts can be unfrozen, or defrosted (to stretch the metaphor). In this interpretation, if protests generate a resurgent awareness of the conflict, and if this then leads to a ‘national conversation’, and if this realigns attitudes towards the conflict, and if this results in a newfound desire to seek political solutions to the conflict, then the conflict can be resolved.

On the other hand, there are evidently an abundance of ‘ifs’ in this equation, which is why I find it doubtful that protest can be considered in such terms. And there is another blind spot to be determined here, for this interpretation neglects the seemingly obvious dilemma that the

protests themselves might be considered a conflict, and that in their repression a secondary frozen conflict becomes perpetuated. So to be clear, I do employ the concept of frozen conflict as it exists in the social movement literature, but only to the extent that it situates the protest as the catalyst for a radical shift in the perception of conflict, not as a possible 'unfreezing' or even solution thereof. In the case of Gezi, the protests certainly did not serve to 'thaw' any one given frozen conflict. They were an attempt to address what the protestors perceived to be a frozen society, a contemporary Turkey that was not working for its citizens. To bring this back to the contestation of temporality, what this means is that the idea of a frozen conflict, a frozen society or even a frozen resistance becomes linked to practices that can be deftly dismissed as conspiratorial, rather than being recognized as born out of genuine grievances.

This means that instead of constituting a thawing of frozen time, the Gezi protests actively sought to freeze time and create a frozen conflict within the confines of the occupation of the park. In other words, the Gezi protestors effectively froze a non-conflict situation, thereby seeking to emphasize that for them the status quo as it existed was already a form of frozen conflict. This is a doubling trick, a mirror image as it were, that sits at the very heart of the enraged-style protest. It achieves the disruption of a public space, not by uprooting it, but by exacerbating its given function, hence emphasizing its importance.

There is a certain irony here, which becomes apparent when one considers one of the most often cited criticisms of the Gezi movement. This went somewhat along the lines of ‘why do they seek to protect a park that was never popular in the first place? Now that it will be demolished, they are gathering where they never used to. They suddenly care so much about its existence, when just a week ago no young person would ever spend their day, let alone the night, there!’ But this should not be a mitigating factor. On the contrary, it only emphasizes what I have described as the exacerbation of the enragé protest. Such protest takes an existing place and exaggerates its function. In this case, the effect was thus the stronger, as Gezi went from a practically empty green space to that of the central symbol of Turkey’s progressive factions, its hopes, dreams and contentions. This did not take place in Gezi despite the park’s relative unpopularity. It took place because of it. The movement therefore effectively seized upon the ‘idea’ of a thriving city centre, staging its own carnivalesque version thereof, precisely so as to protest its deterioration as a communal gathering place, and indeed its imminent destruction.

In sum, such protest does not ‘unfreeze’ a frozen conflict. It dramatizes the idea of a status quo that is frozen in time by seeking a public space to freeze in time. In other words, the notion of frozen conflict is not a mere binary state between conflict and resolution. Instead, the protests suggest a freeze-frame of sorts, one that exists in parallel to the notion of a frozen conflict. Of course, it is precisely in this space that it can be

both at its most emancipatory, yet equally at its most vulnerable to conspiratorial counter-framing. So ultimately it is not even that important whether Gezi is, strictly speaking, a frozen conflict or not. More important is that in seeking to counter the protests, the Turkish state must also 'freeze' itself in time, by creating a state of emergency, a repression of civil liberties and introducing a violent police response. But in both framing attempts, be they conspiratorial or emancipatory, the idea of a frozen temporality is key to the process underlying either position. In other words, while the Gezi protestors 'froze' the park so as to unfreeze Turkish democracy, the Turkish government responded by effectively freezing the civil liberties of the people.

The irony of course is that the very impossibility of peacefully resolving this contestation leads to what is essentially a veritable frozen conflict, that of the post-Gezi purges, the consolidation of executive power, and the post-coup crackdown.¹¹⁹ Yet this does not yield a thriving democratic

¹¹⁹ This is where I feel obliged to point out an inconsistency commonly invoked by anti-government commentators and Gezi-sympathizers, which is to lament why a majority of the population would rally in support of the AK Party despite numerous political scandals, ranging from the pettily fraudulent to the outright criminal. The inconsistency lies in the fact that critics would have it that somehow the Gezi protests should have arisen, not out of the inherent contradictions of the current political system in Turkey, but out of disgruntlement with their own political inefficacy. In other words, they would deny that it was the very logical breaks ensuing from the current political status quo that led to the grievances, which fuelled the protests. In essence, the onlooker who cries, 'Why do these people vote for the AK Party!? Even after Gezi?' neglects the fact

society, nor is it necessarily a frozen conflict. Be it managed democracy or outright authoritarianism, the foundations of Turkish democracy are no longer as sound as they once seemed, and many of its citizens now live in a situation more akin to a frozen conflict than they did during the Gezi protests. For now the Turkish government prefers the hammer to the anvil. But in the contest for democracy, it is the anvil and not the hammer that constitutes the true prize.

The Conspiratorial Peace Frame

There is a final reversal that occurs in the temporal play of the conspiracy frame. This can be summed up simply, but includes two further elements (dormant time and momentum), which for the sake of clarity should be considered separately.¹²⁰ To begin with, this can be put as follows. In the

that it was this discrepancy between the party's popularity and shortcomings that led to the protests in the first place. And even though the AK Party further aggravated this perceived inequality, for example by providing free transport to mobilize counter-protests, it should come as no surprise that Gezi only fuelled the righteousness of AK Party loyalists, rather than dissuading them. In this sense, proponents of a Gezi spirit have touched upon at least one fundamental truth: that the demolition of Gezi Park itself was never a sufficiently inflammatory issue to justify the scale and outsized proportions of the ensuing nationwide protests in comparison to other local demonstrations that took place just weeks before. Instead, the issue of the park became a rallying ground, not in order to form an electoral majority, but to focus on a collectivity that could challenge the narrative of AK Party majoritarianism.

¹²⁰ That being said, they are of course clearly related. I separate them in the main body of the text simply for the purpose of maximizing the comprehensiveness of the

state response to Gezi the conspiracy frame, pace its fantastical politicians, takes on the deceptive form of a so-called peace frame. This may seem to run counter to my earlier suggestion that the conspiracy frame is in essence an infectious adversarial frame. But on closer inspection, it reveals itself to be both.

Yes, the conspiracy frame is adversarial, and indeed it creates a fictional adversary to superimpose upon the real contingent resistance. However, the way it does this is by being posited as a peace frame. That is to say, in the paranoid style the diagnosis of conspiracy, and the prognosis of a violent state response, leads to the formation of a deeply subverted manifestation of what can then be thought of, in an admittedly clunky-sounding syllogism, as the conspiratorial peace frame. A good way to

argument. But their relationship, and the problematic that exists therein, can be characterized as follows: the conceptualization of momentum as existing in contrast to, and hence in tandem with, the idea of dormant time does not adequately explain its relevance. Instead, what is more important than the ‘active but unacknowledged’ versus the ‘inactive but acknowledged’ dichotomy of the mechanisms implicit in dormant time and momentum is the implied contingency that leaves the movement vulnerable to adversarial framing. Here the critique of momentum follows the same pattern, as is the case with dormant time. Firstly, the reliance on an ambiguous notion of both the supposed inevitability and the necessity of a momentum ‘moment’ for social movement success, creates a narrative of events that is conditional on the unpredictable, almost magically elusive instance in which the protests ‘erupt’, and hence reach the public consciousness, thus gaining ‘momentum’. This will be further explored in the following paragraphs.

think of this is in terms of a typically Brechtian inversion. 'Please, don't tell me peace has broken out!'¹²¹

But what does this mean, for peace to 'break out'? The humour of Brecht's quip clearly lies in its ironic reversal of war and peace. After all, we tend to see peace as a celebratory end to war, not as something to be lamented. Yet the warning implied in Brecht's jibe is precisely that of the effect embodied by the conspiracy frame's own reversal. That is to say, when protest is seen as evidence of conspiracy, as a conflict begotten by enemies of the State, then the solution to it must be one of restoring the peace by oppressing the movement. It is therefore a peace that denies the Gezi movement's pacifism, as much as it is an implicit way of saying that the State must retain what is commonly referred to in the literature as a 'monopoly of violence'.

Yet isn't this yet another paradox? To frame the protest movement as anti-peace, but to forcefully respond with police violence to restore the peace appears to be a contradiction in terms. This is, then, exactly what the conspiracy frame as peace frame achieves. It can be both, and yet remains neither. In keeping with our focus on temporality, the conspiracy frame as peace frame thus suggests that the protests form an aberration, an isolated moment in time, a deviation from the peace otherwise secured

¹²¹ I am referring to the character of Mutter Courage's exclamation in Scene 8, 'Sagen Sie mir nicht, daß Friede ausgebrochen ist' ('Do not tell me that peace has broken out'; translation my own) in: Bertolt Brecht, *Mutter Courage und Ihre Kinder* (Berlin, 1996), p. 77.

by the State; whereas for the protestors it is the exact opposite. They must frame the movement as the true continuation of the democratic promise of modern Turkey, and the Erdoğan government as the exception to the rule. In other words, when one sees how the conspiratorial frame takes on the facets of the peace frame, which in turn justifies an escalation of the conflict, it becomes apparent that this invariably leads back to the very hegemony the protestors sought to resist in the first place. Or, to put this differently, the conspiracy frame as peace frame becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy inasmuch as it is a self-perpetuating one. It is but another way to delegitimize the protests, and in so doing robs them of the narrative agency required for sustained resistance, let alone lasting change.

The relationship between the peace frame and the conspiratorial frame thus appears to be circular, and therein lies the premise of its temporal claim. Seen in this light, the peace frame comes to represent a stagnated time, a dormant time as it were.¹²² And it is this form of peace, one in which there is a hegemony rather than a consensus that the conspiracy frame seeks to impose on all resistance to the State; a peace in which

¹²² Take for example the well-known *pax Augusta*, otherwise known as the *pax Romana*. The peace, in this case, lasted a lengthy 206 years, two centuries marked by a cessation of hostilities between the Roman Empire and its enemies. But of course this was only a relatively peaceful period, not an absolutely peaceful one. It was an enforced peace, not a complete lack of resistance. But it remains a notable peace precisely because of the Roman success in sustaining the relative weakness of their adversaries to effect a creeping expansion of the Roman Empire, rather than the outright warmongering that had preceded it.

there can be no genuine resistance. For even if there is the occasional skirmish, protest or uprising, this will be dismissed as evidence of conspiracy, not as a failure to sustain the peace. The peace posited by the conspiracy frame is therefore effectively a potent banality. It speaks to the imagination, but at heart it is a distinctly temporal framing contestation situating the status quo as enduring, and the protest as occurring outside of time, a deterrent to this enforced peace.

I began this section by putting aside two further elements of what constitutes the conspiratorial peace frame. It is now time to incorporate these into the idea of the peace frame. The first underlying factor is that of a so-called 'dormant time'. The second is that of 'momentum'. Indeed the two cannot be entirely separated, for they both revolve around the central axis of a contested temporality. To put this differently, both the ideas of dormant time and momentum are crucial to the relative success of either the protest movement's or the state response's framing strategy.

The concept of dormant time has become increasingly crucial to the study of frozen conflict. The concept refers to that elusive moment in a peace process during which the possibility of a resolution seems least likely. In a protracted conflict this can also be a moment, or time-span for that matter, during which there is a cessation of direct forms of hostility, but nevertheless very little desire, and hence opportunity, for the

negotiation of a settlement.¹²³ Naturally, dormant time can itself be subject to framing,¹²⁴ and/or provide the mantle under which preparations for negotiations can take place, so does not exist outside the framing process in some sort of objective ether. Instead, dormant time, and the contestation of whether or not the dormant time is one that favours the protest or the state response are vital components of the temporal contestation of the peace frame.

Of particular importance here is the process by which the contest appears as a ‘moment’, a contingent event, rather than as an inevitable and urgent outcome of a crisis of realization and representation. And while the emphasis on ‘momentum’ appears crucial to capture the imagination of the public and the (inter)national media, the dilemma that presents itself is how to frame the protests as inevitable, rather than as arbitrary events. In this sense, dormant time and momentum are not merely opposites, they reaffirm the elements in each other that validate them in the first place. Specifically, the ambiguous temporality of dormant time

¹²³ Edward Azar, ‘Protracted International Conflicts: Ten Propositions’, *International Interactions* 1 (1985), pp. 59–70; John Paul Lederach, ‘Conflict Transformation in Protracted Internal Conflicts: The Case for a Comprehensive Framework’, in Kumar Rupesinghe (ed.), *Protracted Internal Conflicts* (London, 1995), pp. 201–22; Tozun Bahcheli, Barry Bartmann and Henry Srebnik, *De Facto States: The Quest for Sovereignty* (London, 2004).

¹²⁴ Neophytos Loizides, *Designing Peace: Cyprus and Institutional Innovations in Divided Societies* (Philadelphia, 2016), p. 155.

could not be accepted as real without the promise of the elusive golden egg of momentum. And in reverse, momentum would not have the potential to capture the imagination in the way it does, were it not for the incorporeal way in which dormant time is encapsulated in the mobilization process.

The problem that presents itself here can be stated in fairly simple terms. In the conflict analysis literature, dormant time is essentially a negative period. That is to say, there is little to no likelihood of resolving the conflict. Again, protest is here seen as a way to move beyond dormant time into an active time, a reframing of sorts. But the problem is that for any protest to be successful in achieving this requires a manipulation of the idea of dormant time in the first place. If one considers the Gezi protests as a form of *enragé* protest, then this suggests that its successful mobilization can only be achieved by creating a sense of stagnant time, a staging of frozen time in public places. If the entire goal is to disrupt, to force awareness of the status quo, this can only be achieved by essentially pulling the subject out of its ordinary relationship to the real. In other words, while the Gezi protests do not posit a conspiracy theory of society as such, they do rely on a strategic effect achieved by mass mobilization, which shifts the perception of the real.

This is where the idea of dormant time remains too inflexible. Its movement into a more active time of reconciliation can only take place precisely when the protest and, in turn, the state response to it take on

the uncanny hallmarks of being both wildly active and deeply dormant. This is not to say that there exists no true dormant stage as such, but allowing it to be framed as dormant 'time' negates the potential to prove any notion of a structural and long-term contentiousness that is not singular or frozen in time, but embodies both to their maximum theatrical, and hopefully emancipatory, potential. The danger, then, is that this doubling of dormant and active time can be equally achieved by means of a conspiratorial framing strategy. The conspiratorial peace frame is one way to achieve this, and from therein, similar forces are implored, but to repressive rather than progressive ends.

So the idea of a dormant time is as crucial to understanding the temporality implied in the peace frame as it is to the resolution of a given conflict. In the mode of the conspiracy frame, dormant time is but further evidence of hidden enemies waiting to rise up. The reader will no doubt have come to realize that all forms of the conspiracy frame boil down to this paranoiac suffusion. But for the Gezi framing strategy, the resistance frame as it were, the idea of a dormant time is a vital component of the process by which it achieves momentum. This, in turn, is vital to its success, or at the very least, crucial to its mobilization strategy.

This perceived distinction between 'dormant' and 'active' periods of time is therefore a cornerstone in both the state response to the protests, and the protests themselves. Indeed, if one looks closely, the entirety of the competing framing strategies seek to establish the protest event as

taking place either outside, or within, time. In the framing of the state response, the protestors are always evading or corrupting time. Their protest takes precious time out of people's daily lives. They are behind the times, out of time, then arrested to serve time. Yet in the eyes of the protestors themselves, they are having a great time, not giving the State the time of day. They enjoy the time of their lives in a Gezi Park rendered timeless. For them the best time is now. So the point I mean to make is that the conspiracy frame, at its core, makes a temporal distinction between the legitimacy (or not) of the resistance to the status quo, and hence posits itself as essentially 'timeless', whereas the protests seek the reverse effect, by emphasizing the collective 'freezing' of a public space in order to demonstrate the 'untimely' nature of the ruling party.

Liberating Time

This means that we can make the following assumption about the power relation implied in the act of (elite) framing. First, there is always an implied hierarchy in the positing of a frame. From this it follows that the hierarchy is based on the perceived legitimacy of the frame. But this is a paradoxical legitimacy. After all, it can only be achieved through struggle, through the after-the-fact assertion that the dominant frame is the legitimate one. Subsequently, we need to ask ourselves what such dominance consists of. How can it be measured? One way of doing this,

as I have sought to suggest here, is by making claims to a contested temporality. This can be adequately summarized in the Orwellian maxim that whoever controls the past controls the present, and who controls the present controls the future. In the case of the Gezi contention, however, there is a deliberate freezing of time in an attempt to wrest the movement free of this stifling temporal control. The desired result is a liberated time. But this, unfortunately, is also the movement's Achilles heel. Its greatest strength is its greatest weakness.¹²⁵

For at the heart of a liberated time is the mechanism of momentum. This is necessary for the movement to achieve its maximum mobilizing potential, yet its nebulous process, its seemingly inexplicable mushrooming, provides fertile soil for counter-framing attempts such as the accusation of conspiracy. I will engage with this in more detail in the

¹²⁵ As we shall see, this holds equally true for the idea of the so-called Gezi spirit. But there is an evident danger that the triumphal rhetoric implied by the invocation of such a spirit lends itself equally to accusations of conspiracy, thereby robbing it of its emancipatory potential. However, this is not simply a strategic matter, in which one might re-frame this issue in some other way so as to avert such accusations. Instead, the idea of a Gezi spirit warrants further inquiry precisely because it contains both the movement's greatest strength and its greatest weakness. This contradiction, in turn, can be identified in the conspiracy frame and the way it is employed in the state response to Gezi. As such, despite the temptation to integrate the impact of the protests in some form of either negative or positive historicist understanding of Turkey's trajectory either towards or away from democracy, it should remain imperative to focus equally on the process by which the 'idea' of Gezi has been integrated into a larger conceptualization of paranoid politics and conspiratorial framing beyond the confines of the protest event itself. I will return to this in more detail in Chapter 4.

next chapter, specifically with regard to the problems implicit in the idea of a so-called 'Gezi spirit' (*Gezi Ruhu*).¹²⁶ In this sense, the idea of momentum becomes an accessory to the liberation of Turkish democracy, while critics consider it a threat to the status quo. In this, it effectively takes on a dynamic that is the very opposite to the previously discussed dormant time, to the degree that dormant time relies on the idea of invisible activity whereas the idea of momentum suggests visible inactivity. And what else is conspiracy theory if not a paranoid suffusion of the perceived omnipresence of invisible activity vs. visible inactivity?

At this stage therefore, and following a careful consideration of the importance of framing momentum and time, it is important to note that the contestation of the protest event is not merely one of opposed ideological stances, but also one of agency, temporality and ownership, that is, the constitutive force, which makes the event an 'Event' in the first place. In this way, the capacity to frame 'revolutionary' time is of at least equal importance, and certainly part of the same process, in which

¹²⁶ David Selim Sayers, 'Gezi Spirit: The Possibility of an Impossibility', *Roar Magazine*, 8 January 2014, available at <https://roarmag.org/essays/gezi-ottoman-turkish-nationalism/> (accessed 25 May 2017); Gözde Böcü, 'The "Gezi Generation": Youth, Polarization and the "New Turkey"', in Isabel Schäfer (ed.), *Youth, Revolt, Recognition: The Young Generation during and after the 'Arab Spring'* (Berlin, 2015), p. 52; Blair Taylor, 'From alterglobalization to Occupy Wall Street: Neoanarchism and the new spirit of the left', *City* 17.6 (2013), pp. 729-747. Ali Bilgic, 'Turkey's other "Gezi" Moment', *OpenDemocracy*, 15 February 2016. Available at: <https://www.opendemocracy.net/ali-bilgi/turkey-s-other-gezi-moment>.

the imaginary revolutionary (from the preceding chapter) becomes contested. It therefore appears that a deeper understanding of the contingent element of protest can only be approximated by acknowledging that the ways in which time is framed constitute a key stage in the determination of whether state response to protest succeeds in mitigating its impact, or, on the contrary, whether the protest movement succeeds in achieving political change.

So if we are to consider time as an object of contestation in the framing of protest, then surely there must be something to be gained by ‘winning’ this time? Yet perhaps it is not so much a question of winning the contest of framing protest as within or outside of the times, but rather one of ‘liberating’ time in terms of discovering its revolutionary potential, the ‘moment’ in which change becomes possible. This is where dormant time, frozen time, and momentum seemingly become reconciled. That is to say, in the idea of a liberated time, the emancipatory potential of the movement can evolve from relying on the contingency of its momentum, to the longevity of lasting change.

Here one might best think of the term ‘liberated time’, or for that matter ‘revolutionary time’, in line with Antonio Negri’s momentous study of the radical role of the experience of time in theories of resistance, but also how it can be integrated into the conceptualization of time in protest movements, and their positing of a ‘mass of versatile, multilateral,

universal relations'.¹²⁷ As opposed to the fixed meaning of the status quo such a framing strategy would seek to resist. Negri points out that liberated time cannot be measured, exactly because its liberation rests on the premise of its resistance to such measurement. This may sound somewhat esoteric – after all what is the difference between measured or liberated time, and how can time be subject to freedom in the first place? For is not time the great equalizer? Yes, and no. Time can be considered an equalizer, hence its potential to square the circle of contingent resistance being cast as inevitable, as necessary. But on the other hand, time is ever subject to framing. It is an alternative way of seeking to introduce hierarchy and the legitimacy of political action.

Between the protest and the state response, both seek to infer that it is their time, their moment, and that their actions will resonate through time as one of historic progress for the Turkish nation. Yet it must be stressed that this is not merely a rhetorical claim. It is not simply a way of framing either the State's importance over that of the protests or vice versa. Rather, time becomes at once the mechanism, the central site and the outcome of the contestation. It is both vital yet incorporeal, both manifest yet practically impossible to delineate. It is the struggle for political legitimacy in its purest form.

¹²⁷ Antonio Negri, *Time for Revolution* (transl. Matteo Mandarini, London, 2003), p. 120.

Momentum, on the other hand, is a way of subverting the experience of time, of amassing a show of resistance that defies the relatively low outcome one would otherwise expect from (progressive) mobilization. In equal measure, the conspiracy frame is an attempt to tarnish this momentum as one occurring outside the time of people's lived experience, as a way of stopping the clock for Turkey's progress, and undermining its capacity to move forward. The idea of momentum is as much a weapon in the arsenal of protestors' resistance as conspiracy is for the defence of the status quo. They are two sides of the same coin, two interrelated poles of what is in effect a temporal contestation.

At the heart of the protest's appeal is therefore the seeming manipulation of 'revolutionary' time (the potential of achieving a liberated time), not unlike that of the paranoid framing strategy, which equally subverts the experience of time to posit the State as being under attack. Liberated time forms an antinomy to conspiratorial time. And within the sustained balance of contest between the two sides, the wider framing mechanisms of the Gezi protests and the state response to them must seek to force an exit lest they become entangled in the straightjacket of the paranoid society. And while the Gezi protests have come to an end, a true sense of calm has not yet returned. The pursuit of conspiratorial foes, the continued repression of all but the most placid forms of dissent, and the staggeringly antagonistic state of Turkish democracy, betray a simmering tension in which the impact of Gezi continues to be keenly felt. This is the

true legacy of the introduction of the conspiracy frame in response to the Gezi protests.

Conditions of, not for, Access to Truth

At this point, to simply posit that the Turkish elite employs framing remains somewhat of an empty statement. Instead, what should be emphasized is that conspiracy theory can form an elite framing strategy that can be employed as a reaction to contingent forms of resistance such as the Gezi protests, dismissing them as but the product of a grand conspiracy against the Turkish state. But this by itself cannot be satisfactory. After all, the protestors considered the repressive measures against them as equal evidence of a conspiracy to corrupt the State from within. That is, in the protest encounter, there is a double conspiracy theory of society. It is a zero-sum game in which the mutual resistance reinforces either position. The protest momentum builds inasmuch as populist support for reactionary government measures grows.

To think of conspiracy in this vein becomes an inquiry not only into the production of truth, or the politics of the production of truth, but into the production of a system that is the production of the politics of truth. This is key to the functioning of the conspiracy frame. In other words, it is the embrace of the narrative exception to the status quo (the protest contestation) as the central premise underlying the truth claim of either

the State or the protest, rather than seeing both as a breakdown of an original possibility of a truthful politics, one of inclusive and participatory democracy.

A good way to think about this is to refrain from viewing the Gezi protests in a normative manner, that is to say, to resist interpreting them simply along the lines of their historical outlierdom, their unique mobilization of the so-called new masses, or even their relationship to other enragé-style protests such as Occupy Wall Street or perhaps even, to a lesser degree, the Arab Spring. Instead, I would suggest we consider the Gezi encounter along the lines of the emergence of a new conspiratorial mode in Turkey, as a physical embodiment of the growing tensions and contradictions born of rapid growth and a dizzying pace of modernization.

Or, to put this in a Foucauldian sense, we might best consider the Gezi protests as the emergence of an event in thought (*histoire événementielle*) that enables us to understand the conspiratorial framing process. Therefore, the rather long-winded formula I posited above (that of the ‘production of a system that is the production of the politics of truth’) may merit in fact three levels of inquiry: (1) the production, (2) the politics, and the (3) systemic forces produced by their intertwinement, in order to reveal the dynamics of conspiratorial framing. One can think of this in terms of what is essentially a distinctly critical orientation to the problem of access to truth. In this, I think we can build

upon Foucault's handy summary of what in his eyes constitutes the purpose of philosophy.

We will call, if you like, 'philosophy', the form of thought that asks, not of course what is true and what is false, but what determines that there is and can be truth and falsehood and that one can or cannot separate the true and the false. We will call 'philosophy' the form of thought that asks what it is that allows the subject to have access to the truth and which attempts to determine the conditions and limits of the subject's access to the truth [*italics my own*].¹²⁸

This should hold equally true in the context of political thought. After all, if we are to suggest that conspiracy theory serves as a truth 'act' rather than a 'truth claim (in that its import lies in the relation of forces it implies and reinforces, rather than any empirical truth process as such) then this must inherently be a discussion of relative 'conditions' created not through access to truth, but rather by their relative position vis-à-vis the truth claim's content. In other words, Foucault's preoccupation with the truth is not so much one of determining the classical origins of truth in either the Aristotelian or Cartesian method. Rather, it is an attempt to think of the subject's access to truth(s) and to question the systems and

¹²⁸ Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the Collège de France 1981-1982* (ed. James D. Faubion) (London, 2005), p. xxiii.

forces by which access to truth, or even the production, dissemination and legitimization of truth is ratified. Does this mean that Foucault is himself a conspiracy theorist? Quite the contrary, while he does posit that there should be no such thing as what had formerly been deemed a 'formal ontology of truth', he asserts that the very idea that such an analytic of truth had taken shape was evidence of the attempts to enshrine the Hellenistic doxa of truth as inherently bound to the subject.

Foucault seeks to question not the truth itself, but the process by which truth takes on the affect of truthfulness, and how this reflects back on the subject. As an a priori suggestion, I warrant it will be fruitful to adopt this stance towards our own approach to conspiracy theory as we move forward. It should remind us that despite the apparent exclusion of the competing frame in our analysis (that is, we are focusing on the state response and not the Gezi framing itself), this will ensure that the goal of the exercise retains its progressive potential, rather than producing a manual of sorts for the repression of future protest. That, of course, would simply not do.

Of course this also requires a certain caution, as the Gezi protests and the coup attempt are not equatable events. However, for the purpose of our understanding of the conspiracy frame, both can be seen to have elicited, and reacted upon, a deeply conspiratorial framing process and narratives of conspiracy. In this, they are inextricably intertwined, yet in significant ways also unrelated. In a way, this contradictory imagery fits the notion

of the conspiracy frame rather well, as it sheds light on its deliberate warping of the possibilities and impact of resistance to the State. After all, conspiracy theory sees events as evidence of a motive force and a vast system of interconnectedness, and in turn, the paranoid style therefore suggests that all resistance is created equally, that it forms part of a grand overarching conspiracy. For us this means that while the events are not strictly speaking comparable, we must acknowledge that as part of the conspiracy frame, they are elevated to evidence of a supposed master-conspiracy, a conflation of all forms of resistance to the Turkish state. In the next chapter we shall see how this manifests, and is exemplified, through the emergence of a 'strongman' political leadership style.

Conclusion: Conspiracy theory, the frame that frames the frame

Frames have the power to bind us, as much as they can free us. They must always toe the line between the real and the created, between their constitutive power and the agency implicit in their own construction.

Framing is vital to the understanding of how we perceive the real, because it facilitates the process of depicting, shaping and, yes, manipulating the way in which we perceive the boundaries of the real. As such, framing conspiracy can help us solve a tantalizing puzzle, that of framing the non-real as real.

Of course the framing that I've had in mind in this chapter is hardly of the artistic variety. Instead, the chapter sought to re-think the ways in which the Turkish political elite frames resistance. To put this in terms of a follow-up question, we might ask, what are the practical implications of framing political discourse in the mode of conspiracy theory? Or, to invoke the positivist sense of the term, who and what can be framed using conspiratorial accusations? In this, and in the aforementioned analysis, we find essentially three tiers of framing. (1) There is the frame as in the painting, the physical boundary of an image, or, in a textual sense, the structure or style of a given text or utterance.¹²⁹ (2) Then there is 'framing' as per the political science literature,¹³⁰ which we can find resonating throughout conflict analysis and social movement studies;

¹²⁹ For a comprehensive overview of framing theories beyond political science, see Gideon Keren (ed.), *Perspectives on Framing* (New York, 2011).

¹³⁰ With regard to framing divergent contentions in Turkish politics, see C.H. de Vreese, H.G. Boomgaarden and H.A. Semetko, '(In)direct framing effects: The Effects of News Media Framing on Public Support for Turkish Membership in the European Union', *Communication Research* 38 (2011), 179–205; Neophytos Loizides, 'Elite Framing and Conflict Transformation in Turkey', *Parliamentary Affairs* 2 (2009), pp. 278–97; Gul Muhsine Aldikacti, 'Framing, Culture, and Social Movements: A Comparison of Feminist and Islamist Women's Movements in Turkey' Dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 2001). For a more general introduction to political theories of framing, see Dennis Chong and James N. Druckman, 'Framing Theory', *Annual Review of Political Science* 1 (2007), pp. 103–26; James N. Druckman, 'What's it all about? Framing in Political Science', in Keren (ed.), *Perspectives on Framing*, pp. 279–302. For a comprehensive overview of divergent framing processes, see Jörg Matthes, 'Framing Politics: An Integrative Approach', *American Behavioral Scientist* 3 (2011), pp. 247–59.

hence also, its evident relevance to the case at hand. (3) And finally, we might even consider framing as a frame-up or set-up, where false evidence is provided to accuse someone of a crime; that is to say, framing as a process by which one produces false evidence against a presumably innocent person.

This latter definition of framing is rarely if ever invoked in the literature on framing, but given our current fixation on the paranoid and the conspiratorial, it seems we can hardly move forward without at least acknowledging it. There may yet be some playful use for it in the end. Uniquely, and unlike other framing studies, in logic of conspiracy theory we must therefore take all three such interpretations of framing into account. In other words, the conspiracy frame frames the frame. (Or, to put this in the above taxonomy: (2)–(3)–(1).)

By now I believe we can safely say that writing about conspiracy theory is also a circumventive way of writing about the production of the real; or, to be precise, the positing of the unreal as real. I use the term ‘unreal’ here as a substitute for a process or relationship more frequently referred to here as that of the ‘non-real’ – which better emphasizes its necessary contestation to the real as such. After all, it does not exist in a state of becoming real, as the ‘un’ might imply. In the non-real, reality is both real and non-real in its inflection towards an antinomy of the real. But for the purpose of concluding this chapter, ‘unreal’ should suffice, as it provides a useful imagery for the entirety, the outcome as it were, of the

conspiratorial framing process, rather than forming part of its process, and will help us as we progress to the next chapter.

So for that matter, writing about conspiracy theory is simply another way to think about a specific critique of the production of truth,¹³¹ a situation in which politicians themselves become the purveyors of conspiracy yet justify their paranoid convictions by enforcing real political action. In sum, not only is conspiracy theory a contestation of the production of truth, it is also a deliberation on the politics of the production of truth. Like Nietzsche before us, who warned of the deceptive ‘heroism of the truthful’ (*Heroismus des Wahrhaftigen*¹³²), we would do well to be suspicious of the dubious heroism of the untruthful.

But after reviewing our findings from this chapter, it becomes clear that conspiracy is not simply unreal, nor for that matter is it purely real in an empirical sense. It takes on real impact when harnessed in the form of a conspiratorial politics, such as has arisen in Turkey today. This is only exacerbated when conspiracy theory becomes a driving force of political rhetoric, of the political imagination (which I have referred to as the imaginary revolutionary) and political decision-making. If what defines a

¹³¹ That is not to say, however, that all critiques of the production of truth, and hence the production of knowledge required for said truth, are inherently conspiratorial.

¹³² Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, *Unzeitgemäße Betrachtungen* (Berlin 1981), ch. 28. Available at <http://gutenberg.spiegel.de/buch/unzeitgemasse-betrachtungen-3244/1> (accessed 25 May 2017).

conspiracy theory is its criticism of how a given truth is produced, then for us to think critically about conspiracy theory means that what we are really talking about is the contested production of (a) truth, not the conspiracy claim itself.

While I have not mentioned them earlier, I am sympathetic to Hardt and Negri's polemical invocation (even if it was devised with truth processes in mind rather than processes of truth) that 'the truth will not make us free, but taking control of the production of truth will'.¹³³ A powerful idea, no doubt, but the reason it is worth isolating here is because it effectively demonstrates the extent to which the idea of 'control' of the production of truth is seen as fixed between a supposedly binary progressive and regressive pole. Yes, it emphasizes the possibility of seizing control thereof for some as yet undefined emancipatory purpose. But it does not, indeed cannot, acknowledge that maybe the tension implicit in this struggle to sustain control is equally what allows the hegemon (the 'controller', as it were, of truth) to frame this struggle as in and of itself necessary to his power.

Yes we must take control of the production of truth, but not simply by contesting the truth claim of the status quo. This means, once again, that the debunking method cannot help us formulate an appropriate response to the effect of the conspiracy frame. Instead, we must articulate how

¹³³ Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, 2001), p. 156.

even the resistance to the status quo becomes embedded in the truth production thereof. Simply put, and to make a vital return here to the Turkish context, we must understand how even genuinely contingent resistance such as Gezi (or, for that matter, the coup) can be made to fit within the justification of the paranoid style, of the slip into authoritarianism that the ruling party's production of a conspiratorial truth implies¹³⁴.

I realize there is a risk here of succumbing to a paradox. After all, how can the unreal be an outcome of the production of truth? And more importantly, how can this ever be systemic if the notion of truth relies on the very contingency of challenges thereto? But I would also suggest that it is precisely in this very paradoxical relationship that we can find the tools required for its dismantling. In order to do so, we should always keep in mind the conspiracy frame's necessary tension between its truth content (*Wahrheitsgehalt*) and the justifications or legitimacy it requires and must maintain to produce such a truth. Admittedly, there is a puzzle here, which can be summed up as follows: Can non-real visions of society transmogrify into real ones? Can the conspiracy frame beget a

¹³⁴ For an illuminating interview with the author Cihan Tugal regarding this matter, see Duncan Thomas, 'Turkey's Disaster: The Coup Against Erdoğan Failed, but that Doesn't Mean Democracy was Preserved', *Jacobin*, 23 July 2016. Available at <https://www.jacobinmag.com/2016/07/turkey-Erdoğan-coup-gulen-kemalist-kurdish-war/> (accessed 25 May 2017).

conspiratorial society? And do protests such as Gezi contribute to or detract from this process? This chapter has made the case that an interesting and relevant way to consider this puzzle is to look at it through the lens of (elite) framing theory, and to introduce the idea of the conspiracy frame as a means by which to do so. The following chapters will consider these themes in more detail apropos the idea of a strongman politics and its affinity towards the pursuit of conspiratorial framing.

Chapter 3

Conspiratorial Discourse and the 2016 Coup Attempt

Introduction

On 15 July 2016, Erdoğan faced what may have been the most direct challenge to his rule since the Gezi protests. Within the span of less than 24 hours, factions of the Turkish military attempted a military coup, taking to the streets of Istanbul and Ankara with tanks and artillery, storming broadcasting and media centres, bombing the Turkish parliament with fighter jets, and patrolling the streets with helicopters and armoured vehicles. In turn, supporters of the ruling party took to the streets, many of them only armed with sticks and stones, in an attempt to fight off the military insurgency. Skirmishes continued throughout the night, but by morning it became apparent that the coup had been unsuccessful. The participants were rounded up, and the government announced that it blamed Gülenists and foreign conspirators for infiltrating the military in order to depose the ruling party. In a sense, it seemed as if a prevalent conspiracy theory had come true. One of the most persistent conspiratorial accusations had been one that targeted the military, accusing it of secretly conspiring against the State. Yet in equal measure, a new conspiratorial interpretation of the coup emerged, one that accused the ruling party of having staged the coup as a false-flag

attempt in order to consolidate its power.¹³⁵ Conspiracy theorists pointed to Erdoğan's first public statement following the coup, in which he reportedly described the coup as 'a gift from Allah' and announced his intention to cleanse the military of what he described as 'members of the gang'.¹³⁶ In sum, the coup elicited both pro- and anti-government conspiracy theories. In either case, they were unique, to the extent that they were conspiratorial interpretations of a genuinely conspiratorial event, namely the coup attempt.

The government's response, and its crackdown on opponents, particularly the speed with which it began to round up its detractors, spawned counter-conspiracy theories. The real coup, critics argued, was playing out in the purge of Turkish civil society, now associated with the righteous cause of weeding out secret conspirators.¹³⁷ Where the military

¹³⁵ Amana Fontanella-Khan, 'Fethullah Gülen: Turkey coup may have been "staged" by Erdoğan regime', *Guardian*, 16 July 2017. Available at <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/jul/16/fethullah-gulen-turkey-coup-Erdoğan> (accessed 24 May 2017). See also Burak Bekdil, 'Turkey's Slide into Authoritarianism', *Middle East Quarterly* 1 (2017). Available at www.meforum.org/6398/turkey-slide-into-authoritarianism (accessed 24 May 2017).

¹³⁶ Adam Lusher, 'Turkey Coup: Conspiracy Theorists Claim Power Grab Attempt was Faked by Erdoğan', *The Independent*, 16 July 2016. Available at www.independent.co.uk/news/world/turkey-coup-conspiracy-theory-Erdoğan-military-gift-from-god-soldiers-istanbul-a7140516.html (accessed 24 May 2017).

¹³⁷ Patrick Cockburn, 'Erdoğan Will be Stronger After the Failed Coup, but Turkey Could be the Loser', *The Independent*, 22 July 2016. Available at

failed, Erdoğan succeeded. But the reality is somewhat more complicated than such explanations suggest. This chapter discusses how the coup might be seen to have constituted a conspiracy Event, and how this represents what is effectively a transformation from conspiracy theory to a praxis of conspiracy.

This requires that we ask ourselves a follow-up question. What makes a coup real, and in turn, what makes a coup ‘unreal’? More specifically, to what extent does the experience of the failed Turkish coup of 2016 as real, unreal, surreal or conspiratorial, affect the way in which the Turkish government has been able to consolidate its powers following the military uprising? To begin to answer such admittedly large questions, this chapter investigates that most dramatic of conspiratorial outcomes, the recent coup attempt. Or, to be precise, the failed coup attempt that took Turkey and the world by surprise on the evening of 15 July 2016, three summers after the Gezi protests.

Not all Coups are Created Equal

There is a common conviction that one of the defining characteristics of a coup is that it requires public and urban displays of violence. The origin of the word coup betrays the longevity of this association. Deriving from the

www.independent.co.uk/voices/turkey-coup-attempt-president-Erdoğan-benefit-from-crackdown-a7150931.html (accessed 24 May 2017).

Latin *colpus* (blow), which in turn came to Latin from the Greek *kolaphos* (blow with fist), it was converted into old French as *cop* (a blow), featured in Middle English as ‘to meet in battle, come to blows’, and today is known to us in the contemporary meaning of the verb to cope.

Finally, the word *coup*, as we know it, is simply a shortened loanword from the French *coup d'état* – literally, a ‘blow of state’ or a blow to the State. Interestingly, when one seeks the definition of *coup d'état* in the academic literature, the key addition to this ontology is the focus on the conspiratorial element. Consider, for example, the following definition, which I have taken from Gene Sharp and Bruce Jenkins’s thesis *The Anti-Coup*: ‘A *coup d'état* is a rapid seizure of physical and political control of the state apparatus by illegal action of a conspiratorial group backed by the threat or use of violence [*italics my own*].’¹³⁸

This fixation on the violent episode implicit in the idea of a coup is so strong that, without it, one has to note it as an exception to the rule. Think of Turkey’s 1997 so-called ‘post-modern coup’,¹³⁹ or Portugal’s ‘peaceful coup’ in 1974, or, in the academic literature, the notion of a so-called ‘soft’ coup. In all cases we see a debate regarding the ‘realness’ of a perceived coup, and a confusion regarding the impact a coup is

¹³⁸ Gene Sharp and Bruce Jenkins, *The Anti-Coup* (Boston, 2003).

¹³⁹ Ali Bulac, *Turkey’s Democracy Saga: The Struggle Against Interventionist Politics* (New York, 2015).

supposed to have. Not all coups are created equal, and a coup is not always a coup. Seen in this light, it is easy to empathize with one Turkish-American journalist's initial confusion as she sought to take in the dramatic events unfolding on the evening of 15 July, when the Turkish military began its assault on Ankara and Istanbul.

Many of us, during the coup's early hours, didn't believe it was real; we thought the all-powerful Erdoğan must have arranged it himself. What kind of coup is this? Everyone said. Quickly, however, as the military began shooting civilians on the Bosphorus Bridge, what seemed like a farce became a trauma.¹⁴⁰

What is striking here is that what makes the coup feel 'unreal' is its initial and momentary lack of violence. Once the fighting erupts, there can be no more doubt as to its realness. In other words, in the mode of the coup,

¹⁴⁰ Suzy Hansen, 'Corruptions of Empire: Getting over the Indispensable-nation complex', *The Baffler* 33 (2016), pp. 8–17. It should also be noted that the experience of the coup in Turkey is influenced by shared recollection, and passed-on intergenerational narratives of previous military coups. To this extent, the experience of the coup arguably takes on the form of a so-called 'inherited conflict' in that it builds upon pre-existing structures of contention being re-formulated through the internalized expectation of military uprisings. For more on inherited conflict, see: Bahar Baser, *Inherited conflicts: spaces of contention between second-generation Turkish and Kurdish diasporas in Sweden and Germany*. (Diss.) European University Institute, (2012).

the experience of the real relies on the violent disruption of the real. In turn, the coup only becomes 'traumatic' once this violence erupts. At first, sans violence, the journalist quoted above experiences the event as farcical or somehow incompetent. In an inversion of Marx's observation that history takes place first as tragedy, then as farce,¹⁴¹ in the experience of the coup it is arguably the exact opposite: what seems like farce, becomes a tragedy. Yet this tragic element – the violence – is apparently also the key ingredient, 'the spice of life' that renders it real. The farcical coup is thus so only to the extent that it appears to us as unreal. A pacifist coup, then, becomes a farcical one, and in so doing seems detached from reality, becomes surreal. So today, when one writes of the coup, it seemingly requires the prefix of being a failed coup, as if only successful coups might be worthy of consideration.

This most recent coup attempt – Turks have now experienced five (if one counts the post-modern coup) since 1960 alone – it was not 'successful', in that it dealt a blow to the government but did not succeed in replacing it. In the time since the coup, and the ensuing purges, one question stands out: 'was this really a coup, and can the crackdown be considered a counter-coup?' This question is not as simple to answer as it seems. Nor, perhaps, is it the right one to ask. Instead, might we not better ask ourselves – like the old problem of the tree that falls silently (or not!) in

¹⁴¹ Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (Chicago 1907), p. 1.

the forest – can a failed coup still be considered a coup? And does this failure subsequently entail a victory for Turkish democracy? Certainly, the following text, sent to every mobile phone registered in Turkey on 16 July, indicated that the coup was already being framed as an opportunity for a heroic national awakening, a rallying cry for Turks to stage a counter-coup. The message, sent on behalf of President Erdoğan, was recorded by the VICE journalist David Jegerlehner.

Dear children of the Turkish nation. This action is a coup against the nation, commandeering armored vehicles and weapons in Ankara and Istanbul, behaving as if it were the 1970s. Honorable Turkish nation, claim democracy and peace: I am calling you to the streets against this action of a narrow cadre that has fallen against the Turkish nation. Claim the state, claim the nation.¹⁴²

As the political fallout has included a widespread governmental purge of bureaucratic institutions, higher education, media organizations and other corporate entities, not to mention the military, the coup seems to have constituted a wish fulfillment along the lines of the conspiratorial paranoia

¹⁴² David Jegerlehner, “I Have a Bad feeling About This”: My Experience of the Failed Military Coup in Turkey’, VICE, 23 July 2016. Available at https://www.vice.com/en_uk/article/military-coup-attempt-turkey-experience-kurdish-876 (accessed 22 May 2017).

touted for so long by the country's political elite.¹⁴³ But does this truly mean that we should consider the political response to the coup a veritable counter-coup? On the fringes of such interpretations, some have even insinuated that the coup was nothing but an elaborate false-flag operation, engineered by the ruling party to justify the ensuing crackdown. While there is little or no evidence that this was the case, clearly there is much to be untangled here, especially with regard to the coup's relationship to the real, and hence, alternately, to the conspiratorial.

Not all coups are created equal, or so one is tempted to think. After all, following the coup attempt, it seems as if Turkish democracy continues to be held under siege. Not by the military, but by its political leadership, and the conspiratorial purging it implausibly argues is required to protect the State. Of course paranoid politics are neither new, nor unique to Turkey. Still, the influx of conspiratorial rhetoric has escalated into what might well be deemed a veritable system of conspiratorial rhetoric as per Richard Hofstadter's polemic on the paranoid style. In the case of the failed coup, we need to rethink our previous understanding of what we understand by conspiracy in Turkey.

¹⁴³ Up-to-date estimates can be found at www.turkeypurge.com (accessed 22 May 2017).

And while the coup may at first appear to be for once a bona fide conspiracy – seemingly in contrast to the overwhelmingly fictional narratives described in the preceding chapters – it is my contention that it cannot but be understood as a result of the mechanisms and outcomes of a prolonged strategy of conspiratorial framing and that the experience thereof remains squarely within conspiratorial framing, not as a counter-example, but as a direct result of the paranoid style invoked by such contentions. As such the failed coup becomes not a form of proof for conspiracy theorists, as much as it is a veritable logical – if not necessarily predictable – outcome of the contingent space created by the persistent employment of the conspiracy frame.

Rather than accusing the Turkish state of having somehow engineered the coup, I would therefore argue that it makes more sense to view the coup as indicative of a broader internalization of conspiratorial framing. So when I suggest thinking of it in terms of a conspiracy Event, I mean to say that the coup fulfilled a process already begun with the introduction of the conspiracy frame, namely the formation of ‘genuine’ conspiratorial activity. To this extent, the military coup can be considered a particularly dramatic demonstration of a gradual process of internalizing conspiracy and political paranoia. In addition, the coup exists as a conspiracy Event precisely because it cements the idea of an urgent necessity for a continued conspiratorial politics and justifies the aggressive state

response required to combat it. It does this not exclusively against the perpetrators, but looks instead for culprits within its own institutions.

The coup Event might therefore well be described as essentially constituting a 'conspiracy Event', as it cements and vividly dramatizes the notion of a conspiratorial Other as plausibly real. After the coup, conspiracy theory thus becomes the new normal, at least in terms of how one interprets the political process in Turkey. This is clearly problematic for at least two reasons. First, it renders Turkish democracy as hostage to the whims of conspiratorial forces. Second, it situates participation in democracy as comprising perpetual vigilance against such forces. The logical outcome of this is the deterioration of Turkish democracy. Politics becomes the praxis of conspiracy, and conspiracy theory the praxis of politics.

In turn, the spectre of the enemy becomes both public and private, no longer simply constituting an outside threat. Yet clearly this constitutes a logical impossibility. So instead, the idea of a parallel enemy comes to fulfil the necessity of being both at once. As such, the enemy is framed along the lines of an internalized conspiratorial adversary and ceases to exist either within or without, but inhabits instead a necessarily contradictory dynamic. When it is a private enemy, it needs to be exposed in public, whereas when it is a public enemy, it must be confronted through the strength of private efforts.

To frame this in a more straightforward manner, what I mean to suggest is merely that the fictitious nature of the conspiratorial accusation is secondary to the opposing forces required to both combat and keep alive this impossible dualism. But even more importantly, the acknowledgement of this effervescence is therefore not contingent, but instead forms a founding mechanism upon which the justification of extended state powers relies. To put this more succinctly yet, the accusation of the parallel state is so effective not despite its logical flaws, but because of them. Its inconsistencies arise from the way in which the coup provides the embodiment of a 'real' conspiracy to fuel further such theories. To this extent, while the coup attempt is evidently a dramatic manifestation of conspiratorial intent, it also engenders the transcendence of conspiracy theory into a seemingly justifiable politics of conspiratorial praxis.

Henceforth, a secondary dilemma begins to take root. It becomes difficult to distinguish conspiratorial politics from conspiracy theory. In turn, conspiracy theories seem to explain not the 'hidden' rationale of political action, but instead become its driving force. A good indication of this confusion, which, at first, appears to be an aesthetic one (at least to the degree that it relies on an aesthetic or observatory, and non-participatory judgement), can be found in one of the predominant early interpretations of the coup attempt. According to this particular version of events, the conspiracy was triggered by increasing indications of a renewed crackdown on opposition elements within the military. That is to say, such

an interpretation would have the coup be a form of ‘preventive’ military intervention against a continued assault on its integrity.¹⁴⁴

Fearing an impending loss of influence – so the narrative goes – dissidents in the military rose up against the government in a last-ditch attempt to thwart the sweeping reforms proposed under the mantle of an expanded array of presidential powers. Despite the dubious veracity of such accounts – and indeed, evidence has since emerged that indicates a far greater level of structural organization – the former interpretation is deeply revealing. First it readily assumes the existence and implementation of a political strategy of the accusation of conspiracy (the drawing-up of lists of names of political enemies even without evidence of a de facto conspiracy). Secondly, and even more importantly, it demonstrates an intuitive understanding of the relationship between political practice and conspiratorial practice.

The possibility of a ‘pure’ coup – to the extent that it arose organically from within and due to genuine grievances – is thus never even taken into account. As such, this interpretation of the coup takes us straight back to one of the beginning principles of this thesis, namely, the idea, derived from McAdam’s observations on colonial uprisings, that accusations of

¹⁴⁴ Curtis Bell and Jonathan Powell, ‘Turkey’s coup was unusual, but not for the reasons you might suspect’, Washington Post, 22 July 2016. . See also Ambassador W. Robert Pearson, ‘What Caused the Turkish Coup Attempt?’, Politico 16 July 2016. Available at www.politico.com/magazine/story/2016/07/what-caused-the-turkish-coup-attempt-214057 (accessed 22 May 2017).

overarching conspiracies can in effect trigger such an event taking place.¹⁴⁵ There exists therefore a curious affinity between the imagined conspiracy and the actual conspiracy, in particular in the way in which they coalesce in the state response to the coup as well as in the public response and immediate reaction, which was one of disbelief.

Through the experience of the government's consistent strategy of conspiratorial framing, the possibility of a military purge was considered plausible enough to give rise to a genuine conspiracy attempt. Even if it turns out that this account of events was false, this would in and of itself remain of interest, as it posits what is essentially a conspiratorial reading of the coup. In other words, the assumption of the existence of a conspiracy behind the conspiracy runs through the very experience of the coup. Indeed, this expectation, in which the coup was itself not conspiratorial enough to be plausible, features in most of the various accounts of the coup.

In effect, the failed coup only exacerbates this framing strategy, as now every accusation of conspiracy is rendered plausible in light of the military action against the State. In this scenario, might we not as well ask ourselves whether a coup is still a coup, even if it fails in its goal to overthrow the State. The answer to this question should be a resounding yes. And beyond this, one might even go as far as to say that the failed

¹⁴⁵ Doug McAdam, Sidney Tarrow and Charles Tilly, *Dynamics of Contention* (Cambridge, 2001).

coup is even more a coup in the conspiratorial mode, as it renders all other accusations of conspiracy increasingly 'real'. For despite all the popular jubilation following the resilient survival of Turkey's 'democracy', the Turkish government has since launched a campaign of conspiratorial accusations that further perpetuates the notion of a State continuously under siege.

Is this not tantamount to a coup on behalf of the State? Arguably, it is the very failure of the coup that allows the conspiracy frame to achieve its full dramatic potential. It is a potential that, even when challenged, only justifies all the more its paranoia and the political repression that ensues. Here too, we can observe a similar question that resonates with the hypothesis of the current thesis: is it in fact the idea of (non-)existing conspiracies that gives rise to real grievances, political dynamics, and social tensions that affect conspiratorial change? The failed coup is therefore not a post-modern coup, but a sort of meta-coup.

Seen in this light, it becomes tremendously important to observe that, in the authoritarian mode, political paranoia does not ensue from the political project. Rather, the project itself depends on the paranoiac suffusion behind the idea of the parallel state. The reason this difference requires such careful distinguishing is that it challenges the predominant narrative of Turkey's post-coup politics. The coup, despite its very real ramifications, was in and of itself not proof of the existence of a parallel

state, nor did it need to be, as the conspiracy frame thrives perfectly well without a physical manifestation of the paranoid conception of the Other.

Instead, the coup attempt, and the ensuing political repression on behalf of the State, can be considered the successful culmination of the narrative drive – or indeed, arc – underlying the conspiratorial necessity of such an existential threat. Here the future of the State is no longer determined by means of democratic process or participation, but instead a state of affairs (which, at the time of writing, remains that of a continued state of emergency) emerges in which the political, and the contestation of political beliefs, can no longer take place through societal participation, but becomes relegated to the underground. The irony here is that where the negative image of the underground was first invoked to depict a conspiratorial adversary, the very real coup attempt has now forced genuine dissent and activism into an actual underground.

What ensues is that legitimate political participation, and such freedom of expression befitting a free society, becomes relegated, and indeed regulated, under the same auspices of curbing the parallel state, and hence the experience of democracy itself becomes one of a paranoid necessity. In this internalized conspiracy, to engage in any form of criticism of the State hence becomes genuinely conspiratorial, in that it is no longer acceptable within the rigidity of the paranoid society. In effect, the systematic use of the conspiracy frame, and the ensuing conspiracy Event in the form of the coup, thus gives rise first to the expectation of –

then the manifestation of – conspiracy as an internalized and self-censoring state of being, and the erosion of genuine political participation into the realm of the conspiratorial.

In sum, what was once democratic participation (free speech, the arts, journalism, public service) becomes a form of conspiracy, whereas the State itself conspires to root out dissent from within its own ranks. This paradox is the logical end result, and the fulfilment, of the conspiratorial framing process and the conspiracy Event. The fact that there was a ‘real’ conspiracy within factions of the military deserves to be considered as part of a wider escalation of conspiratorial framing, not as de facto ‘proof’ of the veracity of all conspiracy theories peddled by paranoid politicians. In effect, the coup therefore takes on a distinctly ‘meta quality; it is both a genuine conspiracy against the State, but in turn it takes place in an environment in which opposition to the status quo has been rendered inherently conspiratorial by the successful implementation of the conspiracy frame in response to Gezi. This means, then, that we must also consider the coup as distinctly different from preceding coups, in that it took place in an environment in which the idea of conspiracy was ‘already’ internalized. The coup presents itself almost as a form of meta-resistance, an exacerbation and indeed escalation of the conspiratorial framing strategy.

New Turkey, Old Enemies

At the time of writing, thousands of Turkish citizens have been detained as part of a widespread crackdown on perceived conspiratorial opposition. And while the targeted job sectors differ, the accusation remains largely the same. Any direct or indirect affiliation with the so-called 'parallel state', in other words, the Gülen movement, to which the government now refers as Fetö (and which it now considers a terrorist organization), or any suspicion thereof, can lead to seemingly arbitrary arrest. The Turkish government has accused the group's enigmatic leader, Fetullah Gülen, of masterminding the coup attempt and has sought to eliminate so-called Gülenists from every layer of society. Despite being the overarching figurehead of the eponymous religious and educational group, Gülen has lived in self-imposed exile in rural Pennsylvania since the 1990s. This constitutes a complete reversal of the overtly friendly, and indeed necessary, relationship Erdoğan and Gülen formerly enjoyed, as each helped the other consolidate influence and support in the early days of the AK Party's rise to power.

To many this makes him an unlikely conspiratorial mastermind. For others, his very distance from Turkey – and the exponential international growth of the movement, let alone his longstanding residency in the United States, makes him a prime suspect for the attempted usurpation of the government. But perhaps it is irrelevant that Gülen himself emphatically denies any involvement in the coup attempt, or that the Turkish

government has not yet provided any consistent evidence of a factual link between the Gülenists and the coup. For as the dragnet of such persecutions widens, so too ordinary citizens, disproportionately those outside the ruling party's base of support, find themselves under suspicion. In the post-coup crackdown, every citizen is a potential enemy.

Admittedly, there is a certain poetic appeal to the idea of a Gülenist conspiracy. After all, the arch-enemy of Turkey's post-coup paranoia is the very same man whose friendship was once actively courted in order to bring about a historic alliance during the early years of Erdoğan's political career. Add to this the cult-like worship of Gülen within the movement that bears his name, and there is ample circumstantial, indeed theatrical, evidence to fuel such accusations, albeit largely of the anecdotal variety. This, of course, is hardly concrete evidence for conspiracy, yet warrants inclusion here not only for its entertainment value, but as an example of the quasi-ritualistic practices of the Gülen movement. In a lengthy profile in the *New Yorker*, published a few months after the coup attempt, Dexter Filkins recorded several firsthand accounts of the devotion Gülen inspires among his followers. It is easy to see how such ardent support might fuel conspiratorial interpretations.

Inside the movement, Keleş and Alpsoy said, people often lost themselves in fantastical rituals. In one, a group of men gathered in a room would grab a comrade, pin his legs and arms, and remove his socks and shoes, often against his will. 'They would

hold him down, and everyone would kiss his feet,' Alpsy said. 'This I witnessed hundreds of times.' [...] Alpsy said that once a man appeared at a service with a shoe that he said had been worn by Gülen. 'People were so excited—they stripped the leather from the shoe and boiled it for a long time. Then they cut the leather into pieces and ate it.'¹⁴⁶

While there is admittedly a bizarre culinary attraction to such accounts, there is no evidence within them that would suggest a Gülenist conspiracy. Yes, the kissing of the feet and eating of the shoes are a way of demonstrating extreme affection for what are otherwise considered unclean objects in the Islamic world, but they are not in and of themselves indicators of a plot against the State. However, in the apparent extremity of this affection, the seeds are sown for the anticipation of an equally extreme antagonism. The two exist on equal poles, at least in the mode of the conspiratorial State. Yet there is more at work here than a simple acting-out of cult-like affectations and hero-worship.

¹⁴⁶ Dexter Filkins, 'Turkey's Thirty Year Coup: Did an Exiled Cleric Try to Overthrow Erdoğan's Government?', *New Yorker*, 17 October 2016). Available at www.newyorker.com/magazine/2016/10/17/turkeys-thirty-year-coup (accessed 30 May 2017).

For it goes to show to what extent Gülen not only embodies the specter of the enemy in Turkish society, but that he does so precisely because he so strongly resembles the anointed figure of the friend. In other words, the very fixation on Gülen as situated on either extreme – the worshipped friend or the hated enemy – makes him such an enigmatic example of the friend/enemy figure. In the fluidity of the friend/enemy dualism, which, I would suggest, functions equally well as a dialectic, the only other comparable figure is, perhaps somewhat ironically, though as we shall see, not coincidentally, that of Erdoğan himself. Both men, whether one considers them to be ardent modernizers or conspiratorial detractors, continue to capture the imagination of loyalists and critics alike, provoking both zeal and ire.

Akin to the popular adage, that one can make peace with one's enemies but not with one's friends, the most dramatic form of antagonism is always that which targets the friend and not the enemy. In other words, the friend is a potential enemy, inasmuch as the enemy must always exist as a potential friend, even if this friendship is rejected. And with regard to the above, isn't the true dynamic almost always the exact opposite? Instead of making peace with our enemies so as to discover them as friends, do we not in fact incite violence against our friends exactly so as to determine who are, and who are not, our enemies?

In other words, in the political realm, the 'public' and 'private' enemy serves primarily to constitute what parts of the public are deemed hostile

or sympathetic to this very attempt to determine the friend/enemy relationship. The coup, in this regard, renders the experience of being a Turkish citizen as a binary equation, and posits it as an either 'for' or 'against' universal position. One either applauds the government for its repressive measures or becomes one of its targets. Therefore, the 'experience' of the friend/enemy dynamic in the political realm can only ever exist not simply as a fixed binary, or even a common duality, but as both a fluid, and hence dialectical, self-reinforcing, relationship. The enemy is as necessary to the idea of the friend, as that of the friend is to the enemy.

We therefore find ourselves in a mode that emulates Blake's playful jibe, 'thy friendship oft has made my heart do ache. / Do be my enemy for friendship's sake,' in which the necessity of the enemy encapsulates that of the friend. The serious underpinning of this desire for an enemy is that, to the political elite, the enemy may well be preferable to the considerably more labour-intensive process of cultivating and maintaining bona fide political alliances. In equal measure, political participation is thus rendered as participation in the purging of such forces from within. This means that on the one hand, the coup elevates the idea of Turkey's political project to a binary equation, while at the same time it suggests that true devotees and true enemies cannot be distinguished except through a mass purge and disruption of the status quo, that is, the

conspiratorial enemy is symbiotic to the very system that seeks to combat it.

In this, the uncanny of the political enemy becomes apparent, in that the divide can never fully be bridged, but must instead inherently rest on the expectation of a disintegration of the relationship. So while the coup may have existed as a momentary event, its afterlife suggests a much more permanent state of repression, seemingly to secure the State against future threat. The paralysis implicit in this state of affairs is hence what renders it uncanny, both moving and immovable, progressing and regressing at once. The breakdown of the friend/enemy relationship is therefore indicative of the wide impact of this paradoxical reality.¹⁴⁷

What the conspiratorial leader (or simply put, the autocrat) has in common with Plato is the desire to rid not just himself, but all his subjects of the shadow and to focus on the purity of the flame, the 'clean slate scenario'. But this is evidently impossible, as now the purity of the subject has come to rest squarely within the confines of its contrasting object. To 'protect' the purity of the State – for the paranoid leader this equates to the security of the State – thus requires enhanced executive

¹⁴⁷ In the work of Derrida, this tension has provided part of what he deems a 'theory of the enemy', which in Derridaean terminology then becomes what is considered a 'spiralled hyperbole', a dialectical relationship that ensues from the extrapolation of the necessary contradiction between the subject-object relationship and the forces that activate the process of their reconciliation.

powers, which in turn only create more enemies, and so on and so forth. The dangerous circularity of this dynamic is evident to those witnessing Turkish democracy consume itself in similar fashion today.

Underground, Above-ground

The crackdown following the coup has at least two distinct repercussions for the idea of conspiracy. First, the subjugation of the public realm itself – which previously featured as the supposed object of the conspirator’s desire – becomes suspect as a hotbed of conspiratorial dissent.

Conspirators are hence believed to be ‘among’ the population, rather than lurking ‘below’ society. This, in turn, alters the sense of the conspiratorial underground. Secondly, the image of the underground becomes that of a parallel state, one perpendicular to the experience of the real, rather than confined to its murky depths. Subsequently, the idea of the enemy becomes an endogenous, rather than exogenous, manifestation of dissent.

In other words, the enemy appears to grow within the confines of society rather than outside it. This alters the idea of conspiracy theory in Turkey, rendering it not just a curious affectation of antagonistic and adversarial positions. Instead conspiracy theory takes on a veritable constitutive, and hence necessary, force apropos the Turkish government’s enduring

political legitimacy.¹⁴⁸ The idea of the conspiratorial enemy fuels the very dynamic by which the friend, and hence, the ‘agreeable’ citizen and his/her role towards society, is to be determined. In other words, the paranoid assumption that the more Turkey grows in strength, the more it will need to root out dissident elements from within its own ranks, suggests a symbiotic relationship with the conspiratorial Other, in which the enemy rides parasitically on the coat-tails of the New Turkey.

The result of this is that the enemy becomes the necessary criterion by which to determine the nature of the friend. In the case of contemporary Turkey, this takes on the affectations of emerging nationalism and a fixation on the strongman persona of Erdoğan. The enemy is no longer simply an outside agitator, but an internalized dissenter. The outcome is that the identity of the Turkish state is measured not by virtue of its engagement with its citizens and the relative productivity of its (civil) society, but rather becomes synonymous with its internalized antagonisms, that is, with the paranoid, conspiratorial, pursuit of the enemy within. Hence, the coup becomes illustrative not of actual

¹⁴⁸ Marc David Baer, ‘An Enemy Old and New: The Dönme, Anti-Semitism, and Conspiracy Theories in the Ottoman Empire and Turkish Republic’, *Jewish Quarterly Review* 4 (2013), pp. 523–55. See also Aylin Güney, ‘Anti-Americanism in Turkey: Past and Present’, *Middle Eastern Studies* 3 (2008), pp. 471–87; Türkay Salim Nefes, ‘Political Parties’ Perceptions and Uses of Anti-Semitic Conspiracy Theories in Turkey’, *The Sociological Review* lxi/2 (2013), 247–64; Türkay Salim Nefes, ‘Scrutinizing Impacts of Conspiracy Theories on Readers’ Political Views: A Rational Choice Perspective on Anti-Semitic Rhetoric in Turkey’, *The Sociological Review* lxxvi/3 (2015), 557–75.

contentions, but constitutes a dividing line, a singular moment of rupture, in which supposedly the ‘true colours’ of hidden dissent are revealed.

That this does not correspond to the actual lived experience of consensual politics, in which grievances are meant to be reconciled, rather than existing as existentially opposed positions, fits squarely within the parameters of the conspiracy frame. In turn, this takes on the distinct qualities of what we have come to associate with the idea of a conspiratorial politics.¹⁴⁹ For many Turks living under the continued insecurities of the extended state of emergency measures, the dangers of such a politics have become manifest, and may perhaps yet serve as a warning of the increasingly undemocratic appetites evident in the supposedly ‘consolidated’ democracies that have so long dismissed Turkish politics as inherently irrational.

The invocation of the parallel state therefore evokes the Foucauldian image of the necessity of a negative image of the underground as constitutive to the State. It even goes a step further, in that it situates the presence of such an enemy not as ‘underground’, but instead as

¹⁴⁹ Mahir Zeynalov, ‘Trump, Erdoğan, and Post-Truth Politics’, Huffington Post, available at www.huffingtonpost.com/mahir-zeynalov/trump-Erdoğan-and-posttru_b_12090684.html (accessed 22 May 2017). See also Ece Temelkuran, ‘Truth is a Lost Game in Turkey: Don’t Let the Same Thing Happen to You’, Guardian, 15 December 2016. Available at <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/dec/15/truth-lost-game-turkey-europe-america-facts-values> (accessed 22 May 2017).

manifest 'within' society, indeed parallel to it. Foucault writes that for the State, 'The underground is a realm of scoundrels, a negative image of the social contract. Each is a prisoner of the other, of whom he may become the betrayer, and the administrator of justice.'¹⁵⁰ But where for Foucault the primary focus rests squarely on the administrative mechanisms in which the punitive force of the State, and hence its hegemonic potential, can come to fruition, in this quotation the description of the 'underground' is startlingly one-dimensional, even potentially farcical.

Yet Foucault is using this normative language in the way that it exists for the non-underground, that is, society-at-large. In other words, when he describes the underground as alternately 'opaque', 'liquefied', 'dug out of the ground' and 'transparent to itself'¹⁵¹ he is emphasizing the extent to which the underground as a concept is constituted not from within its own formative powers, but rather exists primarily as a negative counter-image to the supposed purity of the State, the 'above-ground' if you like. In sum, as the idea of the conspiratorial underground shifts towards the notion of a parallel society, the role of the State becomes one of purging its own ranks rather than securing itself against outside antagonism.

Another way to understand the 'liquidity' Foucault mentions is to consider in the spirit of Bauman's concept of a so-called 'Liquid Modernity', a state

¹⁵⁰ Michel Foucault, *Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology: Essential Works of Foucault, 1954–1984* (ed. James D. Faubion) (New York, 1998), p. 62.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 62.

in which our conceptualization of the real has become increasingly determined by non-existent yet deeply meaningful manifestations and substitutes thereof.¹⁵² What the underground is, the State is not. And in turn, the underground 'is' only to the extent that the State necessitates it to be. (Could there be anything more conspiratorial than the manipulation of the conspiratorial itself?) What stands out most, however, is that the invocation of the underground is intentionally – and hence, necessarily – kept in a transitory yet persistent mode of flux – the better to control its significance, and indeed its Otherness, to the primordial justification of the State's political project and the repression it engenders.

As such, it is not simply a matter of dealing with old enemies, settling scores or pre-existing vendettas, but of the active and ongoing discovery of new enemies. Here we thus find ourselves at the crucial point of convergence between the conspiratorial Other and the fulfilment of the paranoid political project. So when next the Turkish President invokes the murky, and semantically ever-changing concept of the so-called parallel state, one should not simply dismiss this as mere rhetorical scapegoating, but instead re-evaluate such antagonism as a framing strategy by which to infer the necessity of the strongman state. This equates the positing of a conspiratorial underground as above ground – a parallel state in the

¹⁵² Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity* (Cambridge, 2000).

most literal sense of the word. Seen in this light, the coup seeps into what was already essentially a preconditioned experience – an expectation of sorts – of conspiratorial resistance.

Post-Coup Elite Framing of Conspiracy

The Turkish Education Ministry has been at the forefront of the post-coup framing strategy. Following the coup, it produced a short video in which it contrasted the 1919–22 war of liberation with the 2016 coup attempt. The video features dramatic images, both contemporary and historical, of citizens fighting in the street. The action is set to a recital of the national anthem, recorded by Erdoğan himself. The President's personal touch extends even to promotional materials, part of a nationwide curriculum revision, which include a booklet entitled 'The Victory of Democracy and our Martyrs'.¹⁵³ This document contains a foreword penned by the President, and consists of a veritable glossary of the different types of conspirators it blames for the coup attempt. From Gülen to ISIS, the uprising is depicted as the result of a massive international conspiracy; it becomes integrated into a wider framing of Turkish political destiny as

¹⁵³ As described in Mustafa Akyol, 'New Turkey Finds Founding Myth in Failed Coup', *Al-Monitor*, 22 September 2016. Available at www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2016/09/turkey-july-15-coup-attempt-founding-myth.html (accessed 30 May 2017).

inherently subject to, and triumphant in the face of, divergent conspiracies against the State.

And this is but one of many examples in which the conspiratorial strategy is being played out in schools across the country. One might also think, for example, of recent reports of organized student re-enactments, theatrical recreations of the coup, or how at certain schools students are incited to take oaths to ‘never forget this blessed saga’.¹⁵⁴ Such propaganda strays beyond even the usual parameters of a country accustomed to the omnipresence of nationalist and Kemalist imagery, where the face of Atatürk – and increasingly, Erdoğan – graces nearly every wall, let alone school. It is an attempt to merge the imagined communities of both the nation state and the conspiratorial society.¹⁵⁵

In this, the idea of conspiracy seeps into every facet of life. In so doing, it alters the cognitive process, and embodies a consciousness so universal that the citizen anticipates such resistance everywhere, and sees it uprooted and discovered in a growing constellation of seeming evidence for its existence. Indeed, the Turkish citizen adapts and learns to think of life, of civil society and of politics as conspiratorial. In so doing he finds ways to insert himself into these new strategies of paranoia that now inform the workplace, his religious institutions, the schools of his children,

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ For an in-depth analysis of Turkish public memory as a political battleground, see: Esra Özyürek (ed.), *The Politics of Public Memory in Turkey* (Syracuse, 2007), pp. 114-137.

and even his home and extended family gatherings. The conspiracy is then no longer merely something read about in the newspaper, shared by word of mouth or heard on television. In the final stage of the post-coup framing of conspiracy theory, the ordinary citizen has his own position in society cast into doubt, unless that individual, too, embraces and applies to himself and his surroundings the machinations of the conspiracy frame. The seemingly luminal nature of the coup attempt, at least in its opening moments, demonstrated the beginning of an internalized conspiracy frame, in which the experience of reality becomes tainted by the experience and expectation thereof. The result is that conspiracy theory becomes entrenched not merely as a societal curiosity, but as a deeply mythologized, yet vividly bureaucratized, orchestration of an entire nation raised on the experience of a conspiratorial threat to the status quo, the defence of which must then surely be considered in equal measure heroic and perpetual.

But the Turkish government does not simply wish to settle scores with its enemies, be they fictional or real. Rather, in the mode of the paranoid style, the conspiratorial framing strategy seeks to elevate the settling of scores to a perpetual politics of purging. In the culmination of the conspiratorial mode the State can therefore never truly be completely 'purged', or scores truly settled (this would imply that the enemy could deal legitimate blows to the State, or stand on an even footing with it). It can only exist as a perpetual purge, a state of affairs in which a fresh

enemy looms over every horizon, and where a potential adversary lurks within every friend. This is what is meant by the master frame of conspiracy theory. It is the culmination, but also the inevitable paradox, of what might well be deemed the Erdoğan doctrine: a relentless focus on modernization and democratization, seemingly achieved through increased conservatism and authoritarianism.

And here there is a difference between the response to the Gezi protests and the coup attempt. The politics of conspiracy quickly becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy, not by accident, but out of necessity. Its very goal is therefore to achieve this self-serving necessity, and by proxy to find continued justification for enhancing restrictive measures. To do this, it does not require any actual plotting of its own, and certainly need not initiate a false-flag operation. Indeed, the conspiracy frame functions at its hegemonic best precisely when it induces a general, not specific, state of paranoia that can remain conveniently incorporeal. All the interpretations of the 'whodunit' variety therefore inevitably fall prey to the same conspiratorial mode of thought.

It is exactly in this stage of internalized conspiratorial musing that the ensuing purge becomes more than just a demonstration of political strength, and evolves into a sustained experience that seeps into the very distinction between the real and the paranoid in Turkish society tout court. When conspiratorial framing takes on the attributes of a master frame, in other words, when it harnesses the paranoid experience to the

extent that the public internalizes its paranoid account of reality, it thereby seeks to ratify, codify and ritualize the role of the State as essential to the perpetual purge of suspected enemies within its own ranks. This means that we should not busy ourselves trying to discern whether the coup was real or staged. As a defence against the paranoid state, such a debunking approach will remain ultimately ineffective.

State of Emergency, State of Conspiracy

When the current Prime Minister, Binali Yildirim, speaks of ‘scaring’ terrorism by means of state terrorism (‘If you make terrorism afraid, then you are safe. We all together will not fear it, but it will fear us.’)¹⁵⁶, it becomes apparent that the confrontation with the ‘parallel’ enemy is one that will be cast into perpetuity, and in which the preservation of civil liberties becomes at best a secondary concern in its continued campaign to root out its perceived enemies.¹⁵⁷ (Indirectly, it is also an attempt to

¹⁵⁶ ‘Running away not a solution to terror’, Hurriyet Daily News, 20 September 2016. Available at www.hurriyetdailynews.com/running-away-not-a-solution-to-terror-turkish-pm-.aspx?PageID=238&NID=104069&NewsCatID=338 (accessed 20 September 2016).

¹⁵⁷ This emphasis on the ‘imagined’ terrorist corresponds to recent inquiries in critical terrorism studies regarding the discursive practices that reinforce set ideas and power relations of terrorism beyond the normative analysis of ‘whether or not state actors should negotiate with terrorists’. Harmonie Toros, ‘We don't negotiate with terrorists!’:

distract from domestic claims that the coup was a ‘controlled’ coup.¹⁵⁸) In this then we see finally how the conspiracy Event gives rise to that final stage of the conspiratorial framing project; a state that does not need to govern, nor to democratize, but which simply exists to ensure that its terrorist enemies (whether real or imagined) can be demonstrated to be living in fear of the State’s tremendous power (whether they actually are or not remains equally elusive). The pursuit of ‘the enemy’ therefore takes the form not simply of apprehending the culprit(s), but of acting out of the State’s capacity to purge its opponents. In this pursuit, democracy can be readily and conveniently discarded. In other words, the state of emergency, which, in essence, is a state of paranoia, takes on the distinct characteristics of a so-called ‘Master Frame’.¹⁵⁹ That is to say, it informs, yet sustains, the experience of the real as inherently conspiratorial.

So as the official state of emergency is extended into seeming perpetuity, so too does the experience of the ‘normal’ adapt and internalize the

Legitimacy and complexity in terrorist conflicts’, *Security Dialogue* 39.4 (2008), pp. 407-426; Jayne Mooney and Jock Young, ‘Imagining terrorism: Terrorism and anti-terrorism terrorism, two ways of doing evil’, *Social justice* 32.1 (2005), pp. 113-125.

¹⁵⁸ ‘Erdoğan, PM Yildirim slam Kilicdaroglu’s coup remark’, Daily Sabah, 3 April 2016. Available at <https://www.dailysabah.com/war-on-terror/2017/04/03/Erdoğan-pm-yildirim-slam-kilicdaroglus-coup-remarks> (accessed 22 May 2016).

¹⁵⁹ David Snow and Robert Benford, ‘Master Frames and Cycles of Protest’, in Aldon D. Morris and Carol McClurg Mueller (eds), *Frontiers in Social Movement Theory* (New Haven, CT, 1992), pp. 133–52.

notion of ever-lurking and pervasive threats to the system.¹⁶⁰ But this effectively constitutes an impossibility. After all, if the idea of a state of emergency becomes the everyday lived experience, then what can still constitute an aberration from this norm? As such, the idea of emergency, which in essence is then one of ‘emergent emergency’, comes to be the new normal.¹⁶¹ But what further stands out is not the abnormality of continued resistance, but the expected contingency of further unrest. Here a breakdown of meaning begins to become apparent. For as the emergency is no longer a temporary moment, but a sustained period of unrest, what becomes the determining principle of such a state is that of a paradoxical perpetual contingency, that is, the oxymoronic notion of a ‘sustained emergency’.

¹⁶⁰ ‘Turkey to Extend State of Emergency by Three Months’, Al Jazeera, 18 April 2017, available at www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/04/turkey-extend-state-emergency-months-170418034656371.html (accessed 24 May 2017).

¹⁶¹ For a critical analysis see Omer Taspinar, ‘The End of the Turkish Model’, *Survival: Global Politics and Strategy* 2 (2014), pp. 49–64. For further critiques linking the Turkish model to social movements, see Cihan Tugal, *The Fall of the Turkish Model: How the Arab Uprisings Brought down Islamic Liberalism* (London, 2016); Alper Y. Dede, ‘The Arab Uprisings: Debating the “Turkish Model”’, *Insight Turkey* 2 (2011), pp. 23–32. And for an account relating the fall of the Turkish model to various conspiracy theories, see Mustafa Akyol, ‘Whatever Happened to the Turkish Model?’, *New York Times*, 5 May 2016, available at https://www.nytimes.com/2016/05/06/opinion/whatever-happened-to-the-turkish-model.html?_r=0 (accessed 24 May 2016).

As such, in the state of emergency, the embrace of conspiracy theory is not merely a rhetorical affectation of an authoritarian leadership style, but becomes the guiding principle by which political decision-making and the functioning of Turkish institutions come to exist in the service of a conspiratorial mode of being; a binary equation, in which what is in fact a fragmented society is cast off as a conspiratorially polarized one. The state of emergency thus posits a perpetual counter-collectivity upon which it bases its own defensive position. The idea of the Other becomes doubly perpetuated, both internal and external, parallel to the State's destiny, yet vital to its legitimacy.

In sum, the state of emergency achieves an imagined community based not on any founding principle of its own, but on the shared fear of the conspiratorial Other. A paradox ensues, in which the conspiratorial opposition is framed as invisible but universal, whereas the proliferation of actual injustices and critiques is rendered invisible and non-universal; the final result of this contradiction is the culmination of the conspiratorial framing process into that of a conspiratorial society, the perpetuation of the conspiracy frame, and the new normality of state of emergency measures. For at a certain point, this imagined community can only be sustained within the parameters of a uniquely self-negating expectation of not ever actually being a homogeneous group at all, but being already infiltrated by conspirators. Without this paranoia, the state of emergency cannot be realistically extended into perpetuity. And the subsequent

purge in turn becomes a new founding myth, that is, the purge as a new beginning along the lines of that old Platonic ideal of the clean slate.¹⁶² After going through several such cycles of governmental purges, all that can ultimately remain is the solitary figure of the totalitarian leader as the sole embodiment of the righteousness of such a political project, the one figure who can determine at what point the slate has been cleaned. We shall further consider how this develops into a strongman politics in the following chapter.

What we begin to see emerging in Turkey is therefore a perverse collectivity that acts not out of solidarity with any one group or cause, or even overarching democratic principle, but that acts out its own survivalist fantasies through a constant reshuffling and reorientation of political belonging and, more importantly, adversarial positions necessitated to constitute such belonging. The logical conclusion is that once the state of emergency becomes thus internalized as a conspiratorial master frame, the ‘official’ period of emergency can effectively be ended, as it now lies embedded within society –one is tempted to say that it festers – and serves as a founding principle rather than as a contingent moment of unrest in the supposedly quietly democratizing New Turkey. In sum, the purpose of civil society is no

¹⁶² Plato, *The Republic* (rev. edn, London, 2003), p. 224. Popper famously, and at the time controversially, critiqued the dangers inherent in Plato’s envisioned political system in *The Republic*. See for Popper’s response to some of the accusations made against him regarding the clean slate, the addenda of Karl Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies* (rev. edn, London, 2011), pp. 198–200.

longer that of participation therewith, but to secure this participation from infiltration by supposed conspirators. The public must be enlisted to combat the conspiratorial Other (or to participate in the perception thereof), as much as it is also subject to the very purge it is supposed to facilitate. It is at this stage that the conspiratorial society begins to resemble a totalitarian one, as it assimilates pre-existing communal structures into the paranoid style. For example, within the traditional structure of the family unit, it becomes enough for one member of any given family to be accused of being a conspirator for the entire family to be rendered suspect. This holds equally true for institutions, clubs, dormitories, etc. The conspiratorial collective is therefore one that feeds upon pre-existing collectives by entrapping them in its own paranoid web. The 'belonging' within such a society quickly comes to take on the distinctive hallmarks of a totalitarian system: an imagined unity, mysterious powers attributed to its leaders, and a quasi-mythological motivation for the securing of power. The logical conclusion of conspiracy theory as political praxis is thus that culture, society and the experience of citizenship are rendered through a haze of counter-conspiratorial purpose. The tragic irony is apparent. Seen in this light, the idea of the nation state itself becomes conspiratorial. The conspiratorial politics therefore finds expression and becomes codified in shared norms, discourse, institutions and political practices that actively shape any rendering of the political as part of a struggle against conspiracy. The

experience of the real therefore becomes inherently conspiratorial, a subjective experience in which the citizen, or the individual, himself can no longer determine whether he too might be deemed a dissident, a conspirator or, at the very least, a terrorist sympathizer. In post-coup Turkey, conspiracy is no longer a rhetorical curiosity, but instead a touchstone of the framing of everyday experience. In other words, as the state of emergency becomes the new normal, the idea of conspiracy comes to supersede the idea of politics.

What begins seemingly as an antagonistic fancy of paranoid politicians thus quickly comes to resemble a veritable system of conspiratorial framing – and in turn, a politics that relies on the notion of hidden resistance as its motive force. And if we are to accept that the conspiratorial project can only be sustained by turning its suspicion inwards, this requires the constitution of a de facto parasitic collectivity, that is to say, a perceived unity based on the necessity of an ever-evolving threat, yet lacking any grounding beyond the goal of deterring it. The totalitarian logic is a self-perpetuating conspiratorial one inasmuch as the conspiratorial logic lends itself to totalitarianism.

Questions to be Asked, Lessons to be Learned

The goal of this chapter was to begin rethinking the coup in terms of a classic Popperian observation: that a general tendency exists in which ‘all

tyrannies justify their existence by saving the State (or the people) from its enemies' and that for this the enemy need not necessarily be a tangible one. Further, Popper holds that this tendency then 'must lead, whenever the old enemies have been successfully subdued, to the creation or invention of new ones'.¹⁶³ It strikes me that such a state becomes one of inherent stasis, an uncanny state of being in which enemies both new and old, visible and invisible, and real as well as fictional, lurk behind the very premise of Turkey's political necessity. In the synthesis between the idea of an enemy who is both old and new, and the ensuing temporal uncertainty of such an adversary's agency, that conspiracy theory constitutes the dynamic by which the perpetual recreation of the internalized enemy can be made manifest. The coup provides an interesting case study because it essentially poses a genuine manifestation of a conspiratorial enemy following a persistent framing strategy of conspiratorial Othering.

The final stage of this, it must then follow, is the identification not of 'new' internal enemies, but precisely of the friend as enemy, that is, the shift from the military as 'protector of the people' to that of conspiratorial adversary. The reader may therefore already infer the outcome, which logically arises from this continued state of seeking to root out internal enemies: that is, the formation of an increasingly totalitarian society. But it is a managed democracy inasmuch as it is the

¹⁶³ Popper, *The Open Society*, p. 195

impossibility of a truly authoritarian democracy, or vice versa, a democratic authoritarianism. That is to say, the idea of democracy develops essentially in parallel to its true functioning. Turkish society writ large becomes itself immersed in a parallel experience of reality, managed within the confines of a conspiratorial, paranoid, authoritarian but, most of all, parallel state. The real parallel state in Turkey is thus that of the impossible reconciliation of liberal democracy and totalitarianism. In the paranoid style, and the state of emergency following the coup, Turkey is not either one or the other. It is both.

As such, debates on whether Turkey is a democratic, authoritarian or totalitarian society are overly simplistic. Instead, it is precisely in the post-coup state's capacity to be all at once that the constitutive force of the parallel state comes to fruition. Conspiracy theory as the driving force of such a politics results in an internalization of the conspiracy frame as the de facto operating mode of political participation. Yet where the real paradox, and the failure of such a state, emerges – at least to the extent that it seeks to impose a sense of stasis – is that to keep society thus repressed requires a constant shifting of the experience of the enemy and in effect a continued cleansing motion, a purge as it were, in a perpetual apparatus of discovering and rediscovering old and new enemies alike. For if one speaks of the coup as a threat to democracy –which indeed it was – but refrains from supporting the government in its repression of it, this

renders one by proxy a terrorist sympathizer. Or so the logic endemic to the conspiracy frame, and the society it begets, would have it.

Indeed, the outcome of the coup was to be, first and foremost, that even the former critics of the government now have to seemingly come out in its favour, lest they be deemed supportive of the coup attempt. As the continued state(s) of emergency begin to normalize a time of perpetual turmoil and civic unrest, regional conflict and deteriorating political opportunity structures, the exception becomes the rule, and the status quo becomes one of paranoia and conspiracy theory. As a result, the true parallel society becomes one of almost Sisyphean authoritarianism, in which the State's institutions must be purged in cycle after cycle of repression. The idea of the secret conspirator, the terrorist internalized, has thus become a necessary component of the justification for increasing executive powers. Conspiracy theory becomes political praxis, and the idea of Turkish democracy becomes inherently conspiratorial. The status quo thus becomes itself a sort of parallel society. Criticism of the government can therefore no longer take place within civil society, but is cast outside it and made to be synonymous with conspiring against the State.

In this it can therefore be observed how the conspiracy Event in the form of the coup attempt becomes consolidated in a turning inside out, a Moebius strip as it were, of the very possibility of political expression, and in so doing engenders a static society by virtue of a subversion of the

idea of political participation itself. It is not the coup attempt that 'causes' this stasis as such. Rather, it is the sum of the structural contradictions of such a state that leads the experience of politics to become inherently infused with the notion of conspiracy. I have suggested that this constitutes what might well be deemed a conspiratorial master frame (or a master frame of conspiracy), which, in turn, can bring about the hegemonic fulfilment of a conspiratorial master frame; the experience of the real as inherently conspiratorial.

The reason I make these observations here is that it strikes me that within the time-span between the Gezi protests and the coup attempt one can identify the key components of (a) the 'creation' of new enemies, (b) the contradictions of the 'new' versus the 'old' enemy, and hence the changing experience of temporality itself, and (c) the emergence of a state of affairs in which the idea of the parallel state becomes effectively internalized, rendering each and every friend a possible enemy. Much of what this thesis seeks to accomplish focuses exclusively on the first (a) of these dynamics, the mechanisms by which the Turkish political elite invents conspiratorial opposition in its polemical rhetoric. More specifically, it has set out to demonstrate some of the conditions under which such a strategy could be put in motion, and how the idea of the conspiracy frame can help us understand the central role that conspiracy theory has come to play in the Turkish political arena. In light of the ongoing political repression in Turkey and the continued purge against all

manner of ‘enemies of the State’, an inquiry into the two remaining stages (b and c) should warrant urgent consideration.¹⁶⁴

If we are to think in any way of a political trajectory through which to seek to resolve the most pressing issue of the political crisis in Turkey – the erosion of Turkish liberal democracy – we must do so in a way that goes beyond a mere reactionary volley of rhetorical polemics accusing Erdoğan and his cronies of political manipulation. I fear that such words, even if spoken or written in earnest, will only go to waste, at best falling on deaf ears, and at worst causing the endangerment of others.

Therefore, at the very least as a starting point, a critical understanding of the coup within the parameters of conspiratorial framing should be considered paramount to the possibility of re-framing the idea of conspiracy theory in Turkish politics today.

Conclusion

¹⁶⁴ The goal of future inquiries into the coup attempt, at least from a theoretical perspective, would then be to possibly suggest how one might structure a future analysis of such discourse, while positing what might be adopted as the beginnings of a taxonomy of post-coup rhetorical justifications for increased presidential powers in a way akin to that of similar studies following Gezi. Another approach would be the introduction of a critical framework with which to question to what extent the Gezi protests and the coup, in light of their combined failure to achieve lasting change, or at the very least to depose the ruling government, may rather than being evaluated in normative interpretations of ‘success’ be regarded instead as two highly dramatic outcomes of structural contradictions in the experience of political participation – or lack thereof – and the extent to which irregular forms of political participation may appear valid as potential emancipatory mechanisms, even in an otherwise democratic society.

Finally, to what extent does the coup need to be understood through the lens of the Gezi protests? At first glance, the coup could not be more different from the progressive demonstrations of 2013. Yet on the other hand, the experience of the coup, and the reaction to it, has been distinctly bolstered by the consolidated powers derived from the preceding response to Gezi.¹⁶⁵ One might argue that the crackdowns following the coup are but continuations of the Gezi contention, yet this would appear to simplify somewhat the vastly different nature of the dual contentions. Yet for better or worse, the coup must be considered within the parameters of post-Gezi politics, at least to the extent that one can trace a clear divide between the politics preceding and following Gezi.

In turn, it seems more insightful to situate the coup within the same 'backlash'¹⁶⁶ mechanisms of the Gezi protests, rather than simply equating it to Turkey's other coups of the past decades.¹⁶⁷ When reactions to the coup attempt see in it simply a repeat of previous coups in Turkey, they fail to take into account how deeply the experience of the coup was ingrained in the post-Gezi psychology. A good way to look at

¹⁶⁵ Berk Esen and Sebnem Gumuscu, 'Turkey: How the Coup Failed', *Journal of Democracy* 1 (2017), pp. 59–73.

¹⁶⁶ S. Erdem Aytac, Luis Schiumerini and Susan Stokes, 'Why Do People Join Backlash Protests? Lessons from Turkey', *Journal of Conflict Research* 3 (2017), pp. 291–316.

¹⁶⁷ Coray Caliskan, 'Explaining the End of Military Tutelary Regime and the July 15 Coup Attempt in Turkey', *Journal of Cultural Economy* 1 (2017), pp. 97–111.

this, I would argue, is to take into consideration the most comparable aspect of the coup and the Gezi protests, which is to say, the focus on the demonstrations following the coup and the protests during Gezi. This highlights the mobilization rather than the Event as such, and should also help us distinguish the overlap and incongruencies between the idea of social protest before and after the coup attempt.

Since the failed coup, there have been frequent counter-mobilizations of pro-government protestors, with only isolated and relatively ineffective anti-government protests.¹⁶⁸ But aren't these 'celebratory' counter-demonstrations following the failed uprising in fact a reversal of the emancipatory mobilization of Gezi? In other words, the pro-democracy demonstrations following the coup are problematic, at least to the extent that they celebrate the Turkish state as nationalist rather than liberal, as conservative rather than progressive. Yet this should not render the demonstrations inherently invalid. Rather, and in keeping with the critique made in this thesis, it demonstrates the extent to which the notion of a social movement 'spirit' is subject to flexible sympathies, and has become integrated into the overarching conspiratorial experience, to the point

¹⁶⁸ Lisel Hintz, 'The Dark Side of the Popular Mobilization that stopped Turkey's Coup', Washington Post, 21 July 2016. Available at https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2016/07/21/popular-mobilizations-dark-side-against-turkeys-coup/?utm_term=.8656da484eaf (accessed 24 May 2017).

that even the symbolic potential of protest now serves to demonstrate national unity rather than to point out injustices and grievances.¹⁶⁹

To a certain degree these demonstrations serve as negative counter-images to the goals of the Gezi movement. Seen in this light, these new mass gatherings constitute no less than a radical counter-image to the so-called 'Gezi spirit' (*Gezi Ruhu*). As such, any attempt to equate the post-coup rallies with the Gezi protests must inevitably run into a seemingly irresolvable dilemma. Where Gezi sought to disrupt and disengage the status quo, the post-coup demonstrations seek to restore the status quo. Ergo, the victory rallies seek to restore precisely what Gezi sought to disrupt. What sets these (pro-government) rallies apart from the Gezi protests is not their anti-liberal stance, but their opposition to what is in essence a conspiratorial threat rather than a concrete one. There is an almost oxymoronic tinge to these anti-parallel state protests. After all, they are hardly resisting anything at all. Instead, they call for enhanced executive power to uproot conspiratorial dissent. As such, a curious reversal occurs. The state of emergency becomes the normal state of affairs, and the meaning of resistance pivots to that of organizing popular demonstrations of national unity.

¹⁶⁹ Kaya Genc, 'Talking a Tightrope: Despite the Crackdown in Turkey, the post-Gezi Spirit Still Survives Among the Determined', *Index on Censorship* 1 (2017), pp. 13–15. See also Pinar Gümüş, 'Negotiating "the political": A Closer Look at the Components of Young People's Politics Emerging from the Gezi Protests', *Turkish Studies* 1 (2017), pp. 77–101.

This means that the Turkish government has not simply ‘repressed’ truly emancipatory protest by violent means, but has instead successfully exploited the coup attempt and the conspiratorial divides to co-opt protest as a rallying cause for nationalism and pro-government sympathy, hence drowning out alternative forms of resistance. In effect, it is the final – and one is tempted to say ‘complete’ – hegemonic takeover of the ideas and import the of the Gezi protests or, for that matter, any enraged-style politics of resistance. It seems therefore that to do justice to the particularities of the conspiratorial framing strategy, and to prevent its interpretation as being a historicist one, the final piece of the puzzle must be one in which we compare –yet do not equate – the Gezi transformation from single grievance to mass movement and the victory demonstrations as both existing in the conspiratorial mode, yet not as embodiments of the same mobilizing dynamics.¹⁷⁰ Instead, the following chapter contrasts the emergence of a strongman leadership style – a ‘strongman spirit’ of sorts – with that of the idea of the Gezi spirit.

But if not all resistance is created equal, then does this not reflect poorly on the idea of Gezi’s supposed pluralist vision for society? It would seem that in the transition from the Gezi protests to the current wave of nationalist and pro-government popular mobilizations, a key demographic

¹⁷⁰ Defne Över and Basak Taraktaş, ‘When Does Repression Trigger Mass Protest? The 2013 Gezi Protests’, *Research in Social Movements, Conflicts and Change* 41 (2017), pp. 205–39.

is being mobilized outside the Gezi spectrum. In turn, the danger here is that the current pro-government demonstrations seek to use the tacit endorsement of the political elite as a means to disenfranchise the notion of a progressive politics. While the current wave of nationalist demonstrations could not exist without the conspiratorial framework that spanned the frame of time between Gezi and the coup, at the same time they exist only in that very universe.

In other words, they posit a version of the State that exists outside the confines of the Gezi contention, yet remains intrinsically aware of the precedent set by Gezi as a reason for its existence. In this one can therefore begin to distinguish a primary and organizing differential between the mobilizations on the one hand of the Gezi protests, and on the other, that of the anti-coup demonstrations, which in turn feature both pro- and anti-Gezi groups.¹⁷¹ The result is a dangerous solipsism in which patriotism or even Turkishness is based on conspiratorial beliefs rather than continued democratization. In turn, this comes to fit squarely within the parameters of an increasingly conspiratorial politics.

What this means is that the coup, Gezi, and the post-coup demonstrations, come together as a quasi-mythological triumvirate.

¹⁷¹ Sophia Jones, 'Thousands in Istanbul Put Aside Political Differences for Anti-Coup Solidarity Rally', Huffington Post, 24 July 2016. Available at www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/istanbul-solidarity-rally-anti-coup_us_5791f5cee4b0fc06ec5c8e1c (accessed 24 May 2017).

Instead of engaging with politics as a mode of consensual deliberation, the pursuit of the political becomes a conspiratorial pursuit of power. It is a commonly held assumption that Turkish politics is inherently majoritarian. Yet increasingly, it has become a game of thrones, a winner-takes-all contestation, and in so doing drifts further away from the genuine experience of liberal democracy. Whether by means of a progressive uprising, a military uprising or a nationalist uprising, the future of Turkish politics detaches itself from the idea of a process of politics. It should come as no surprise therefore that this coincides with a rediscovery of conservative and Kemalist thought, poetry and politics.¹⁷²

The outcome of this is that the binary of being ‘for’ or ‘against’ a continuation of the current government becomes not a question of consensual politics, but of vastly different destinies of the Turkish state. So, regardless of the outcome, the idea of the Turkish state is no longer that of a participatory democracy, but rather becomes a prize to be won in the battle of grand narratives. The result is that conspiracy theory becomes the driving force of all political engagement, articulation and execution, rather than having any bearing on the day-to-day realities of

¹⁷² Luke Harding, ‘Turkey’s Protestors Proclaim Themselves the True Heirs of Their Nation’s Founding Father’, *Guardian*, 8 June 2013). Available at <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/jun/08/turkey-protesters-proclaim-heirs-aturk> (accessed 24 May 2017).

the Turkish people. The very idea of democracy becomes conspiratorial rather than representational.

Chapter 4

Discursive Processes of Conspiracy: Strongman Politics and the Gezi Spirit

Introduction

In the fourth and final chapter of this thesis, I move beyond the case studies of Gezi and the coup, to instead highlight the emergent discursive processes and power relations that have come about through conspiratorial framing of both events. Specifically, I contrast the competing notions of the so-called Gezi Spirit with that of the strongman leader, and demonstrate how in the contestation between either position a counter-intuitive reinforcement of the conspiratorial framing process is articulated. The concrete way in which I have chosen to analyze this admittedly broad set of concepts is to focus specifically on the shifting ways in which the transformative potential of both the ‘spirit’ of resistance and the ‘spirit’ of the strongman are juxtaposed in what I here argued constitutes a dialectical relationship. That is, a mutually reinforcing relationship predicated on the inconsistencies and mutual impossibility of resolving the conspiratorial framing process through democratic participation instead of civil strife. I argue that this hinges on how the idea of strongman leadership needs to continuously re-conceptualize the shifting notion of conspiratorial resistance to delegitimize actual resistance and consolidate renewed state power and legitimacy.

As such, whether one considers Erdoğan as the triumphant father figure of contemporary Turkey, a Turkish strongman or, alternately, as colourful sultan or despot, he undoubtedly shares all the characteristics of a conspiratorial figure in the public imagination. His own image is continuously being crafted, shaped and manipulated in the multidimensional interpretations that his persona engenders.¹⁷³ The challenge therefore, and particularly in light of the coup attempt, is to find a mode of viewing Turkey's enigmatic leader in a more systematic and less normative manner. So rather than simply identifying the symptoms of paranoid politics in Turkey as the direct outcome of Erdoğan's polemical style, this chapter demonstrates how the potential of the strongman 'spirit' can be juxtaposed with that of the Gezi spirit, and in turn, argues that both renditions of either a 'spirit' of resistance' or of strongman leadership become integrated into the conspiratorial framing strategy. In other words, instead of considering Erdoğan as either a despotic figure or a magnanimous president, this final chapter seeks to determine what is essentially a final antinomy of conspiracy theory in Turkey, that of the dissonance between the 'spirit(s)' of resistance and that of the strongman leader.

As such, any directly normative assessments of President Erdoğan's leadership style will be largely discarded for the purpose of this chapter.

¹⁷³ Zafer Yilmaz, 'The AKP and the Spirit of the "New" Turkey: Imagined Victim, Reactionary Mood, and Resentful Sovereign', *Turkish Studies*, April (2017), pp. 1–32.

Rather, what I mean to suggest is that the popular notion of a so-called ‘Gezi spirit’ (*Gezi Ruhu*) lends itself to a conspiratorial interpretation (a key vulnerability of the momentum-oriented mobilization strategy) inasmuch as the strongman leader requires the notion of a conspiratorial Other to act out his power vis-à-vis such opposition. The dialectical relationship these spirits thus take on, and how they both infuse each other with meaning, is the primary focus of this chapter.

It is therefore not so much a matter of whether the Gezi protests or the coup ‘changed’ Erdoğan’s leadership style, inasmuch as we should consider how the idea of such resistance has become integral to, and integrated into, the continued legitimacy (or lack thereof) of his political authority. So while the Gezi protests and the coup certainly reinforced pre-existing contentions in Turkey, they also provided a pathway for the consolidation of state power, and an opportunity for Erdoğan to make his mark on Turkish history in a way that might have not been possible without such resistance. And while we may speculate as to whether Erdoğan may have held authoritarian ambitions prior to the Gezi protests, it strikes me as more important, and more theoretically valid, to instead situate the particular appeal (and contradictions) of the strongman leadership style with that of the appeal (and contradictions) of conspiratorial framing and conspiracy theory in the wake of the Gezi protests.

In the strongman mode of leadership, opposition becomes a political expedient aiding the strongman's success. The more resistance he faces, the more he is called upon to restore order, and, in turn, the more turmoil he can create, the more he can ensure his continued relevance. There is a level of self-sabotage here. But it is a self-harm that fuels, rather than defeats, the strongman spirit. In the same manner, invoking conspiracy theory as a response to such resistance deliberately escalates the contention; not in the sense of Nixon's 'madman' strategy of Cold War politics, in which American politicians were to lead their Soviet counterparts to believe that they were capable of inciting nuclear war, but a much more internalized irrationality.¹⁷⁴ That is to say, in the relationship between the paranoid politician and the figure of the strongman leader, a distancing from reality must be initiated. One way to do this is through conspiracy theory, or for that matter, the adoption of a conspiratorial politics, or the conspiratorial framing strategy with which it is begotten.

Yet we must be careful here not to misconstrue such a politics as both catalyst and outcome of the strongman spirit. Add to that the somewhat

¹⁷⁴ Nixon is quoted as saying to his chief of staff, Halderman: 'I call it the Madman Theory, Bob. I want the North Vietnamese to believe I've reached the point where I might do anything to stop the war. We'll just slip the word to them that, "for God's sake, you know Nixon is obsessed about communism. We can't restrain him when he's angry – and he has his hand on the nuclear button".' H.R. Halderman and DiMona Joseph, *The Ends of Power* (London, 1978), p. 122. See also Denny Roy, 'North Korea and the "Madman" Theory', *Security Dialogue* 3 (1994), pp. 307–16.

vague definition of such a spirit, and one can see that there is more here than meets the eye. It is not simply a matter of a popular leader such as Erdoğan invoking controversial political measures to gain populist support, although certainly this is part of the process. Erdoğan, even though he is the most visible symbol of the paranoid style in Turkish politics, is not the sole proprietor of this seeming breakdown of reason. So to begin with, one should contrast what might be called the ‘irrelevance’ of the conspirator with the (relative) irrelevance of the strongman himself.

This has the following consequences. Not only is the veracity of the conspiracy claim of relatively secondary import – at least in contrast to its very real outcomes -- the same can be considered to be true for the idea of the leader figure, whose ‘leadership’ comes to rest on his imagined resistance to conspiratorial threats rather than constituted by any tangible outcomes of his political decision making. After all, he must be both ‘all’ and ‘one’; he must exist in two incompatible states of being. The elusive possibility of achieving such a duality is of course precisely what creates the necessary tension between the strongman leader as hero and as enemy. He is never either one or the other, but posits himself as a necessary concatenation of the two. It is in this mode that the strongman spirit begins to emerge from the contradictory forces begotten by the antinomy of friend and enemy, leader and oppressor, victim and conqueror, etc.

Harkening back to the preceding chapter, we can think of the strongman leader as the logical outcome of the exacerbation of the friend/enemy relationship implicit in the conspiratorial society. Contradictions of his persona adequately embody the same dynamics of the friend as enemy, or for that matter, the enemy as friend. Therefore it is no surprise that a persistent theme in strongman rhetoric is that ‘if only one would get to know him’ he would not seem so bad. In this sense, Erdoğan is not unlike Trump, or even Putin, in the way in which his persona lives in the public imagination as both saboteur and fixer, peacemaker and warmonger, and above all villainous yet amiable.

One might recall one of the many anecdotes that shape Atatürk’s legacy, an account illustrating the tremendous productivity attributed to the founder of the Turkish Republic. It goes as follows. Atatürk was known to stay up all night, working tirelessly around the clock. The message was clear. Here is a champion of the people, employing an indefatigable work ethic to protect the nation. At the same time, it was widely rumoured that Atatürk was a restless womanizer, and would spend much of his time bedding the wives of his associates. Whenever such rumours became too persistent, the police would arrest some poor soul for slander. Of course this only further spread the rumour that Atatürk enjoyed an insatiable appetite for both work and women.¹⁷⁵

Such contradictions are at the heart of the strongman fantasy: a figure who toils day and night while still cavorting with his many mistresses,¹⁷⁶ his ardour for the nation matched only by his passion for sexual conquest. True or not, the anecdote is illustrative of a certain dynamic, which the reader will no doubt anticipate as being akin to that of the conspiracy theories the strongman so readily invokes. For is it not true that the ‘leader’, the embodiment of the power of the State, becomes more interchangeable the more his strength assumes that of a universal symbolic power? (Interchangeable, not in the sense that his identity is insignificant, but on the contrary, that the project he himself has come to embody is so strong as to render the man, the politician, a ‘replaceable

¹⁷⁵ As recounted by the outspoken Slovenian philosopher Slavoj Žižek, *Trouble in Paradise: From the End of History to the End of Capitalism* (London, 2014), p. 75. For a more scholarly account of Atatürk’s legacy, see Cengiz Candar and David Pryce-Jones, ‘Ataturk’s Ambiguous Legacy’, *The Wilson Quarterly* 4 (2000), pp. 88–96. For a historical perspective on the lasting influence of Atatürk on foreign policy, see Nicholas Danforth, ‘Ideology and Pragmatism in Turkish Foreign Policy: From Atatürk to the AKP’, *Turkish Policy Quarterly* 3 (2008), pp. 83–95; John F. Crossland, ‘Turkey’s Fundamental Dilemma’, *History Today* 3 (1988), p. 5. For a comprehensive Atatürk biography, see Patrick Kinross, *Atatürk: the Rebirth of a Nation* (London, 2001).

¹⁷⁶ For a fascinating account of how the figure of Atatürk lived in the Nazi imagination, being quoted by Hitler as a ‘star in the darkness’, see Stefan Ihrig, *Atatürk in the Nazi Imagination* (Cambridge, 2014). It should be noted that the infatuation was not necessarily mutual. Hitler considered Turkish nationalism as an inspiration for Nazism, but not as an extension of the German Reich. For a ‘revision’ of the relative reciprocity of its effects, see Halil Karaveli, ‘Hitler’s Infatuation with Atatürk Revisited’, *The Turkey Analyst* 1 (2015).

object’.)¹⁷⁷ He becomes both the primary antagonist, as well as redeemer, the ‘hero’ of the nation state and its institutions. The strongman leader is therefore subject to a strongman spirit, precisely to the extent that this spirit can be identified in the notion of conspiratorial framing. For the strongman leader, reason moves away from empirical reality, and begins to form its own symbolic and self-fulfilling nexus of logic.

Erdoğan, therefore, in the moment he assumes the role of the leader figure rather than merely being the leader of a political party, must pay a price for his elevation, which is precisely that of becoming Other to himself. In other words, the successful politician, in assuming the role of strongman leader, does so only by transitioning his agency from that of his personal elevation into that of a sublime emergence, the cost of which is also his detachment from the people as such. To put this simply, there is something supremely conspiratorial implicit in the idea of a strongman spirit. Not that he is simply paranoid, or perhaps even delusional (although this may well be true). Instead, in the transfiguration from political figure to strongman leader, a paradoxical form of reverse political representation takes place. The strongman leader no longer seeks to mirror the public’s attitudes, but instead must impose them. Not by force, but by implying that he knows what is really good for them. So on the one hand, the strongman leader appears as a more intuitive, emotional and indeed

¹⁷⁷ Slavoj Žižek, *The Fragile Absolute, Or, Why is the Christian Legacy Worth Fighting For?* (London, 2000), p. 36.

forceful embodiment of the popular will. Yet on the other, he outgrows yet consolidates his political mandate precisely when his actions and political decision-making become based on his persona rather than the collectives he represents.

In other words, the leader figure exceeds even the boundaries of the political representative precisely by assuming the idea of becoming part of a larger (nationalist) 'manifest' destiny together with the people. In effect, it is ultimately but an exacerbation of the dilemma posed by the paradox of political representation – the question of how one figure can be truly representative of all – and the necessity of both becoming other to the collective populace (if there even is such a thing) while also seeking to represent a universal, in this case Turkish, national unity. The alienation of the strongman leader is therefore not simply an isolation in the simple sense of being detached from the daily reality he is sought to represent, but alienated exactly from his own necessity proper: in the fetishization of the politician-cum-strongman-leader, he becomes both the arbiter and embodiment of a national identity that feeds upon a peculiar constellation of internal contradictions, assumptions (some of which, indeed, are contradictory as well), conspiracy theories and (paranoid) conspiratorial expectations.

Democracy and the Strongman Leader

In public statements Erdoğan vocally rejects the accusation of being a strongman leader, despite his frequent tirades against enemies of all sorts in campaign speeches and political appearances.¹⁷⁸ He is to a degree correct. Turkey is not ruled by autocracy. Nor, for that matter, is it strictly speaking non-democratic. Like other ‘democratic’ populist leaders such as Putin or Trump, he is, and continues to be, tremendously popular among his supporters. This raises the evident question: can a democracy still be considered democratic when it sustains the strongman leader? In other words, how can a democratic society give rise to a type of leadership one would otherwise associate with a totalitarian system? Can it do so without compromising its very *raison d’être*, that is, to be a system of government for the people and from the people? After all, despite its political chaos, Turkey continues to be a parliamentary democracy, if perhaps not a truly ‘participatory’ democracy in the fullest sense of the word.

The answer, I would suggest, is that the strongman leader flourishes precisely in the framework of democracy. That is to say, the means by which the strongman can invoke both his democratic popularity, and simultaneously justify his authoritarian politics, is at the very heart of the

¹⁷⁸ Becky Anderson and James Masters, ‘Erdoğan Insists reforms don’t make him a dictator’, CNN, 19 April 2017, available at <http://edition.cnn.com/2017/04/18/europe/Erdoğan-turkey-interview/> (accessed 26 May 2017).

necessary contradiction underlying the idea of the strongman spirit. In this way, the idea of Turkish democracy only underscores the strength of the strongman position. Not only is he powerful, he is also democratically elected. Democracy ceases to be a representative system, and instead serves to justify the strongman's goal of stripping away democratic rights and freedoms.

In this way, the duelling forces of the spirit of resistance and the strongman spirit take on what appears to be a dialectical relationship. They feed each other's reason to exist, and, in turn, reinforce the strength of either position. The harsher the response elicited by the strongman leader, the faster such opposition grows. And in turn, the more visible resistance becomes, the more necessary the strongman appears to his loyalists. So when I suggested earlier that the Gezi movement, at least in terms of its momentum, became trapped in a totalitarian 'logic', I was referring to this dynamic, essentially a closed loop of negative reaffirmation. The result is a relationship of internalized paranoia and the self-perpetuating necessity of the strongman.

It appears therefore that in the emergence of the strongman spirit, we are not talking simply about a show of force. Instead, there is an apparent truth claim to his very persona. That is to say, if the leader is always right, then any opposition to his 'rightness' can never be anything but untrue, illegitimate, etc. The strongman leader thus becomes a personification of the idea of the conspiratorial Other. He personifies the

truth act, yet without truth content (*Wahrheitsgehalt*).¹⁷⁹ After all, to demand empirical rationality from the strongman leader would be to question his authority. The manner in which this unfolds has all the hallmarks of a totalitarian system. If the political system fails to provide for its citizens, then, due to the lack of opposition, only the State itself can be held responsible for the inevitable breakdown of order. Yet as the system relies upon the assumption that it is flawless, and can hardly criticize itself, it externalizes the failure onto hidden dissent and conspiratorial forces.

This means that the totalitarian project, led and embodied by the strongman leader, inherently stands both within and outside its own structural fantasy, relying on a conspiratorial togetherness in opposition to foreign conspirators. Allegiance to the strongman and his ideals becomes conspiratorial in and of itself, whereas fictional conspiracy is invoked to justify participation in what becomes a conspiracy of society fuelled by a conspiracy theory of society. Hannah Arendt already famously referred to this process as the ‘totalitarian dichotomy’.¹⁸⁰ On

¹⁷⁹ To illustrate this, one can think for example, of Mussolini’s favourite campaign slogan, the strikingly banal declarative statement, ‘the leader is always right.’ John Whittam, ‘Mussolini and the Cult of the Leader’, *New Perspective* 3 (1998), pp. 12–16. See also Piero Melograni, ‘The Cult of the Duce in Mussolini’s Italy’, *Journal of Contemporary History* 4 (1976), pp. 221–37.

¹⁸⁰ Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York, 1976), p. 436.

the one hand, the public must be enlisted as co-conspirators in the totalitarian project, while on the other it is told that it must be wary of conspirators hiding in every corner. In Chapter 3 I have already briefly discussed how the ensuing purges have led to the formation of what is in essence such a conspiratorial society. Yet it is in the characteristics of the strongman leadership position that we can readily see how the politics of such a process unfolds. It is directly linked to the spirit of the strongman leader and, as such, to the way in which he can manipulate resistance into a consolidation of his own powers.

This can be better understood when one recognizes that the whole point of Arendt's observation is exactly that the totalitarian logic is not contained in the full restriction of society as such, but in the leader's being expected and able to ensure that no legitimate opposition can be voiced. Totalitarian tendencies flourish precisely in systems that uphold the illusion of checks and balances, and of being a democratic society. Far from democracy simply being a 'convenient' mantle for authoritarian leaders, the idea of democracy is integral to the perverse appeal of the strongman who is both deeply attuned to the supposed will of the people, yet dares resist them –and indeed suppress opposition – to uphold the nation. The strongman leader is not simply a monstrous figure. He is a fatherly one. Seen in this light the notion that totalitarianism is a system in which everything is either prohibited or obligatory takes on a distinctly psychoanalytic note. After all, the strongman leader exerts control not by

direct oppression as such, but by wilful management of the idea that at some point or another the people will rise up to challenge the father. A peculiar conspiratorial dynamic thus begins to reveal itself already in this sense, before it is even borne out in the accusation of the conspiracy frame.

Of course such a system can never fully and absolutely enforce either mandatory or prohibited acts, or even clearly designate what falls within and outside of these categories. The ambiguity, and the perceived flexibility in either stance, despite their absolute value, is of course precisely what forms the totalitarian experience, that of a both deeply arbitrary and yet simultaneously forcefully structured and controlled society. Rather than consisting of a failure to become an absolute totalitarian society as such, it is in the tension between these positions, and the impossibility of truly achieving such a state, that the true contradictory force of the totalitarian system emerges.

And that is exactly why the obsession with conspiracy is a necessary element of political repression, inasmuch as it is a reflection of this categorical forcefulness. Whether action is prohibited or obligatory, it is a subjective act only to the extent that it exists within the parameters, and hence confines, of the state hegemony, that is, it happens under the ever-watchful gaze of the 'closed system.' Yet despite all this, the power of this relationship, or indeed the network of relationships it relies upon in a form of totalitarian social contract as it were, remains somewhat

dialectical precisely to the extent that it assumes and internalizes its own impossibility. The dualism of prohibited/obligatory exists only to the extent that the individual subject can still 'imagine' his resistance, that is, a world in which the regulatory capacity of the State is required to control and maintain collective 'freedoms'. It is, however, only ever a half-freedom, the feeling of being integrated into a group, while maintaining a perceived distance. Or, in other words, the scene emerges in which each and every individual supporter in a crowd of thousands still considers himself to be the only sane one, the only one who knows this is political theatre, yet participates nonetheless. There is, therefore, an implicit sense of detachment that becomes necessary for participation in the totalitarian collective. In turn, this detachment can be seen to mirror that of the strongman leader himself, and his relationship vis-à-vis his responsibilities of political representation.

The idea that 'the leader is always right' therefore comes to be merged with a secondary assumption, which is that the strongman leader's fantastically exaggerated claims of national strength and unity (despite all evidence to the contrary) are rendered implicitly 'true' in a reversal of the aforementioned maxim of 'everything that is not prohibited becomes compulsory'. What this means, when thought through to its logical conclusion, is therefore that nothing is true but everything is possible. Crucially, the totalitarian logic then necessitates that the totalitarian system become a paranoid one. After all, if the strongman leader must

achieve the unimaginable, yet subsequently make the impossible not only possible, but rather compulsory, then failure to do so will out of necessity be displaced onto a conspiratorial Other.

There emerges therefore a strange interconnectedness between both the immense possibilities of the boundless capacity Erdoğan experiences as a result of resistance, and the legitimate threat it poses to his political ambitions. On the one hand he fuels a deep paranoia regarding the existence and exploitation of the idea of an equally nebulous and nefarious counterpoint, that of the conspiratorial agitator. While on the other, even in the visible structure and organization of the paranoid state, he engineers a certain conspiratorial togetherness, which is that its supporters come to believe that they themselves are part of a destined collective, seeking to undermine the 'ordinary' path of history by superimposing their own vision onto the nation and its seemingly inevitable detractors. Quickly, however, this vision becomes focused primarily on the expulsion of perceived detractors rather than any organizing principle as such.

In turn, the all-encompassing powers attributed to the strongman leader only further fuel reactionary conspiracy theories attributing to him all manner of false-flag operations; the idea emerges that even opposition to the strongman might be manipulated by the leader. When one considers such accounts of the coup attempt that suggest it was simply a ruse by the State to seize enhanced executive powers, this reveals already the

extent to which there has been an internalization of the strongman spirit. To this extent, it is relatively meaningless whether or not there was a false-flag operation, or if the government knew of the coup in advance. For evidently the expectation of a strongman spirit has already been internalized. And this, ultimately, is the strongman's greatest strength: the ability to detach himself both from the experience of the real, and to encompass what one might call the production of the real.

Another popular tactic is for the strongman to accuse other Western democracies of secretly harbouring anti-democratic or even fascist tendencies. The most recent example of this occurred in a series of heated statements following the expulsion of a Turkish diplomat from the Netherlands, and amid a similarly heated debate regarding Turkish political campaigning in Germany. In both cases, Erdoğan accused his European counterparts of being Nazis, war criminals, etc. One might well see this as a darkly ironic inversion of the so-called 'New World Order' conspiracy theories centred on supposed moves to form a totalitarian world government.¹⁸¹ But it is of course primarily another one of the contradictory manifestations of the strongman spirit.

¹⁸¹ Pat Robertson, *The New World Order* (new edn, London, 1991). For a less subjective and more critical analysis, see Jovan Byford, *Conspiracy Theories: A Critical Introduction* (New York, 2011).

Another example that clearly demonstrates the contradictory rhetoric of the conspiratorial strongman can be identified when Erdoğan threatens non-Turkish countries for harbouring supposed anti-Islamic sentiments, but then uses their anti-terrorism measures as a justification for oppressing Turkish opposition at home. Recently, in a speech to members of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), Erdoğan stated that ‘There are serious plots against the Islamic World.’ ‘We must pay attention,’ he said, ‘the blood being shed is Muslims’ blood. Those who kill and those who die are all Muslims. The unknown terrorists – and we do not know whom they serve and whose pawns they are – do not represent us in the Islamic world.’¹⁸²

To put this tactic in stark contrast to the way in which subsequent accusations of conspiracy and justifications for conspiracy come together in their mutually exclusive yet evidently constitutive relationship, one might consider the following two quotes, in which Erdoğan refers first to the Charlie Hebdo terrorist attacks (which were committed by members of the radical Muslim group ISIS) in Paris, then to the French state of emergency initiated in response to it. First:

¹⁸² ‘Anti-West Statements by Turkish President Erdoğan and PM Davutoglu: Muslim Countries Must “Unite and Defeat the Successors of Lawrence of Arabia”; ‘No One Will Be Able to Stop the Rise of Islam in Europe’, The Middle East Media Research Institute (MEMRI), 9 February 2015, available at <https://www.memri.org/reports/anti-west-statements-turkish-president-Erdoğan-and-pm-davutoglu-muslim-countries-must-unite> (accessed 26 May 2017).

French citizens carry out such a massacre and Muslims pay the price [...] The West's hypocrisy is obvious. As Muslims, we've never taken part in terrorist massacres. Behind these lie racism, hate speech and Islamophobia [...] games are being played with the Islamic world. We must be aware of this.¹⁸³

Then contrast the above with the following statement; again, referring to the Paris attacks, but this time using the counter-terrorism measures as both justification for the state of emergency in Turkey and as accusation against a supposedly double hypocritical, even conspiratorial West.

Nobody tells France: 'How can such a practice as the state of emergency take place in a democratic country? How come such operations can be carried out without judicial permission? You are doing wrong!' But the same parties, with the notions of democracy, freedom, human rights and the rule of law, unceasingly dictate to us, who face terrorism every day, saying 'Do not conduct operations against terror organizations!'. We

¹⁸³ Jon Stone, 'Turkish President Erdoğan accuses West of "playing games" with Muslims after Paris Attacks', The Independent, 14 January 2015. Available at www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/turkish-president-erdo-an-accuses-west-of-playing-games-with-muslims-after-paris-attacks-9976991.html (accessed 26 May 2017).

have not heard nor seen those who give us this order ever turn to terror organizations and say ‘Do not attack Turkey! Do not kill the innocent!’ Now I ask: Why do the methods regarded as France’s right to struggle with terror hit a wall of democracy, freedom, rule of law when it comes to us? Why? This is called hypocrisy. I say it explicitly that these expressions do not have value for us anymore at all.¹⁸⁴

There is a fascinating double accusation to be discerned here. First, Erdoğan accuses France of conspiratorial antagonism towards Muslims, even going as far as to suggest a mass conspiracy to undermine the Islamic world. Yet in the other accusation, he likens Turkey to the West, and demands to know why his presidency is treated with what appears to be a double standard. After all, if France can declare a state of emergency, then why should Turkey not be at liberty to do so as well? – And so on and so forth.

Of course it is easy enough to find contrasting or even hypocritical statements from politicians, yet in the above case the contradiction is not a mere rhetorical curiosity, nor merely a case of political convenience.

¹⁸⁴ ‘Claim: Erdoğan says “democracy, freedom, rule of law have no value for us”’, Fact Checking Turkey, 21 March 2016, available at <http://factcheckingturkey.com/domestic-politics/claim-Erdoğan-says-democracy-freedom-rule-law-have-no-value-us-168> (accessed 26 May 2017).

Instead, I would suggest that the contradiction between the two conspiratorial accusations, and in which Turkey features as supposed victim of conspiratorial anti-Turkish intent, reveals once more the duplicity underlying the relationship of the strongman with conspiracy theory, and in particular, how the sense of the strongman spirit encapsulates a singular figure representing the many, who determines his friends by making enemies, and ensures peace by declaring war, and so on and so forth. The logical conclusion is that any statement from the strongman leader on his own position devolves into what is essentially a sort of constitutive banality. After all, once the figure of the strongman becomes detached from the 'reality' of politicking, no statement is too bizarre. The more contradictions he articulates, the more they place him outside any coherent logic or challengeable system of meaning.

Carl Schmitt's conception of the political: Is Turkish democracy consuming itself?

In recent years there has been a resurgent interest within academic publications for the writings of Carl Schmitt. His work is most commonly associated with the theory of the friend/enemy, or 'the friend-enemy distinction'. While he was a prolific writer, he is most well known for his

1927 work 'The Concept of the Political'.¹⁸⁵ No doubt part of his previous obscurity has been his affiliation with the Nazi regime.¹⁸⁶ In particular he sought to provide a juridico-legal foundation to the Nazi regime, and was known as the 'crown-jurist of the Third Reich'. This means that any attempt to read his work must also occur within the split-screen of history; that is to say, we must both distill the relevance of his work for political theory, while at the same time considering the various ways in which his Nazism shaped his views; and perhaps more importantly, acknowledge how his views were constitutive to Nazism. To help me do so I will rely not just on a direct reading of the friend-enemy distinction, but also use Derrida's 'The Politics of Friendship', in which the French poststructuralist seeks to deconstruct the theory of the enemy by means of a theory of friendship.¹⁸⁷ In turn, I believe that this friend/enemy distinction is highly relevant to the manner in which I discuss conspiracy theory in Turkey. This means that I will attempt to integrate the concepts introduced here within the broader discussion of conspiratorial politics in Turkey. While this is far from an in-depth analysis of Schmitt's thought, I would nevertheless like to isolate some core concepts that will be applicable to the way in which I use the terms 'friend' and 'enemy' in the thesis. I also believe that these comments can help provide theoretical

¹⁸⁵ Schmitt, Carl. *The Concept of the Political*. trans. George Schwab. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996.

¹⁸⁶ Balakrishnan, Gopal. *The Enemy: An Intellectual Portrait of Carl Schmitt*. New York: Verso, 2000.

¹⁸⁷ Derrida, Jacques. *Politics of friendship*. Vol. 5. Verso, 2005.

context to what in this thesis is referred to as 'democracy consuming itself'. In other words, I am interested in the particular conception of the political by which democracy becomes particularly vulnerable to a form of extreme (paranoid) antagonistic politics.

Based on lectures written for the *Deutsche Hochschule* in Berlin, 'The Concept of the Political' sought to conceptualize an 'essence' of politics. This means that the idea of the friend-enemy distinction functions as a *prima facie* for his conception of the political. Schmitt argued that the political is the primordial sphere upon which all other domains are based (religion, economics etc.) The reason that it influences all other spheres was its capacity to distinguish between friends and enemies, or, in other words, that all spheres become 'political' once they have to face the problem of distinguishing the friend and foe. It is therefore not simply that all spheres of life are political, but that since the political is the most essential one to identity (being that by which the State determines the friend and enemy), that all other spheres must inherently fall within its sphere. In a broader sense –and this is where the authoritarian element of his argument is most apparent– the central function of the State, and thereby of the democratic process, is that of distinguishing between the political friend and the perceived Other. Through this process of identification, the nature of politics is rendered most concretely into the political. However, this function of 'concreteness' can, somewhat paradoxically, rest on the 'possibility of conflict'. The key point for Schmitt

is then that the friend/enemy distinction (which I will later theorize as an antinomy) can be constitutive to the political regardless of the manifestation of actual conflict. This should not be taken as a pacifist idea. Instead, what Schmitt rightly assumes, is that the possibility of such conflict –or, the potentiality for violence- becomes itself a form of real violence. The process of distinguishing between friend/enemy never has to be completed. It is in the impossibility of fully rendering conclusive this identity that the core of the violence existence. In sum, violence is not just the means to an end, it is the very foundation on which identity is created within the political, and hence, the only sphere of reality on which politics can be made manifest.

In the friend/enemy distinction, the idea of the enemy functions as a form of essentialist reduction of the Other. Not simply a moral difference, or a racial one, but rather a sort of fundamental all-absorbing otherness to the sovereign individual. This means that the very notion of being the friend becomes reliant on the identification of what he is not: a negative determination so to speak. Yet this also makes the idea of the enemy properly constitutive in its own right, as a positive determinant of the friend. Carl Schmitt famously describes the enemy as: “The political enemy need not be morally evil or aesthetically ugly; he need not appear as an economic competitor, and it may even be advantageous to engage with him in business transactions. But he is, nevertheless, the other, the stranger; and it is sufficient for his nature that he is, in a specially intense

way, existentially something different and alien, so that in the extreme case conflicts with him are possible. These can neither be decided by a previously determined general norm nor by the judgment of a disinterested and therefore neutral third party.”

But this does not just mean that the identity of the subject is defined by the political; rather, the political becomes that process by which this identity is discovered, declared, and made manifest. Here we can make the leap to Derrida, who suggests that Schmitt takes this declarative function and renders it into teleology of the political. That is to say, antagonism and differentiation is not the abstract thing that the political must seek to overcome –pace Schmitt- but rather it becomes the origin of the political itself; not just its *modus Vivendi*, but its *apologia pro vita sua*. The political looks back on itself and finds its sovereignty legitimized by virtue of this differentiation. Derrida writes:

“We are constantly reminded that only a *concrete, concretely determined* enemy can awaken the political; only a real enemy can shake the political out of its slumber and, as we awaken to its actual/effective life (as’ the *living* fool that I am’, when it bemoans the fact that there is no longer, or not yet, an enemy). But there is the specter, lodged within the political itself; the antithesis of the political dwells within, and politicizes, the political. (...) Negativity, disavowal and politics, haunting and dialectics. If there is politicism in Schmitt, it lies in the fact that it is not enough for him to define the political by the negativity of polemics or opposition

(oppositional negativity in general) – which is not at all the same as defining the political – as teleologically political. The political is all the more political for being antagonistic – certainly, but opposition is all the more oppositional – supreme opposition, *qua* the essence and *telos* of opposition, negation and contradiction – when it is political.¹⁸⁸

While Derrida is not the easiest theorist to interpret, what is important here is that the element of ‘possible’ violence functions already as an implicit ‘reality’ of the State. This means that there does not need to be a ‘real’ enemy for the forces to manifest that allow for the determination of an enemy. The possibility of violence is therefore in and of itself already a form of violence: the ambiguity of the ‘occurrence’ of the violence allows the State to emerge in a relationship of (potential) force towards its people, rather like a conspiratorial form of Hobbes’s monopoly of violence; or, by extension, Weber’s notion of the State as ‘human community that (successfully) claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of violence with a given territory’.¹⁸⁹ Weber is here echoing the Trotskyian attitude, that is also reflected among the contemporary Left, and even political ‘realists’ that all States rely on violence to enforce their position. Yet this violence comes in three forms. For Thomas Hobbes –from which Weber takes the term- it functions as a ‘Gewaltsmonopol’, i.e. the capacity to inflict

¹⁸⁸ Politics of Friendship, 138-9.

¹⁸⁹ Max Weber: Essays in Sociology, pp. 771-28, New York: Oxford University Press, 1946, p. 77. The Hobbesian conception of the term originates in: Hobbes, Thomas. *Thomas Hobbes: Leviathan (Longman Library of Primary Sources in Philosophy)*. Routledge, 2016.

violence with impunity. For Arendt, such violence –when enacted in practice- invariably undermines the power, and hence legitimacy of the State.¹⁹⁰ For the conspiracy theorist, the symbolic power is one that manifests itself precisely through a lack of violence. So where power minus violence is otherwise considered as a sign of legitimate authority, the conspiracy theorist sees the common lack of resistance to the status quo as itself a sign of the successful implementation of violent subversion (through plots, secret deals, manipulations, foreign coups, etc.). This, then, is a non-symbolic form of violence ‘presumed’ to underlie the creation of public consensus.

If we apply this to the Turkish case, what stands out most readily is the particular constitutional definition of the Government’s power to declare a State of Emergency. In the Turkish phrasing (*Olağanüstü Hal*)¹⁹¹, the term literally translates to a ‘State of Exception’ thereby inadvertently mirroring Schmitt’s ‘*Ausnahmezustand*’ (commonly translated to ‘state of exception’), which serves as a fundamental concept in his legal theory. Pointing out the overlap between the 1982 Turkish constitution and the terminology employed by Carl Schmitt, Turkuler Isiksel writes: *Olağanüstü Hal* bears out Schmitt’s conception of the state of exception as entailing “the suspension of the entire existing order,” whereby “the norm is

¹⁹⁰ Arendt, Hannah. *On violence*. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 1970.

¹⁹¹ For a detailed analysis –and conceptual explanation- of the term, see: Bezci, Egemen B., and Güven Gürkan Öztan. "Anatomy of the Turkish Emergency State: A Continuous Reflection of Turkish Raison d'état between 1980 and 2002." *Middle East Critique* 25.2 (2016): 163-179.

destroyed by the exception.”¹⁹²he argues that the ‘spirit’ of Emergency rule is embedded within the 1982 constitution.

“For nearly 15 years of slow-burning civil war, constitutionally mandated emergency rule deprived millions of citizens of basic rights protections, allowing rampant extra-judicial killings, disappearances, torture, ill-treatment, forcible displacement, and countless other grave abuses. Thus, the 1982 Constitution has overseen the expansion and normalization of procedures of emergency rule in entire swaths of the country for most of the constitution’s existence. *Olağanüstü Hal* bears out Schmitt’s conception of the state of exception as entailing “the suspension of the entire existing order,” whereby “the norm is destroyed by the exception.”¹⁹³

(Adding that the Turkish scholar Bülent Tanor refers to it also as the anti-constitution because of the rights it grants the Government to potentially undermine democracy and democratic rights), particularly because this

The citations are from: ¹⁹² Carl Schmitt, *Definition of Sovereignty* [1922], in *Political theology. Four chapters on the concept of sovereignty* 12 (George Schwab trans., 2005).

¹⁹³ Isiksel, Turkuler. "Between text and context: Turkey's tradition of authoritarian constitutionalism." *International Journal of Constitutional Law* 11.3 (2013): 702-726.

“nominally “exceptional” format of authoritarian rule was internal to the constitution, meaning that it was “ordinary” in the sense of being a constitutionally mandated exemption from constitutional guarantees of basic rights.”

I think this serves as an interesting transition to the problem of conspiracy in Turkey’s contemporary –and ongoing- cycle of declaring and extending the State of Emergency following the coup in July 2018, effectively making it not only the first declaration of such an emergency, but also the longest sustained ‘State of Exception’ in modern Turkish history. As I will argue in this thesis, many of the attributes of the state of exception have been since institutionalized, leading some to suggest that Turkey now lives under a perpetual State of emergency, or what Amnesty International has described as a ‘normalization’ of emergency measures. In other words, emergency powers risk becoming the new normal of Turkish political life as they become integrated both within the culture, the media, and within political institutions.

To stay with Carl Schmitt’s concept of the enemy, what resonates most strongly with the Turkish case is how he argues that the pursuit of the enemy becomes not just the legitimization, but also the essence of the State. (This is why, for example, the French philosopher Jacques Ranciere uses the word ‘police’ instead of ‘State’). In this thesis I will follow the argument along the lines of a political praxis of conspiracy theory. In other

words, the process by which accusations of conspiracy become normalized to the extent that the pursuit of political enemies becomes not just the function, but the essence, of the political. In the following quote from ‘The Concept of the Political’ we can detect a foreshadowing of the same form of State rhetoric that underlies the common paranoid nationalist narrative in Turkish politics today:

“It would be ludicrous to believe that a defenseless people has nothing but friends, and it would be a deranged calculation to suppose that the enemy could perhaps be touched by the absence of a resistance. No one thinks it possible that the world could, for example, be transformed into a condition of pure morality by the renunciation of every aesthetic or economic productivity. Even less can a people hope to bring about a purely moral or purely economic condition of humanity by evading every political decision. If a people no longer possesses the energy or the will to maintain itself in the sphere of politics, the latter, will not thereby vanish from the world. Only a weak people will disappear.”

In other words, the only certainty of politics is the existence of the enemy. In the pursuit thereof a people finds its true identity, and can readily cast aside other ethical or institutional restraints such as democracy, human rights, and so on. In this form of rhetoric, we can detect for the first time how it is precisely democratically elected leaders –rather than autocrats or

tyrants- who can most readily harness this form of a paranoid conception of the political. In the thesis I refer to this as 'democracy consuming itself'.

So perhaps a better way to view this problem, i.e. that of the inevitable relationship between the idea of the enemy and the justification for a less democratic politics is to adopt what Chantal Mouffe has referred to as a politics of *agonism* instead of antagonism. This mirrors to some degree the distinction that already existed in Plato's *Republic*, which is that of the difference between the public enemy and the private one, and specifically, between the antithesis of 'war' on the one hand, and 'public insurrection' on the other. For Plato, the only 'genuine' war is that of international strife between foreign adversaries, whereas domestic conflicts count as a form of 'discord' and must be treated not as a matter of survival, but as a condition of society. The point being, that it is impossible to truly wage war upon oneself. The distinction is here one of the enemy versus the opponent, but can be mirrored *within* the public sphere as well. That is to say, we can fight 'wars' domestically, but only on the condition that the opponent becomes an enemy on categorical, rather than reasoned grounds. Simply put, once we forego a reasoned contestation within democracy, we also move beyond the sphere of agonism, towards a politics of antagonism. An antagonistic democracy –and this is where I break ties with Schmitt, who makes the opposite conclusion- is therefore

a contradiction in terms. A truly democratic society is one in which the opponent is conceived of as precisely that, and adversary, but not an enemy. Plato provides this distinction in the following terms: “A private enemy is a person who hates us, whereas a public enemy is a person who fights against us.” Of course this is an altogether too facile distinction, which is also why ultimately Plato’s Republic (as Popper already argued so convincingly) would be an inherently authoritarian society. Chantal Mouffe’s response to this overly negative conceptualization of the political function of the enemy, and her warning against liberals’ desire to fight fire with fire, presents a much more deliberative picture of the role of adversarial politics. She writes:

“Alas, it is not enough to eliminate the political in its dimension of antagonism and exclusion from one’s theory to make it vanish from the real world. It does come back, and with a vengeance. Once the liberal approach has created a framework in which its dynamics cannot be grasped, and where the institutions and the discourses are missing that could permit that potential antagonisms manifest themselves under an agonistic mode, the danger exists that instead of a struggle among adversaries, what will take place is a war between enemies. This is why, far from being conducive to a more reconciled society, this type of approach ends up by jeopardizing democracy.”¹⁹⁴

¹⁹⁴ Needs page

In other words, we cannot simply wish a way the idea of the enemy in a more consensual, centrist, conception of truthful, ethical, normative politics. The friend-enemy antithesis will always feature as a distinct trope of authoritarian visions of society, and can only be properly reconciled precisely if we create the conditions in which arguments can be brought to bear against it. If we simply cannot accept that this is the case, and treat the antagonistic politics of the Erdogan Presidency as antithetical to Turkish politics, then we only encourage and strengthen the conditions under which it functions. This means that the only appropriate response to the Erdogan-style polemical attitude, is to both deny the premise of his contestation, yet simultaneously to counter him head-on with genuine policy-oriented debate. To simply look away is in this case just as bad as pouring fuel on the fire. The challenge implicit in the Erdogan Presidency is to embrace the most progressive elements of the progressive democratic platform, and to do away with the moralist, politically correct attitude with which liberals formerly argued in favor of, and indeed sought to embody, the hegemonic status quo.

A liberal democracy can only function if there is a social space in which political opponents can reasonably compete. Consensus should here be the goal, not the a priori condition of the political. And in turn, once politics evolves into a mere contestation of antagonism, of an opponent who 'hates' the other side and sees them not as participatory to

democracy, but as its aberration, then the political can no longer function in any agonistic sense as such. This is therefore precisely what we risk in our earnest outrage and frustration with the Erdogan Presidency. His rhetoric poisons the well from which civic discourse flows, and we find ourselves incapable of reasoned debate, and instead arming ourselves for a war among ourselves. And this is therefore the exact point at which the conspiratorial logic becomes seemingly plausible. It is also, as we shall find, at the heart of the apocalyptic expectation within paranoid nationalism. Once politics can only be conceived of as a battle, a contest of wills rather than reason, then inherently the focus shifts away from a genuinely representative political space towards a much more binary and ultimately unreal vision of politics being strictly between winners and losers, friends and enemies, fascists and socialists, and so on. What is vital to realize, is that this is not 'caused' by the onset of conspiratorial thinking, and the desire for an apocalyptic societal reckoning. On the contrary, the aforementioned are the symptom of a deliberate attack on the function of Turkish politics, an erosion of trust in the deliberative processes of democracy, and ultimately a strategic assault on the discursive norms and practices that we associate with democratic politics.

Democracies are surprisingly brittle things. Like sandcastles facing the tide, they require careful management and constant vigilance to keep the waves from crashing down upon them. But this is to some degree a false

metaphor. For the true threat to democracy is embedded in its very functioning. That is to say, there is a constitutive gap, a creative void or a social space that democracy requires in order to be truly free. And it is precisely in this capacity that even the strongest democracies are always at risk from reactionary forces, populist antidemocratic sentiment, and the political rhetoric of conspiracy theory. Carl Schmitt saw this weakness as something that could only be rooted out through force, whereas the deliberative model of democracy would argue that this form of violence is itself democracy's paradoxical weakness.

The Uncanny of the Strongman Leader¹⁹⁵

¹⁹⁵ While I invoke Freud's concept of the uncanny here, I realize that a more apt Freudian application to the strongman might be that of the 'taboo' ruler figure, whom the sanctity of power makes both untouchable and all-touching. Yet for the sake of the current argument, which is, after all, not an orthodox Freudian one, I believe the merit of choosing the concept of the uncanny above that of the taboo can be summed up in the following way. For as we shall see, the death of the idea of the man (the political candidate), and the birth of the leader figure as the strongman leader, is the very mechanism through which the true conspiracy, the consolidation of power and the leader as a symbol of such power, a 'being-for-itself', is actualized (see earlier note on Arendt's concept of the totalitarian collective). The irony is that it is the paranoid style of illegitimate rule that belies the fulfilment of the strongman symbol in the first place. The rise of the strongman leader only occurs due to the crisis of legitimacy of the autocrat. This is important, because it suggests the contradiction implicit even in the idea of the strongman leader and that of the autocrat. While the strongman finds the means for authoritarianism in his supposed democratic legitimacy, the latter experiences the exact opposite: the autocrat must play 'nice' so as to avoid an uprising, whereas the

So as Turkey's President becomes an ever more contentious figure, so too do the ensuing polemics become increasingly grand in scale. To name just a few: Ranting about Western conspiracies, while mending ties with Russia and Israel. Aiding the US in the fight against ISIS, while reigniting war against the PKK. Imprisoning hundreds of journalists, while boasting of the freest press in the world. Releasing prisoners from jail to make room for post-coup arrestees. Protesting Coca-Cola by drinking Fanta, and so on and so forth. While such contradictions prove fertile soil for liberal outrage, which in turn – to stretch the metaphor – only further fertilizes the strongman's populist credentials, they should not be dismissed as mere curiosities or the inconsistencies and hypocrisy of an erratic strongman leadership style.

Instead, and this is an argument that runs throughout the entirety of this thesis, the spirit of the strongman leader (or for that matter, the spirit of resistance thereto) arises not despite such contradictions. On the contrary, the strongman leader embodies these contradictions. His very persona comes to reflect the impossibility of the reconciliation of the contrasting forces he so readily invokes. The strongman leader is not merely a hypocritical or duplicitous politician. He is himself a result of the very real forces ensuing from the clash of the said incompatibilities. These

democratically elected strongman must act as a tyrant to sustain his legitimacy. It is not a clean dualism of course.

antinomies do not exist to be resolved. They are not even necessarily dialectical. There is no clear thesis, antithesis, let alone synthesis. His is an impossible figure, precisely so as to become the only possible one. We have briefly explored what this means in terms of a so-called totalitarian logic. But one might even go a step further, and think of this as essentially part of the ‘uncanny’ nature of the strongman, as simultaneously truthful and untruthful, erratic and static, timeless yet momentary, and, above all, popular yet reviled.

This ‘death-birth’ of the leader figure, his transformation from ordinary politician into symbolic leader, is of course hardly a tangible process. The stages in which the strongman evolves from a political figure into a mythical, symbolic entity of the State can perhaps best be likened to that of the idea of momentum as discussed in the previous chapter. After all, in the same way that momentum allows a movement to grow seemingly exponentially, yet without evident coercion, so too does a similar such process emerge with the strongman leader. Furthermore, his own momentum, as it were, is directly tied to his capacity to stem the tide of the counter-momentum, that of opposition to his rule.

As such, the strongman leader begins to take on the distinct characteristics of the Freudian conceptualization of the uncanny.¹⁹⁶ This is

¹⁹⁶ Sigmund Freud, *The Uncanny*, transl. David McLintock (London, 2013). The term is mostly used in the psychoanalytic literature and literary criticism. While these often

not because he invokes malicious forces by making claims of conspiracy. In fact, the reverse occurs. It is not that the strongman simply invokes the uncanny. He becomes the uncanny. That is to say, the leader figure begins to take on the distinctly uncanny features of what in Freudian terms is referred to as the 'animated corpse'. In other words, he is both an inanimate, 'dead' object, while rising above his mortal form, embodying the nation state and determining the state of the nation. This is the epitome of the authoritarian balancing act. The strongman leader both seizes the future, promising infrastructure projects, fame and international recognition, all the while imposing a rigid conservatism and promising to bring the country back to its roots.

If we view the uncanny as a state of being in which a force is elicited from an impossible contradiction, the strongman leader emerges as the perfect exacerbation, the logical conclusion of competing visions for Turkey. In his persona, one finds a reprieve from the chaos of opinion, and finds solace in the comfort of certainty. His falsehoods are not cloaked in truth, as much as his truth is not cloaked in falsehood. He becomes both compulsive liar and oracle of truth. Both emotive populist, and wise leader, he becomes friend to all and friend to none, devoted Muslim and champion of secular democracy, oppressor and liberator, and finally,

describe relations of power, they do not necessarily describe political processes as such. For exceptions, see David Collings, *Monstrous Society: Reciprocity, Discipline, and the Political Uncanny* (Cranbury, NJ, 2009); Yolanda Gampel, 'Reflections on the Prevalence of the Uncanny in Social Violence', in Robben and Suárez-Orozco (eds), *Cultures under Siege: Collective Violence and Trauma* (Cambridge, 2000).

human, yet immortal. Of course this is devastating for Turkey as a democratic society, but is also clearly invigorating for the masses that flock to his support. The spirit of the strongman leader is like a slime that oozes from the cracks and contradictions of the uncanny object.

So the strongman leader not only desires the impossible, he becomes an emblem of the impossible, and rides the ensuing wave of contention until it breaks onto the shores of resistance.¹⁹⁷ But like the tide, the force of the strongman leader ebbs and flows, begetting resistance while draining it of its capacity to resist. When the impossibility of the strongman's promises incurs resistance to his rule, his forceful response only further consolidates his position of power. Even when the strongman fails, he grows in strength. And the in the chaos between momentum and paralysis, between forceful leadership and political stasis, the strongman leader resembles the uncanny object in that his existence (*Dasein*) becomes detached from the impossibility of his purported purpose, that of legitimate political representation. In sum, the strongman leader becomes part of a broader dialectical movement in which (conspiratorial) resistance is internalized into the continued justification of strongman tactics.

¹⁹⁷ I realize this may appear somewhat esoteric. But I want to juxtapose the cadaverous imagery of the uncanny with that of the clear water of the breaking tide. Either way, the point is, after all, not which metaphor to adopt, or what simile to invoke, but rather to distil from such images the relationship of forces that determine the leader's resurgence in the face of resistance; the strength of the spirit as it were.

The reason I find the use of the term ‘uncanny’ relevant here is that the pejorative inflection of the word already implies the obvious: that this is not a natural state. It is a perversion of the idea of the democratically elected leader. Yet what should stand out most in the case of the strongman uncanny is its affinity to the mechanisms of conspiracy theory. Can there be anything more distinctly uncanny than the notion of the conspiratorial Other, an enemy who is both there and not there? Not only is the strongman leader both catalyst and outcome of his uncanny stance towards the politics he represents, and the system he controls, he also seeks the essential validation of the conspirator as a mechanism through which to leave behind the political and embrace the mythos of the leader figure.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁸ A close to perfect illustration of the uncanny of the strongman leader (even if it does not appertain directly to Turkey) can be found in the plot of the original version of Mussorgsky’s operatic masterpiece Boris Godunov. The Tsar, ‘Boris’, is haunted by an unspeakable crime. He has risen to power by ordering the assassination of his predecessor, a mere child. His mortal fear is that his enemies will figure out the truth, and conspire against him by inciting revolution. Yet this revolution never takes place, even when the public inevitably hears rumours of his crime. In a wonderfully ironic scene, the impoverished crowds gather outside the palace walls, but show complete indifference to whether or not the Tsar conspired to seize the throne. What difference does it make to them? Either way, they remain hungry and impoverished. What they want is food. They couldn’t care less about throne-room scheming.

In the end, faced with no resistance whatsoever, the Tsar retreats into his palace, wracked with the anguish of the unresolved conspiracy. No one seems to care about his crime, and he dies a self-pitying death. It is tempting therefore, to interpret his death, not literally as the death of the Tsar, who had no reason to die. There was no design on his life. His rule was in essence, legitimized by the indifference of his subjects. It works,

The strongman spirit, like conspiracy theory, and even like the idea of momentum in resistance thereto, comes to revolve around a central axis of contradictory forces, of uncontrollable tensions, which in turn beget the chaos in which conspiratorial thought thrives. In sum, the uncanny characteristics of the idea of the strongman leader, his 'death-birth' from being a politician to an embodiment of the nation writ large, and the conspiratorial tension underlying at once his legitimacy, the support and the resistance he requires to sustain such power, further spreads the uncanny dynamic, until what emerges is a conspiratorial, paranoid society; a Turkey paralysed by the sheer force of the conspiratorial volitions of its strongman leader.

however, when one considers it as the death of the politician and the birth of the strongman leader. Only in this sense does the abrupt ending of the opera, and the lack of a confrontation, make any sense. Indeed, it is almost as if the piece works as an anti-opera, a prelude to the events that will surely follow once the masses revolt in hunger and he has to repress their revolt. Boris becomes the epitome of the uncanny strongman. From the ashes of his revolt, and the scheming of his politics, arises the strongman figure as embodiment of the state, but detached from the responsibility of political representation.

It is striking, when seen in this light, how the original piece was deemed unacceptable by critics, as it was not deemed to meet the requirements of a formal opera (due to its chopped structure, atonality and lack of a female lead). Following the death of the composer, the piece was conveniently rewritten, restructured and lengthened to fit the requirements of a more formal historical epic. With this knowledge, it is hard not to consider the revised version as a somewhat kitsch simulacrum of the original; a cleaned-up work of art. This is undoubtedly unfortunate, as the opera's brilliance lay exactly in that it was not intended to be a Gesamtkunstwerk to suit the tastes of the Russian aristocracy.

In the case of Turkey this contradiction is expressed rather well when the current political elite prosecutes and imprisons critical journalists, lawyers and others who speak out against government policies, yet still allows the publication of certain types of criticisms that suggest how the State might for example encourage tourism, engage fruitfully with allies, and other forms of 'constructive' criticism in the mode of cultural diplomacy but with an emphasis on Orientalist conceptualizations of 'Eastern hospitality' and supposed 'Ottoman tolerance'. As such it is with a completely straight face that Erdoğan can claim to uphold freedom of speech, even boasting that Turkey has 'the world's freest press', while shutting down news outlets that criticize the government. But a problem emerges. Since the only press that is tolerated is press that is favourable to the government, one becomes suspicious even of the differing ways in which 'positive' news is reported. In this way, possible slights to the government could supposedly be buried even in seemingly uncritical phrases. In other words, once everything that is not prohibited becomes obligatory, the boundary between the two positions begins to erode, and paranoia must necessarily ensue. In this way, one can also think of Turkey's press, and its relationship to the figure of Erdoğan, as being both free, and distinctly unfree even for government loyalists.

The way this unfolds is as follows. If criticism can no longer be safely published and distributed, a paranoid suspicion emerges, which is that this criticism will be encoded in seemingly uncritical news, in ways that

cannot easily be detected. As a result, the suspicion must inevitably be cast inwards, to the point that even uncritical news loses its capacity to express sympathy for the government, and must instead do so by actively antagonizing seemingly conspiratorial forces. The result is that the media becomes not merely a mouthpiece for the government, but instead a self-incentivizing platform for political witch-hunts. A good example of this was to be observed in the campaign for the presidential referendum, in which the so-called *Evet* (yes) vote was primarily articulated by its negative inversion – that is, the invocation of all the forces that supposedly sought to achieve a *Hayir* (no) vote. To this extent, activists circulated posters that depicted portraits of the ‘yes’-team, a gallery of the political elite, alongside a ‘no’ poster presenting images of ISIS, Gülen and the Kurdish political party HDP. The message was explicit as much as implicit. In a system in which criticism is no longer tolerated, even direct democracy is framed as a vote between the political elite and outside conspirators. The breakdown of political language is thus also a breakdown of the possibility of political participation. In other words, when the State fails to achieve its goals, it can no longer blame the constructive criticism as little as it can blame itself.

When the strongman leader assumes the duplicitous characteristics of the uncanny, he consolidates even the opposing manifestations of his power, that is, the resistance his leadership style begets. Seen in this light it is

not merely a matter of whether Erdoğan is an autocrat or a democrat, or even a 'sultan' or a Tsar. Rather, he is necessarily both. The very tenaciousness surrounding Turkey's current love affair (at least among government loyalists) with the strongman, including the resistance he invokes, and the damage it does to Turkey's position on the international stage, only contributes further to the resilience of the strongman spirit. What renders this figure emblematic to conspiracy theory is precisely his implied reversal of real resistance apropos imagined agency, and in turn, false resistance invoked to justify political agency.

This can be summed up in a curious paradox surrounding the persona of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. On the one hand, his government has mainstreamed conspiratorial accusations against 'lobbies', 'traitors' and 'foreign agents'. Yet alternately, analysts and researchers have become hooked to a narrative of daily outrage in which Turkey's controversial president is described as 'sultan', 'dictator' and 'despot'. Depending on who one believes, the country is either on the brink of civil war, or instead heroically participating in a resurgence of nationalist principles. In such an increasingly polarized environment, with tensions escalating on both sides, the fringe elements of Turkish society have seen the opportunity to take centre stage. It is the Erdoğan doctrine in full force: denying dissenting voices any expression on their own terms, and instead igniting and awakening pre-existing social divides that have long lain dormant. In this race to the bottom the results are contradictory, paradoxical even. In

an unprecedentedly connected world we are now more isolated than ever, and despite unprecedented technological access to information and instantaneous capacity to fact-check, there has been a proliferation of conspiracy theories, fake news and paranoid politics. The spirit of Gezi and the spirit of the strongman leader, perhaps even the spirit of new resistance(s) such as the coup attempt, are therefore all but lost in the labyrinthine constellation of competing truths and untruths. Therefore, let us examine in equal measure the opposite to the strongman spirit: a spirit of resistance, the so-called Gezi spirit. Despite its emancipatory potential, this can be seen to harness some of the very same contradictions, weaknesses and susceptibility to conspiratorial framing, as what we have just considered appertaining to the strongman spirit.

The Gezi Spirit

The idea of the 'Gezi spirit' is on the face of it a rather appealing one. After all, it is difficult to explain how exactly such a seemingly innocuous protest could have transformed into a national movement. There will always be a certain mystery as to the momentum of the movement. It is easy to forget that some weeks before the onset of the Gezi protests, thousands of protestors had already sought to march to Taksim Square

on May Day. Yet it was not until Gezi that something changed, elevating a relatively minor protest to a veritable mass movement. I would like to suggest that pursuing an intersectional understanding of such forces requires returning the Gezi conflict to a similar tension to that underlying the conspiracy frame, that is the tension between cause and subject, specifically with regard to their anticipated role within Turkish society. The process by which the ‘spirit’ as such is achieved has been referred to as a so-called ‘re-composition’ of people, which focuses not on a given identity, but on a process of collective transformation or so-called ‘becoming’ vis-à-vis the status quo.¹⁹⁹ One way in which this takes concrete form is by means of the movement’s emancipatory potential, that is, in the vacuum of meaning, a space from which non-heterogenic identities could be expressed and embraced. Consider for example the following statement, featured in a collection of online interviews with protestors.

Finally I went there, met new friends and realized it was the first day of Resistance. I decide to stayed there all the time. I was hiding my orientation before, but I decide to have a coming out. I start to wear some special shorts, which were

¹⁹⁹ Serhat Karakayali and Özge Yaka, ‘The Spirit of Gezi: The Recomposition of Political Subjectivities in Turkey’, *New Formations* 83 (2014), pp. 117–38. See also Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt, *Commonwealth* (Cambridge, 2009).

shorter and shorter, day by day. Now, I'm ready to tell everyone that I'm homosexual without any shame. The Gezi Resistance changed me.²⁰⁰

What stands out here is not only the distinctly personal nature of the transformation attributed to Gezi – the focus on the individual experience vis-à-vis the collective – but rather, that there is no sense that this is a protest as such. Instead, it becomes a site of personal discovery. In this, the protest served as a vehicle for emancipation, rather than as an outright display of resistance. The grievance articulated by such protests is therefore not, strictly speaking, an a priori one, but rather a (to some degree contingent) outcome of the transformative process of participation in the collective.

When viewed this way, the protests not only arise from shared grievances, they also allow for new identities to be formulated. This occurs by means of gathering outside the hetero-normative experience of daily life and witnessing the collective resistance of others who feel the

²⁰⁰ Full interview and others can be found at the blog 'My Gezi Park', available at <http://mygezipark.blogspot.co.uk/> (accessed 26 May 2017).

same.²⁰¹ Of course I am not trying to say that the function of Gezi was simply for young people to make discoveries about themselves. Instead, what I mean to stress is that the transformative potential of the movement is not merely that it imagines a transformed society, but that it begins with a transformation of the self, of the subject's relationship towards the perceived status quo.

This means that the transformative potential, the nigh-on spiritual experience of the protest gathering, can become equally transformative for the paranoid state. It creates a 'double Othering' of sorts. Not only are the protestors now seen as outside the cultural, religious or sexual norm, they are also situated as being outside the responsibility of representation of the Turkish government. Tragically, the liberation makes possible a more extreme isolation. Finding little possibility for self-fulfilment (in a broad sense of the term 'political opportunity structures'), alternative expressions of identity form the Gezi spirit, as much as they exacerbate the status quo from which they were already considered exempt. Yes, the protest had a massive emancipatory impact on its participants, but by elevating Gezi to a semi-mythological site of transformation, it belied the possibility of such progress being made within the given politics of the time.

²⁰¹ Bülent Eken, 'The Politics of the Gezi Park Resistance: Against Memory and Identity', *South Atlantic Quarterly* 2 (2014), pp. 427-36.

Articulation of Momentum, Momentous Articulation

It seems to me that the best way to think about this is to return to the problem of momentum, which, in turn requires the following assumption. There appears to be a clear limitation to the truth claim of a collective spirit when it is derived solely on the basis of having achieved a form of critical mass. If the success of the Gezi movement can only be quantified by measuring its relative mobilizing success, then this ultimately leads to a tautology of sorts, which at worst constitutes a redundancy. This creates a vacuum of meaning, a loss of specificity, and begets the emergence of a proto-spiritual articulation of the protests that makes it vulnerable to the conspiracy frame. Yet this, and the disruptive potential it implies, is of course in equal measure the protest's greatest strength.

To put this in terms of a classical sophism, the idea of the Gezi spirit is both the 'carriage' in the mouth (the Sophists argued that to articulate something would inherently render it existent; hence a carriage could literally and figuratively be made to 'roll' over one's tongue) as well as simply another name for the very force that makes the carriage appear in the first place, that is, its articulation. In this mode of thinking, there is an emphasis on action over theory, one that draws upon the Stoics' impassivity towards suffering rather than the Christian doctrine of

enduring torment, and which resonated through the protests of the New Left and continues to be felt in the likes of Gezi or Occupy Wall Street. They are all movements that rely paradoxically on their perceived universality in the face of their minority (vis-à-vis the status quo) as a necessary condition for the self-actualization of their meaning. To detractors, this makes them self-perpetuating. To supporters, the focus on mass participation is precisely what lends them their inclusivity and diversity.

To help us understand both the temptation and the pitfalls of such resistance, we should therefore consider the aforementioned Stoic principle as functioning on two levels. First, there is the idea of the Gezi spirit existing in relationship to its own repeated utterance, not unlike the ‘human microphone’ or ‘voice of the people’ tactic used in the Occupy movements and indeed in Gezi.²⁰² But the emergence of such a spirit also occurs in a more metaphysical sense. To put this simply, the spirit becomes ‘real’ exactly at the point where the conditions for its reality can

²⁰² For a selection of texts discussing the ‘human mic’ technique and horizontal power structures in the Occupy movement, see David Graeber, *The Democracy Project: A History, a Crisis, a Movement* (London, 2014); Sasha Costanza-Chock, ‘Mic Check! Media Cultures and the Occupy Movement’, *Social Movement Studies: Journal of Social, Cultural and Political Protest* 11 (2012), pp. 1–11; Stephen Lerner, ‘Horizontal Meets Vertical; Occupy Meets Establishment: To grow, the occupy movement will need to connect with tens of millions of ordinary Americans’, *The Nation*, 14 March 2012, available at <https://www.thenation.com/article/horizontal-meets-vertical-occupy-meets-establishment/> (last accessed 26 May 2017).

no longer be clearly conceived of, or for that matter, met. So what ensues is a necessary paradox between the implied motion and the stasis, an uncanny frozen mobility implicit in the occupation of public spaces such as Gezi Park or Taksim Square.

In other words, the idea of mass occupation of public spaces becomes a form of a radically passive movement: inaction with the goal of forcing a reaction. But there is always a looming duality to such an exercise.

Whether it is between the poles of motion/stasis, spontaneous momentum/active organization, or collective resistance/individual liberation, the Gezi spirit derives meaning from these opposite forces. In what is therefore essentially a reversal of the Cartesian maxim ('I think therefore I am'), the movement comes to embody the very reason for its own existence. It exists, thus it has meaning. The evident danger here is that this detracts from the original grievances underlying the protests in the first place. Quickly, the contestation between the occupiers and the State takes on a conspiratorial quality, a sense that either position is inevitable and unbound from the 'real' of the status quo. This has distinct ramifications for the movement, as the state response becomes more oppressive, often begetting counter-violence.

In one sense, the invocation of a collective spirit by the protestors to describe the protests is not altogether different from the narrative of conspiracy employed by the State. Not only do both rely on an unexplained rendering 'visible' of the 'invisible' but they serve to detach

and isolate a supposed agency that has been identified as momentum. The occupation of Gezi Park can ultimately be seen as an escalation of the original contention, one that, in so doing, grew exponentially beyond a single-issue movement into an overarching contestation of Turkey's political leadership, and hence its political future. It is a resistance borne from the articulation of momentum, which, in turn, begot a momentous articulation. Is this a mere circularity, a redundancy even? On the contrary, the dualism between Gezi's articulation and fulfilment consists of one side, not two. Like a Moebius strip, turning in on itself to form a loop, the movement's potential derives its force, its thrust as it were, from the circularity implied by this double tension. The Gezi spirit's shows its 'best' side when it refuses to be a singular event, a singular group, and embraces the plurality of its meanings, and hence its truths, but also succumbs to a conspiratorial state response at precisely this point of synthesis.

For in light of the plurality of the Gezi spirit, one can recall how, in the initial stages of the protest, the movement struggled to accurately frame the reasons for its emergent success – at least in that it had demonstrably tapped into a wider contention beyond the issue of the park – and subsequently agonized over how to present itself to the international media. On the one hand, the protestors could paint a picture of Turkey as a totalitarian society, under the assumption that the international media would equate it with other recent protests such as

the Arab Spring (which in 2013, it should be noted, was still regarded much more favourably by the international community, before the long-term instability in the Middle East that ensued) and, on the other hand, the less theatrical but to the protestors more desirable framing of Turkey as a modern democratic society undergoing political transitions.

To put this in a binary of sorts: the Gezi protestors achieved their initial goal of mass mobilization, yet in so doing gave rise to an imagery and an interpretation of Turkish society that appeared to be rather more binary than the plurality of its collective would suggest. In the narrative of the international media, the movement was clearly cast as the victim of an oppressive state.²⁰³ As images of police brutality and news of the accidental killing of protestors and innocent bystanders spread across the globe, the Turkish government, which until then had been mostly lauded for its incrementally progressive policies, saw itself quickly derided in the international media, and worse, condemned by the very international political elite who had once championed the so-called 'Turkish model'. The Gezi protests, on the other hand, were not about religious values or secularism. They were about very modern contentions: identity politics, development, economic inequality and social injustices. In the face of such overwhelming anti-government sentiment, the Turkish government found itself isolated and vilified.

The consequences of this, when thought through to their logical conclusion, are that, even as the protests grew in visibility in the international media, their continued momentum became dependent on a version of their movement as something it was not: a battle against Islamo-fascism or some other such simplification of their original grievance, that of the demolition of a public park. I realize that this may sound like a critique of the protestors.²⁰⁴ Yet this is not my intention. Rather, what I mean to suggest is that the same forces that gave rise to this transformation enhance the potential risk of a conspiratorial framing strategy, a rhetoric that sees in the transformative potential of Gezi evidence of nefarious meddling. After all, if it is credited with the capacity to liberate people's experience of themselves apropos Turkish society, this changes them, but not society as such. This creates fertile soil for the strategy of adversarial framing that I have here described as the

²⁰⁴ Furthermore, I realize that by not positing a means by which to counteract this dilemma, it may appear that I am wistful for a return to class-oriented politics of resistance rather than one revolving around identity politics. Again, this could not be further from the truth. I agree that such class-based 'traditional' protest movements are no longer representatives of the shifting political opportunity structures and lived experiences of youth in Turkey. This should not mean, however, that we must embrace unquestioningly the 'spirit' of Gezi as being an inherent victory. Instead, my hope is that in acknowledging certain problems the idea such a collective spirit poses, and how this relates to certain challenges of enragé-type protests, a more robust understanding of the conspiratorial underpinnings of the idea of momentum can be achieved; an understanding, which in turn might lead to the articulation of future resistance to the current status quo rather than a disillusionment with the merits of popular protest following the dissolution of the Gezi moment.

conspiracy frame, and which in turn contributes to the potency of the strongman's appeal.²⁰⁵

Exclusive focus on 'collectivity', that is, the mobilizing success or otherwise of the movement, leads to a situation in which the indeterminacy of such an empirical evaluation becomes projected instead onto the idea of a 'collective spirit', which in its nebulousness allows for the exploitation of its cause by conspiratorial framing strategies. Furthermore, the logic of the contingent necessity underlying this spirit has a distinct weakness. It allows the framing of accusations of conspiracy in response to its lack of a concrete structure, as well as the proto-spiritual ways in which the spirit is expressed as a transformative experience.²⁰⁶ This can prevent a coherent articulation of its original grievances, one that is cast in generalities or even redundancies rather than targeting specific grievances.

²⁰⁵ For another take on the strategic employment of adversarial framing by the AK Party (in which the author argues it has been unsuccessful), see Burak Bilgehan Özpek, 'Turkey Today: A Democracy Without Opposition', Turkey Analyst, 28 February 2017. Available at www.turkeyanalyst.org/publications/turkey-analyst-articles/item/577-turkey-today-a-democracy-without-opposition.html (accessed 26 May 2017).

²⁰⁶ David Selim Sayers, 'Gezi Spirit: The Possibility of an Impossibility', Roar Magazine, 8 January 2014. Available at <https://roarmag.org/essays/gezi-ottoman-turkish-nationalism/> (accessed 26 May 2017).

This is not to say that there is no merit to horizontal power structures, or for that matter the positing of (relatively) non-hierarchical power structures. Neither should the movement need to make any specific demands, even though this is often seen as justifying a violent state response because there was no possibility of resolution or dialogue with a single representative body). However, in terms of the embrace of the idea of a collective spirit, it becomes important to acknowledge that it cannot be simultaneously catalyst, mechanism and outcome. This constitutes of course a necessary paradox for the success of the movement. For without broadening its scope, the protest begun by demonstrators against the demolition of a park would, in all likelihood, not have received any attention whatsoever. Yet in so doing, it also opened itself to a much more uncertain determination of its collective cause and its goals. This has the following detrimental effect.

For now the protest movement falls prey to the same totalitarian logic of which it has already accused the State; by mythologizing its own ontological necessity even when its authority is based on contingency and despite evidence that it is not truly a representative entity, the protest fails to transcend the limitations demarcated by the State's response. That is to say, it can only sustain its spirit while in contestation. It cannot articulate a stand-alone identity. And while proponents of the idea of a Gezi spirit argue that its strength lies precisely in its capacity to

participate in a global protest against the neo-liberal state,²⁰⁷ this provokes precisely the most ludicrous and fantastical, that is, conspiratorial, responses, targeting the movement as Other to Turkish interests.²⁰⁸

As such, the concept of the spirit, while necessary for the mobilizing success of the movement, also opens a window for reactionary state framing. What ensues is that the very implication of the ‘spirit’ leads to a contrasting challenge by the government that it indeed still holds sway over a true majority of voters, a nationalist spirit it seeks to superimpose on the protests. At this point the conflict devolves into a test of numbers, rather than one of ideology.²⁰⁹ As soon as the driving force of

²⁰⁷ Efe Can Gurkan and Efe Peker, *Challenging Neoliberalism at Turkey’s Gezi Park: From Private Discontent to Collective Class Action* (New York, 2015).

²⁰⁸ Karakayali and Yaka, ‘The Spirit of Gezi’, p. 128.

²⁰⁹ Imagine, for example, what the story of David and Goliath would be like if David’s claim to strength were on the basis of being equal in strength or numbers to Goliath. Of course this would negate the symbolic power of the struggle, which is that of the underdog against an overwhelming force. And more to the point, the fact that David succeeds in slaying the giant adversary is precisely because of his relative inferiority, not in spite of it. The protest contestation is therefore not between equals. In turn, the premise on which the idea of momentum hinges is that David-and-Goliath moment, the emerging possibility of prevailing despite all evidence to the contrary. The problem, however, is that when this momentum takes place, that is, when the protests become a nationwide insurgency, a role reversal takes place. Suddenly, the government can invoke a so-called ‘silent majority’. David and Goliath effectively swap roles. Now the state casts itself as David, as the misrepresented yet righteous underdog, and the protest momentum becomes conspiratorial evidence of an existential threat to the state.

the movement shifts away from its radical challenge to instead base its challenge on the claim that it presents a more accurate representation of society, it loses part of what made its mobilization so effective in the first place.

In this reversal, we thus find ourselves at a paradoxical juncture. And a new problematic emerges. If the movement's 'success' relies on its collective mobilizing power to demonstrate its relevance outside institutional politics, how then can it maintain the underdog status required for its appeal in the first place? This was already an evident problem for the New Left and other youth movements of the 1960s, and the topic has provoked much debate since then.²¹⁰ But the question remains, how can a movement seek to become part of the status quo without losing its ontological necessity thereto; or, in turn, how can it remain outside the status quo once it starts to become the status quo?

Redeeming the Gezi Spirit

To begin answering this question, of how far the Gezi spirit can be 'redeemed' if it falls prey to the paradox of its own success (by becoming

²¹⁰ Hans Toch, *The Social Psychology of Social Movements* (Indianapolis, 1965).

estranged from its founding contentions), we must return to the key moment in which the movement effectively transforms from a single-issue protest to a mass movement. For while the momentum implied by the transformation from a small-scale protest to a nationwide resistance movement certainly merits a certain amount of legitimacy, perhaps even triumphalism, we must keep in mind that the idea of the Gezi spirit as underlying this success was not only an outcome, but also a condition for its emergence. At its heart, therefore, one should regard the Gezi spirit's reliance on repeated enunciation not only as a sign of its lack of corporeality, and hence of its weakness, but also as an indicator of both its emancipatory and conspiratorial potential. Indeed, if we are to add but one more antinomy then this would reasonably be one of emancipation/conspiracy. After all, the elite framing response to the spirit relies in equal measure on repetition and the incessant redistribution of adversarial frames, with the added element that it seeks to repress framing attempts that utter messages that offer a pluralist conceptualization of society.

So to the extent that the moment, or momentum, of the spirit can be considered successful, it is in its capacity to elicit a forceful state response, which it necessitates for the continued presence of its momentum, and the depiction of the protests in the international media as between a simplified binary of progressive versus repressive forces. What follows is that both the Gezi spirit and the strongman spirit

(evidenced by the forceful state response) become essentially more totalitarian in relationship to their own legitimacy, ontology and posited necessity? And in their relationship there comes to be in essence a somewhat conspiratorial intertwinement of the forces underlying their contestation. This, then, is the central problem of the Gezi spirit: that it can only exist, and continue to exist, by being juxtaposed with an increasingly repressive counter-image, that of the authoritarian state, embodied by the paranoid leader. Like the irresistible force paradox, in which an unstoppable force meets an immovable object, the idea of a Gezi spirit ultimately distances the protests from their original contentions, and contributes, however tragically, and indeed with a dark irony, to the constitution of a more authoritarian Turkey.

In sum, thinking of Gezi as either contributing to or deterring from today's repressive politics in Turkey, neglects the simple fact that such normative attributing of the movement's impact contributes to the very political paralysis being criticized. The solution to this dilemma, and our way out of what at first seems an irreconcilable logical snare, is to view Gezi through the lens of its own contradictions, that is to say, to unwind the Moebius loop mentioned earlier, so as to bring into focus the universal premise of the movement's appeal, which is still that of a more open, more democratic, more free, and most of all, more inclusive, Turkish society. This can be articulated in ways that do not rely on the anti-state narrative, nor on the idea of momentum, as the origin of their conception.

That is to say, for the Gezi movement to be truly 'successful' in the long term, it must also fade away, but leave in its wake spores of resistance, trace quantities of its original spirit, that can grow towards a more progressive politics, without succumbing to the paranoia and repression surrounding the idea of social protest in Turkey today.

This means that any attempt to theorize the Gezi spirit must lead first to a somewhat counter-intuitive outcome. The idea of the Gezi spirit becomes the most potent symbol of the movement's momentum, as much as its resistance drives its vulnerability to accusations of conspiracy. Naturally, this is not the movement's 'fault', nor, for that matter, is it strictly correlative with the relative harshness of the state response. But like a catch in a machine that prevents motion until released, or like the detent in a clock that regulates striking, the idea of a Gezi spirit is both what moves and stops the movement's progression. The spirit, therefore, becomes in a sense uncanny, both alive and distinctly elusive, bursting with the tension of its own possibility, but nevertheless ultimately repressed when expressed.

So finally, let us consider whether the duelling characteristics of force/resistance and momentum/stasis can be reconciled. Can there be a way for the Gezi spirit to move beyond the boundaries of its dualities, or, for that matter, can it gainfully employ them in a way that does not elicit an authoritarian logic of self-perpetuating necessity? Before we conclude the analysis of the Gezi spirit, we owe it to ourselves to consider its

particular strengths, and their emancipatory potential, rather than merely acknowledging its apparent weaknesses.

This can be difficult to determine, considering how the idea of the spirit appears to follow the law of diminishing returns. Once the protests reach a peak point of momentum, it is difficult, perhaps even impossible, for them to keep growing. On the other hand, if we consider the spirit merely as a contingent narrative moment based on an unidentifiable phalanx of contextual circumstance, this hardly warrants celebration either. The irony that ensues is a paradoxical one. The idea of momentum is both touted as the inexplicable formula for successful consolidation of the spirit as such, while its very seeming contingency simultaneously gives rise to the state response, which seeks to frame it as non-contingent in the paranoid sense.

In other words, there takes place what appears to be a dialectical relationship between the contingency of the spirit as reliant on successful momentum rather than actual grievances, and the subsequent acknowledgement of non-contingent structures precisely due to the inexplicability of this momentum. But this, of course, is the very same contradictory mechanism that lends the movement meaning. In sum, while the momentum obscures the original or individual grievances, the state response it elicits is one that targets this 'assumed' spirit but not the grievance with which the movement originated (the park), nor for that matter the grievance that led to momentum (the disproportionately

violent police response). In this sense, the spirit can essentially be considered 'expendable'. In other words, counter to the idea that the Gezi spirit remains the lasting legacy of the movement, the exact reverse is in fact the case. The spirit served to demonstrate the validity of the notion that Turkey had not yet fully democratized, and in light of the burning out of the Gezi spirit the original contention remains much more convincing. In the fallout of Gezi, the progressive credentials of the AK Party were shattered. To achieve this reveal, the idea of a Gezi spirit was therefore both vital and yet expendable: vital to the degree that it forms an overarching narrative of resistance, and expendable in that it could never last, yet in its melting away it revealed the long-term legitimacy of the original grievances underlying the protests – the destruction of public spaces, the erosion of civil liberties, and the social injustices undermining political participation (and hence representation) in Turkey.

So what at first seems to resemble a closed totalitarian logic, a momentum that justifies its own meaning by means of catalytic necessity, turns out to be a safety mechanism for the underlying grievances. By this I mean to say that both conceptualizations of the ontology of such resistance, whether contingent or necessary, come to rely on their own negation, and indeed their own perceived failure, to extend the grounds and the logic for their own justification. We have already seen how this creates what is essentially a toxic logic, a closed loop. That is to say, yes the spirit is flawed, but it is a deliberately flawed strategy. And by no

means can this spirit alone infuse a progressive politics or, for that matter, fuel lasting political change. But the spirit, in its rapid burning of oxygen, creates a momentary vacuum of meaning in which a more progressive politics can be articulated and, more importantly, revitalized.

What is key here is that this occurs because of the closed logic of the spirit, not despite it. If the totalitarian logic derives from the process of making contingent events seem necessary and, vice versa, making necessary and logical outcomes appear contingent, then this creates a similarly upended symbolic space, in which the visibility of the Gezi grievances, and their longstanding impact, can be maintained even beyond the confines of the protest Event itself. In sum, while the spirit of Gezi elicits a forceful collision, the ensuing political repression, the conspiratorial framing, and indeed even the coup attempt, elicit and ensure a long-term (international) awareness of the legitimacy of the Gezi movement's grievances vis-à-vis the status quo.

For more than anything the spirit as such only exists in that it enunciates, casts into reality, the multitude of voices as an echoing of its own 'realness', seemingly without reliance on external framing (although the international media attention such protests elicit would belie this). It is exactly a thing that relies on not being a thing. Again, this does not entail a positivist sociological phenomenon that can in some way be measured or even process-traced, but rather that in the transition from a protest event to a protest 'movement', a relationship takes shape between its

own necessity and the endurance of the contentions that brought about its successful mobilization in the first place.

Evidently this should not be interpreted as an attempt on my part to criticize the protests as being somehow irrelevant, nor to deny the genuineness of what to all intents and purposes was a historic manifestation of cross-identity solidarity and mobilization. Instead, what a careful analysis and critical reading of the idea of the Gezi spirit can tell us is that despite all the virtues of such a radical collective, the point is precisely that it was never meant to last; not due to the impossibility of its goals, but because the portended outcome of such a spirit, if materialized into political practice, or 'revolution' for that matter, could never truly reflect the nature of the Gezi contention in the first place. We must therefore allow ourselves to distinguish between the Gezi spirit and the Gezi contention. That is to say, the spirit can only ever be the vehicle for the expression of contention, and should not be allowed to become a manifest form of the underlying grievance as such.

This separation serves a vital purpose. That is to say, there is a distinct reason underlying the madness of committing to something as obtuse as the Gezi spirit. So yes, the Gezi spirit is flawed, and this results in its eventual erosion. But it is a deliberate, and necessary, limiting of its fulfilment. So too, does it prevent the movement from becoming a totalitarian system, a self-perpetuating logic. While the spirit may be the ghost in the machine, it is also the virus that secures its own inevitable

destruction. And it is precisely this balancing, this on-the-brink energy, of the Gezi protests that forms its greatest difference with both the state response and the coup.

For as much as the Gezi protests did not occur in a vacuum, they relied on previous networks of resistance, many of which have now entered the political mainstream. In his writing on protest, Peter Dews already suggested as much when he wrote that, ‘it is only if the distinction between contingency and necessity is preserved, if these categories are not blended in the unfolding of spirit, the destiny of being, or the play of *‘différance’* that political action directed towards the overcoming of those contingencies which take the form of senseless necessities even becomes a possibility’).²¹¹ In other words, the problem of the Gezi spirit can only be overcome exactly when it can be a finite moment, not a persistent ideology or long-term political project. That is, in the culmination of the Gezi protests into a nationwide movement, the spirit achieved its full success. The seeming erosion of said spirit can be considered part of this success.

This can be summed up as follows. While the Gezi spirit is coded to prevent its evolution into a totalitarian system by means of its own erosion, both the state response and the coup seek to achieve the authoritarianism belying such an outcome. The Gezi spirit intentionally

²¹¹ Peter Dews, *Logics of Disintegration: Post-Structuralist Thought and the Claims of Critical Theory* (London, 2007), p. 52.

limits the chances of reaching its logical conclusion, whereas the state response and the coup (while seemingly at odds) strive to reach this hegemonic point. There is a crucial reversal that occurs here; one that cuts to the heart of the very necessary impossibility of the Gezi spirit. It is a spirit meant to subside. Not to fail, but to allow for a brief enactment of its message, and then to fade away, leaving the origin of its meaning intact. The strongman spirit constitutes the exact opposite; a totalitarian spirit meant to persist, but to wilfully lose its message, to forgo its ontological justification, in order to persist (and appear even more apt) in the post-Gezi political landscape.

Conclusion

At this point, the reader may have become aware that we should be approaching a synthesis of sorts. That is to say, if we are to consider the Gezi spirit and the strongman spirit in the Hegelian fashion as forming a conflict between thesis and antithesis then we should reasonably expect that through their negation and realization they can achieve a sublation of sorts. Yet, isn't this instead rather a case of the 'negative dialectic' in the Adornian sense? That is to say, since we have been concerned here with conspiracy theory, the real focus has been on ascertaining the limits of knowledge in Turkish politics, rather than seeking a moment of unification in the positive sense. If you will, we can therefore negate Hegel's claim

that 'everything that is real is rational', by stating that in the paranoid society everything irrational becomes real, and in turn, that everything unreal becomes rational. Since there can be no positive reconciliation of the Gezi spirit and the strongman spirit – after all, they are interdependent in their negative agonisms –the outcome must be put in the negative.

In other words, throughout the course of these chapters, there has been a focus on the false, on the conspiratorial, on imaginary collectives, fantastical enemies and the forces these phantasmagorical images impose on the political. To this extent, I believe the idea of the strongman and the Gezi spirits, respectively, form part of the method, validity and scope of such an epistemology. Or, if you like, they demonstrate how the non-method, invalidity and intellectual confines of both the Gezi and strongman spirit function in a dialectical relationship to another.

With regard to the two 'spirits' discussed in the current chapter, the emancipatory collective momentum of the Gezi spirit and the contradictory rise of the uncanny strongman spirit are linked not in any unity principle, but, in their self-reinforcing necessity, contribute to their own rise and downfall. In the case of the strongman politician, I have characterized this as the death-birth of the leader figure. As for Gezi, I have tried to demonstrate how the movement's supposed failure was in fact a predetermined escape mechanism implicit in the enragé-style

protest, to liberate it from becoming entangled in the totalitarian logic that any synthesis of the two spirits would imply.

I have sought here to juxtapose these two notions of the spirit (of the strongman and of resistance) and, without attempting to reconcile their opposition, instead suggest how their confrontation posits a discovery for us regarding conspiracy not simply as an object of knowledge, but as indicative of a systemic process of thought itself. In this, we have seen how the idea of the conspiratorial society goes beyond both the figure of Erdoğan and the Gezi contention, or for that matter, even the more recent coup attempt. In other words, how conspiracy theory informs what one might call Turkey's 'democratic dilemma': the curious contrast between a coup seeking to restore democracy, a purge seeking to protect democracy, and a protest movement seeking to preserve democracy.²¹²

The fundamental flaw of the spirit, whether in the mode of Gezi or the strongman, is that it exists only to the extent that it can maintain a tension between the object of desire and the resistance it faces in achieving this goal. For the ultimate fulfilment of its desire, the

²¹² Kathy Gilsinan, 'Turkey's Putsch and the Democratic Dilemma', *The Atlantic*, 16 July 2016. Available at <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2016/07/turkey-putsch-Erdoğan/491630/> (accessed 26 May 2017). For a similar response to the coup, see Gareth H. Jenkins, 'Post-Putsch Narratives and Turkey's Curious Coup', *Turkey Analyst*, 22 July 2016. Available at <https://www.turkeyanalyst.org/publications/turkey-analyst-articles/item/562-post-putsch-narratives-and-turkeys-curious-coup.html> (accessed 26 May 2017).

culmination of its project and the vanquishing of its foe would equally render the spirit non-existent. That is to say, the Gezi spirit requires the idea of the conspiratorial strongman leader, just as much as the strongman spirit requires the idea of a conspiratorial protest collective. What makes this a relationship of conspiracy is therefore not that one or the other position is empirically valid or invalid, pure or impure, but that both are locked in their mutual impossibility.

One way to think of this is in terms of a chess game. In the game the king can only ever be checked. Yet apart from forming the illusive object of the game's premise, the king himself does not embody any discernible identity or characteristic as such. In this, he becomes 'the king' only by means of being the object of desire for the opponent, in other words the fulfilment of the act, which is at the same time the death of the king. In this, the fulfilment of the king's own desire, the 'being king' cannot be reached through his usurpation. Yet it exists only in the imminent possibility of his being taken by his opponent. The exacerbation of this dilemma fuels the game. It does not seek to resolve it. In other words, one finds that in recognizing his negative image, the subject can therefore achieve a self-essence. The missing link therefore, to which the metaphor of the chess game should draw our attention, is that this 'negative desire' holds true not simply for the essence of the resisting force, but by means of the very negation ultimately imbues the object with its own being. In this case it is the figure of the king. But in the case

of protest, or for that matter the coup, there exists a relationship of necessity between the symbolism of the strongman leader and the justification of the pursuit of resistance.

This, however, is where we encounter the limit of the chess game as metaphor. After all, in a game of chess, there are two supposedly equal opponents. In the case of resistance to the State, the momentum of said opposition relies precisely on a reversal of the dynamics of contention. Or, to put this somewhat less theoretically, the idea of resistance to the strongman leader is that of the underdog confronting the hegemonic opponent. It is a radical act of questioning the legitimacy of the leader, not a fair competition as such. In turn, the strongman leader must invoke conspiratorial enemies so as to frame himself as the true victim of this confrontation.

The contradictions this implies are evident. The strongman must portray the nation as weak and threatened precisely so as to come to its rescue. To put this in one final Hegelian premise, the leader takes on the form of the so-called 'couple', that is, the famed negated negation. In other words, the transformation occurs exactly when it takes place not only in itself, but for itself. From this it can then be derived that there exists the possibility of a strategic element or at least the possibility of a strengthening by means of such contestation. In the social movement literature, it is widely claimed that the clash between strongman leaders and protest movements forms a 'battle of wills', when in fact it seems

much more likely that it is a war between spirits, between the alternate ideas of the conspiratorial Other, between imaginary renditions of either the 'sultan' or 'the mob', and not any distinctly normative or positivist concept of the 'will' as a distinctly rational entity.

Lastly, what is so interesting about the spirit of Gezi is that it can be seen to fulfil dual roles, which is relatively meaningless at least in a normative sense, yet bursting with consequences with regard to the subject-object relationship implicit in its founding narrative, or what one might call the ontological foundation of the movement. On the one hand, the idea of the spirit guarantees the 'historicity' of the movement and its impact, and at the same time it prompts a state response that emphasizes its relative obliqueness with regard to concrete grievances as indicative of its conspiratorial leanings. In other words, the premise of the Gezi spirit is that out of necessity it reinforces its own existence in a closed loop, as it were, yet at the same time provides a vacuum that both nourishes it and engineers its own antagonism. The stronger the idea of the spirit resonates with(in) the founding myth of the Gezi movement, the easier it becomes for the State to challenge it as being inherently outside the nation's representative mandate; dismissing it as irrelevant, at best, and conspiratorial, at worst. It is important to begin with this duality of the Gezi spirit because it rests on being both the contingent episode of mass mobilization as well as a distinctly non-contingent grievance-oriented contestation. Yet in the indeterminacy between these two

conceptualizations of resistance, and the necessity by which they are intertwined, an ontological insecurity takes root that both strengthens and weakens – reinforces yet undermines – the object of resistance by destabilizing the subject in its relationship to it. So, in turn, this relationship must bring us back to the separation of the contingent versus the necessary – or at least the semblance of such a separation despite its interconnectivity – with the added nuance that the interpretation of the event as necessity requires again not a supposedly ‘contingent’ mobilization, but instead a momentum, an echoing of the spirit. What this means is that the idea of the spirit (an ‘effect’ in the modernist sense) becomes on the one hand detached from the actions and emotions from which it derives, while at the same time becoming linked in a temporal assumption of indeterminate ‘momentum’.

For now, this can be distilled into two conclusions: first, the notion that the resonance of momentum in the Gezi protests is both necessary yet detrimental to its emancipatory potential; and secondly, that the strongman leader can function as a personified form of the friend/enemy dynamic both contested and contrasted by popular resistance. As such, this chapter suggested that the contradictions implicit in these sets (friend/enemy; contingency/necessity; momentum/conspiracy) resonate in the figure of the strongman leader, not only mirroring the idea of the collective Gezi spirit, but also allowing him to manipulate the crisis to

strengthen and consolidate a more authoritarian and less democratic future for Turkish society.

In addition, I have argued that the dialectic of the strongman vis-à-vis resistance can best be understood in terms of two central premises underlying both the strongman spirit and the spirit of resistance. The first is that of the social movement collective as a genuine representative body precisely because of its perceived exteriority to the political status quo, and the second that of the 'leader figure', who as a strongman political persona seeks to embody the collective will of the nation and to counter-mobilize his own supporters as a signal of his continued strength. In other words, the idea of the strongman leader is crucial to the success of the protestors' momentum. Yet the seemingly conspiratorial element of momentum is equally crucial for the transformation from politician to strongman leader.

This, then, has been my attempt to posit a more theoretical analysis of conspiracy theory in Turkey. I realize that throughout the course of this thesis, I may have contributed to some degree to this confusion by withholding a straightforward definition of the term. But instead I have sought to take the epistemological route. That is to say, I have attempted to identify the dynamics and relations of what essentially forms an epistemology of conspiracy theory; a theory of knowledge that is, in essence, a theory of non-knowledge or an anti-theory of knowledge. In turn, it is my goal to have contributed towards an approximation of what

might some day lead to a more comprehensive theory of how conspiracy theory has altered the course of Turkish politics, and hence history, in such unprecedented ways.

Conclusion: Does Elite Framing of Conspiracy justify the definition of a 'Post-Truth' politics? Discussing a problematic terminology.

A fundamental puzzle underlies the study of conspiracy theory. How can we study something of which the defining characteristic rests upon the contestation whether or not it is true at all? In this thesis I have sought to get around this dilemma by forgoing the 'debunking' approach. I have not gathered data or evidence to either verify or deny the veracity of conspiracy theories, nor, for that matter, have I provided a comprehensive list of all the conspiratorial accusations appertaining to Gezi and the coup. Instead, by questioning the idea of 'truth' in political conspiracy theories, and therefore also the 'truthlikeness' of conspiracy theories as both interpretative mechanisms and political justifications, I sought to situate the underlying impossibility of gathering data on conspiracy theory as a source of knowledge production in its own right.

There are of course certain weaknesses that derive from the scope, method, and temporality of the work presented here. First, the thesis must limit itself to those conceptions of conspiracy theory that relate to the Gezi protests and the coup attempt. This is necessary yet also somewhat limiting. Secondly, the focus on conspiracy theory by its very nature does not facilitate simply answers. Nor for that matter, is it easily replicable in any empirical sense, although it could give rise to empirical

additions and perhaps even quantitative or qualitative elaborations on a theme. Finally, the temporal limitations of the thesis are such that they cannot take into account events that have as yet not occurred, and for this reason the outcomes are neither strictly descriptive nor prescriptive, but rather serve as an application to conspiracy theory of the dialectical principle that the real is rational to the extent that the struggle with unreal/irrational is a transitory development in which forces are shaped in struggle rather than existing as stand-alone dictums.

As a result, I believe that the critical analysis of conspiracy theory discourse may well reinforce the idea of a necessary retention of the positive within the negative. (This takes on the form of sublation (*Aufhebung*), or in Hegelese, the negation of the negation.)²¹³ Yet this 'positive' outcome must not necessarily be so in any normative sense, but rather exists as a positive entity in the sense that it begets the production of knowledge as a progression from the abstract to the concrete. A key insight is therefore that this process can equally occur as a ratification of seemingly 'unreal' ideas such as is the case in conspiracy theory. When this leads to the silencing of opposition, it has very real and negative impacts on Turkish democratic practice. The question therefore, is whether or not this process can be seen to warrant the idea of an analytically comprehensive conceptualization of 'post-truth', and if such a

²¹³ G.W.F. Hegel, *Science of Logic* (transl. A.V. Miller) (Amherst, 1998).

term can prove useful as an analytic concept? In my conclusion I would therefore like to synthesise the findings contained in this thesis, by briefly discussion whether or not they might constitute a so-called ‘post-truth’ politics.

When I began writing about conspiracy theory in Turkey the term post-truth had not yet been coined.²¹⁴ The idea that Turkish political rhetoric was inherently conspiratorial, at times truthful, at others not, and not really worth paying any particular attention to, was a relative truism. As an outsider, the conspiratorial and at times fantastical manifestations of Turkish political rhetoric fascinated me. I came to suspect that Turkish politicians enjoyed playing a game of what Richard Hofstadter had already diagnosed in the 1960s as ‘the paranoid style’ – a style which, given his object of study, he attributed to American, not Turkish, politics.²¹⁵ Simply put, such a politics warrants being called a ‘style’ precisely because it forms a consistent trait, an affectation of sorts, in which conspiratorial accusations, however absurd, are used to rouse populist support.

²¹⁴ For more recent texts on the topic, see: Matthew D’Ancona, *Post-Truth: The New War on Truth and How to Fight Back* (London, 2017). See also James Ball, *Post-Truth: How Bullshit Conquered the World* (London, 2017); Evan Davis, *Post-Truth: Why We have Reached Peak Bullshit and What We Can Do About It* (London, 2017); Ralph Keyes, *The Post-Truth Era: Dishonesty and Deception in Contemporary Life* (New York, 2004).

²¹⁵ Richard Hofstadter, *The Paranoid Style in American Politics* (new edn, New York, 2008).

Seen in this light, I began to understand how conspiracy theories in Turkey serve to systematically reinforce and mobilize longstanding grievances and imagined communities. As such, I would suggest that there is an urgent need to 're-frame' what the Turkish version of this paranoid style can tell us about conspiratorial politics, and in turn, what conspiratorial politics can tell us about Turkey. The spread of conspiracy theory to the political mainstream presents evident dangers to Turkish democracy, and should warrant at the very least a critical consideration, perhaps even re-evaluation, of the relationship between conspiracy theory and the idea of post-truth as both distinctly Turkish yet in keeping with a global movement towards a more conspiratorial politics.

The post-Gezi and post-coup politic struck me as a particularly well-suited case study by which to understand the rise of such a conspiratorial politics in Turkey, but with a twist. For the thesis has suggested that through the lens of conspiracy theory we might come to better understand how non-real ideas drive real political action. So rather than applying the established perspective of examining the theory of conspiracy theory, I sought to put together a more critical discussion of conspiracy theory. That is to say, what is the theoretical component that allows the conspiratorial to take on the attributes of the real? And in turn, how does this transformation beget real political decision-making?

My reasoning here has rested on the belief that a certain flirtation with the paranoid is at the very heart of the struggle between liberty and

equality; that is to say, at the core of what makes liberal democracy such a profoundly ambitious project is precisely its amenity to contestations of the production of knowledge and, hence, the questioning of political legitimacy. This struggle is also one between certainty and doubt, and is vital to our capacity to safeguard democracy as a process rather than a *fait accompli*. It is precisely this lack of certainty that imbues the democratic project with its emancipatory potential, and in turn requires of us as democratic citizens a certain vigilance. After all, to attempt to reconcile the tug of war between equality over freedom, and, vice versa, freedom over equality, while somehow guaranteeing both, requires a certain Sisyphean necessity. But the fruits of such labour are self-evident. Liberal democracy is never truly finished. And this is a good thing.

The politics of post-truth, however, seek to assert the kind of certainty that can only be achieved in a totalitarian system. So to begin with, one must keep in mind that while conspiracy theory as it occurs, let us say 'freely in the wild' in civil society, constitutes but part of a wider tradition of questioning the production of knowledge. But when, on the other hand, the State takes on conspiracy theory as its motivating force, its nexus of ideas, then a perversion occurs; a stifling of democracy in the pursuit of ever-changing enemies. For even in the successful eradication of all non-sanctioned views, the ultimate lie behind every such society is that it constitutes in and of itself a conspiracy. In societies such as Turkey, in which democratization is an ongoing process, yet lingering contentions,

social injustices and historical grievances remain prevalent, these threaten to provide fertile soil for autocratic opportunism and populist manipulation to take root.

There exists indeed, buried within the very experience of democracy, an ongoing negotiation of truth(s), which for the sake of its validity should never be fully reconciled. In other words, for Turkish democracy to flourish requires both challenging antagonist simplifications, while at the same time resisting the temptation to enforce a supposed empirical purity of one form of truth over another. In the mode of the paranoid style, however, politics exists to provide certainty, and does so by the pursuit of fictional enemies. It is this doubling of meaning which this thesis has referred to as a breakdown of meaning, and that has been here examined in more detail apropos conspiracy theory, the Gezi protest and the coup attempt.

Of course, as with any political position that sells its polemics as empirical reality, there exists a certain wilful ignorance as to the elusive relationship between truth and politics. A truly curious and deeply contradictory result of this is that the strongman leader and his supporters decry the effects of post-truth just as strongly as do his opponents, if not more so. This can take the form of rhetorical accusations or, as has occurred on multiple occasions, the imposition of temporary bans on social media or

even outright bans on reporting terror attacks or protests.²¹⁶ More direct measures to stem the flow of news, shrouded in claims of combating fake news, include mass firings, buying out or expelling media moguls, wiretapping and imprisonment.²¹⁷ In a recent example, Turkish prosecutors sought up to 43 years in prison for a journalist from the opposition newspaper *Cumhuriyet*. The charges include the targeting of the President through ‘asymmetric war methods’.²¹⁸ Regardless of the form it takes, a truthful media therefore becomes synonymous with the elimination of the idea of pluralism and a dismissal of agonistic versions of the truth. Post-truth is therefore nothing less than a pure manifestation of the contradictions of the possibility of a pure truth itself, and the ensuing desire to seek within itself the reasons for its own necessity, rather than looking outside.

In turn, one of the decisive mistakes in the reaction to post-truth is one that calls for more censorship of fake news and stronger hegemonic

²¹⁶ Berivan Orucoglu, ‘How President Erdoğan Mastered the Media: Turkey’s Once-Feisty Press has succumbed to an Artful Mix of Bribery, Muscle, and Ideology’, *Foreign Policy*, 12 August 2015. Available at <http://foreignpolicy.com/2015/08/12/how-president-erdoğan-mastered-the-media/> (accessed 23 May 2017).

²¹⁷ ‘Democracy in Crisis: Corruption, Media, and Power in Turkey’, Freedom House report, available at <https://freedomhouse.org/report/democracy-crisis-corruption-media-and-power-turkey/executive-summary#.VcuwdRNVhBc> (accessed 23 May 2017).

²¹⁸ Tuvan Gumrukcu and Humeysra Pamuk, ‘Turkish Prosecutors Accuse Newspaper of Asymmetric War on Erdoğan’, *Reuters*, 5 April 2017. Available at <https://www.usnews.com/news/world/articles/2017-04-05/turkish-prosecutors-accuse-newspaper-of-asymmetric-war-on-erdoğan> (accessed 23 May 2017).

control of free speech, in the erroneous belief that there exists a central truth that can be secured from above yet that remains somehow liberal rather than authoritarian. So while there exist presumably earnest efforts to tackle the proliferation of fake news in Turkey, the danger is that such attempts, at best, inadvertently come to resemble the authoritarian measures they seek to prevent, and in the worst case, actively fuel further repression.

As an example one might take a two-day event hosted by the German Embassy in Antalya, in which German and Turkish journalists engaged in workshops on such questions as ‘can the media violate Human Rights by spreading certain news’?²¹⁹ A worthwhile topic one might think, yet isn’t this but another manifestation of the fake news accusation – the idea that news should be ‘kept in check’? We must be wary that, even in our earnest desire to curb the spread of untruth in our media and politics, we do not sever the line between freedom of speech and censorship. Yet on the other hand, how do we establish sound ethical practice to both protect ourselves and deter the manifestations of post-truth, without simply contributing further to the force thereof?

So finally, how does the idea of post-truth correlate with that of conspiracy theory? After all, to those who busy themselves with the

²¹⁹ Yunus Paksoy, ‘Turkish, German Journalists Discuss Fake News, Ethics’, Daily Sabah, 10 May 2017. Available at <https://www.dailysabah.com/politics/2017/05/11/turkish-german-journalists-discuss-fake-news-ethics> (accessed 23 May 2017).

study of paranoid politics, or Turkish politics for that matter, it must seem evident that the idea of post-truth is not something new at all, but rather a newish-sounding way of describing a breakdown of the status quo already evident at the very least since the Gezi protests. Do I mean to say that the political elite in Turkey believes the conspiracy theories they readily invoke in their political rhetoric? Not necessarily. Conspiracy theory in Turkish politics is, however, hardly a red herring. It is no mere diversionary tactic. Instead, to briefly assume the conspiratorial inflection ourselves, let me put it this way: The thesis has sought to demonstrate that there is something more sinister going on here. Conspiracy theory might best be considered as a polarizing strategy, as a form of ‘managed democracy’, and as a tactic for consolidating executive powers and control of the judiciary. For while we may accept a certain flexibility in the so-called truths pandered by (Turkish) politicians, it seems that of late the untruths have become increasingly absurd, yet systematic, and invoked exactly when uncomfortable yet evident truths, are touted by the opposition, by journalists, academics, civil servants and so on. This thesis has sought to put some of this rhetoric into perspective, and to demonstrate the ways in which such conspiratorial rhetoric can influence both state response to (contingent) resistance, political decision-making, and perceived shifts in political legitimacy and participation.

To simply characterize the evident lack of truth in Turkish politics strikes me as a limiting view at best, and in the worst case perhaps even as a

form of intellectual dishonesty. It is no surprise that it is precisely the political strongman who makes the strongest appeal to curb fake news, the better to justify the wholesale repression of free speech.²²⁰ The net cast over such news, or forms of resistance, is almost always too wide, and within its tangles even ‘earnest’ liberal attempts to combat post-truth come to fulfil what is in essence an authoritarian impulse to control and insinuate even the opposition narrative.

As such, for those who keep up with Turkish politics, the term post-truth can be no more than a glitzy piece of nomenclature to describe a lesson already learnt long ago: that in a hegemonic system, the truth of any given matter is entirely secondary to the overarching whims of the strongman political project.²²¹ So while I share in the current fascination

²²⁰ The idea that the strongman is only as strong as his opposition therefore requires a slight alteration. For it is not the ‘strength’ of the opposition, but rather its imagined volatility and supposedly irrational yet hostile intentions, that allow the strongman to flex his muscles in the form of oppression. In the very resistance the strongman invokes, he finds his own strength. Although this point may at first seem self-evident, it plays an important role in the current line of reasoning in that it separates the ‘violent’ element from the ‘interpellation’ of ideology. The leader is not strong because he wields force. He is strong because he seeks out conflict in which to assert his dominance. In the dependency on outside agitators lies the root of the claimed necessity for him to wield repressive powers. Ultimately in this balance, one cannot exist without the other, and even if it did, it would lose its inherent justification, the necessity to exist. (The contradiction between the contingent and necessity will be explored in detail in Chapters 4 and 5.)

with the idea of post-truth, I remain highly doubtful of its merits as an analytic concept, at least as it is popularly invoked. For as long as one employs the concept of post-truth as a mere polemical figure of speech, one loses the capacity to integrate it into a wider body of critical and political thought. So why dedicate an entire thesis to the concept of conspiracy theory and post-truth? For one thing, despite its current limitations as a theoretical idea, I believe that the idea of post-truth is not just a titillating assumption, capturing our attention because it straddles the divide between likelihood and impossibility, but is also a timely and opportune one. In other words, it is exceedingly rare for what is essentially a philosophical problem, a puzzle of political thought, to capture the public imagination to such an astounding degree. And it has been interesting to see the notion of conspiracy theory and its impact on (Turkish) politics grow so rapidly over the three years in which I have worked on this thesis. There is an opportunity here to bring together both public awareness and critical considerations of the idea of truth in the political sphere. Secondly, if we can relate post-truth back to a rediscovery of the intellectual merits of a theory of conspiracy, then the term may in turn become more valid in the analytic sense.²²² So yes, it

²²¹ Ece Temelkuran, 'Truth is a Lost Game in Turkey: Don't Let the Same Thing Happen To You', Guardian, 15 December 2016. Available at <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/dec/15/truth-lost-game-turkey-europe-america-facts-values> (accessed 23 May 2017).

can be a useful and revealing lens through which to assess the crisis of Turkish democracy, but only if applied carefully through a theoretical analysis of conspiracy theory in, or as, political praxis. This thesis has sought to take some preliminary steps in this direction, and has brought together a variety of literatures and ideas that can bring about a more rigorous theorizing of the concept of post-truth.

One serious critique of the validity of post-truth as a concept remains to be addressed. It is currently the fashion to decry conspiratorial politics as a contemporary phenomenon, a deviation from the supposedly rational status quo that preceded it. But this conceals what, in my view, is nothing but a thinly veiled desire to establish what is essentially a form of censorship, an ellipsis-like desire for a return to a pre-post-truth era. And

²²² Clearly in this regard, much work remains to be done, and pathways to new opportunities are yet to be explored. Future research will no doubt continue to shape the parameters by which we have come to understand the intrusion of accusations of conspiracy into the process of contentious politics, (elite) framing, and state response. In turn, the challenge remains as to how one might criticize the Turkish government, and the strongman figure of Erdoğan, without falling prey to similarly conspiratorial language that relies all too heavily on a depiction of the State as being governed by a supposed ‘dictator’, ‘despot’ or one with the relatively positive or negative (depending one’s position) nickname of ‘Sultan’. Of course in so doing, one merely reinforces the strongman persona of the leader figure, which in turn exacerbates the conspiratorial mindset and the hyperbole of the paranoid style. On the other hand, the problem remains that many such accusations are urgent and need to be made, particularly as the Turkish government grows more oppressive and takes on more totalitarian visions of the state. The hope is, therefore, that in developing a better understanding of the conspiracy frame, one might also identify more apt means by which to voice opposition to this troubling course of events.

therein lies what appears to me to be a complete, and perhaps wilful, neglect of the totalitarian impulses such a desire entails. In Turkey, where it has become difficult at any given time to distinguish between sanctioned and non-sanctioned news outlets, and fake versus real news has come to be synonymous with whether the content thereof supports the government or not, the danger such a politics entails is already evident.

Simply 'curbing' fake news or disavowing post-truth as a politics of the far right is no solution to this dilemma. The problem is that post-truth is precisely a form of truth in that it contains within it the premise for its own justification, rather than allowing for any refutation as such. In other words, one cannot fight post-truth by seeking for a pure pre-post-truth impartiality. That would only trap us further in conspiratorial politics. Instead, I would argue that we may best be served by de-escalating the contentions surrounding post-truth not by ignoring it entirely, nor by embracing it, but instead by honing in on the idea of conspiracy theory, and what it can tell us about the kind of politics that may well nurture the breakdown of truth in politics.

To begin with, I would suggest that this requires of us a certain willingness to think of conspiracy theory in a more theoretical fashion, and to build upon and question some of its own 'truths'. These have been presented here as follows: first, the notion of conspiracy as being

inherently a language or delusion of political losers;²²³ secondly, the false assumption that conspiratorial rhetoric is a sinister and evasive belief, rather than a constitutive one, the so-called ‘philosophical debate on conspiracy’;²²⁴ thirdly, that conspiracy is used as a way to frame the inexplicable, the elusive and the paranoid in politics. Instead, the arguments contained in this thesis have suggested that we turn these truisms on their head and argue the exact opposite: first, that conspiracy is a language of (political) winners; secondly, that the untruth of conspiracy theory brings about very real forces; and thirdly, that conspiracy theory begets a very real system of prejudices, antagonisms and friend/enemy relationships, that serve rather than detract from the political system in Turkey today, in which the current government’s increasingly authoritarian politics form but part of a wider conspiratorial praxis.

Of course these three reversals are all related, and in many ways their presentation here might beget and require further elaboration so as not to seem merely polemical. Throughout the thesis I have sought to illustrate the contradictory dynamics of these arguments through what can best be understood in terms of a set of antinomies; and furthermore, that it is in the contradictions arising from these sets that the very real

²²³ Ted Goertzel, ‘Belief in Conspiracy Theories’, *Political Psychology* 4 (1994), pp. 731–42.

²²⁴ David Coady (ed.), *Conspiracy Theories: The Philosophical Debate* (Farnham, 2006).

forces of conspiratorial rhetoric can be brought to bear onto, through and as a result of the political process and the events of Gezi and the coup in Turkey today. Some of these have been the friend/enemy dynamic, the tension between contingency/necessity, between conspiracy theory/theory, truth/untruth, and the spirit of Gezi versus the strongman spirit. The topic of conspiracy theory, and the relative merits of the term post-truth, the (im)possibility of truth in Turkish politics, and the crisis of democracy in Turkey have provided the backdrop for the discussion of forces elicited by and through the contestation inherent in these sets.

Discussion of Findings: Revisiting case selection and assumptions

My research has led me to the following conclusions: (1) The state response to the Gezi protests signaled the emergence of a distinctive conspiracy frame in which differing forms of social mobilization and resistance were interpreted as constituting part of an international conspiracy to undermine the Turkish state. (2) In the time-frame between the Gezi protests and the coup, conspiratorial framing was employed to curtail and delegitimize political opposition, which in turn led to an increasing legitimizing of the grievances underlying the protest movement (3) The coup presented the emergence of a 'genuine' conspiracy, which was nonetheless deeply rooted in the elite framing of conspiracy. This led to a form of cognitive dissonance, in which the 'true' motives of the coup

plotters, and indeed their identity is still in doubt (4) The thesis suggests that the perpetuation of such frames of conspiracy have since come to embody a process of paranoid framing, in other words, a praxis of political paranoia, that both consolidate state power and threaten to undermine further the democratic gains made by Turkey over the past decades.

The thesis thus depended on an analysis of conspiracy that relied, perhaps paradoxically, but necessarily so, on the assumption that conspiracy and accusations thereof should not be considered an external force that shapes the political process, but instead must be read as a means by which politics is constructed from the inside out. I have sought to suggest that a conspiratorial politics is a means of manipulating a supposed 'imaginary revolutionary', that is, the emancipative potential of a protest or coup, but also the political legitimacy required to consolidate political power against (in some cases, fictional) enemies. It has also been my goal to demonstrate how between what might be understood as a negotiation of the contingent/necessity relationship between conspiratorial framing and resistance thereto, a post-truth system of meaning and political decision-making, takes shape that in turn reinforces such a conspiratorial politics, perhaps even a politics of 'post-truth'.

In other words, post-truth should neither be considered the catalyst of conspiracy theory, nor is it in reverse that conspiracy theory constitutes the a priori condition for post-truth. We would be much better suited to

think of the ‘post’ in post-truth as a particular affect of truth – or as Popper puts it, as the embedded verisimilitude of a given theory, which the notion of conspiracy theory, when strategically employed, can exploit and manipulate, and posit as a contesting truth, and hence, suggesting the possibility of an alternative system of truth.²²⁵ To take conspiracy theory more seriously is first to examine what exactly we mean by the word theory in conspiracy theory.²²⁶ The preceding chapters have sought to provide both a different mode of reading conspiracy theory that goes beyond the predominant trends in the popular literature on conspiracy – the so-called ‘debunking’ approach – as well as presenting an innovative angle on the idea of post-truth in Turkey.²²⁷

²²⁵ Karl Popper, *Conjectures and Refutations: The Growth of Scientific Knowledge* (London, 1963).

²²⁶ Pigden already famously disagreed with Popper by stating that ‘the belief that it is superstitious to posit conspiracies is itself a superstition.’ Here I intend, however, to go beyond even Pigden’s suggestion that we take conspiracy seriously, to posit that instead we take the theory in conspiracy more seriously. See Charles Pigden, ‘Popper Revisited, or What is Wrong with Conspiracy Theories?’, *Philosophy of the Social Sciences* 1 (1995), pp. 3–34.

²²⁷ David Aaronovitch, *How Conspiracy Theory Has Shaped Modern History* (London, 2010). See also Rob Brotherton, *Suspicious Minds: Why We Believe in Conspiracy Theories* (London, 2016); Francis Wheen, *How Mumbo-Jumbo Conquered the World: A Short History of Modern Delusions* (London, 2004); Chris Fleming, *Modern Conspiracy: A Short History of Paranoia* (London, 2014); David Coady, ‘Conspiracy Theories and Official Stories’, *International Journal of Applied Philosophy* 2 (2003), pp. 197–209.

Without seeking to equate the failed coup attempt and the Gezi protests, I have situated both within a critical consideration of the role that conspiracy theory has to play in navigating, interpreting and influencing both events and the state response they have given rise to. To put this in, say, the terms of a crime mystery, the failed coup attempt here provided the narrative catalyst (the murder), whereas the events of the Gezi protests and their outcomes are seen as the preceding contestations leading up to the cumulative event. Yet, as in the murder mystery, things are not as they seem. For one thing, I do not attempt to ‘solve’ the puzzle of the coup, inasmuch as I do not mean to assess the relative failure or success of the Gezi movement in any normative sense.

Secondly, in no way do I mean to suggest that there exists a straightforward causal relationship between the Gezi protests and the coup attempt. Instead, if one identifies both cases as interconnected, yet highly distinct Events, what becomes clear is that they both cannot be discussed, whether in writing or in spoken word, without assuming a nigh-on conspiratorial attitude. The central premise underlying the notion of conspiracy theory’s efficacy is the argument that the internal dynamics of the protest or coup contestation give rise to the context in which the conspiracy frame can be deemed viable as an elite-framing tactic. For now, let me stress that I do not and did not consider Gezi and the coup

attempt as comparable entities in any sociological, political or ideological sense. Rather, I have sought to demonstrate how both fit within the wider dialectics of what is, in essence, a politics of conspiracy theory, a political manifestation and exploitation of post-truth insecurities and uncertainties.

This prevalence of conspiracy theory's dissemination into the political mainstream in Turkey, and the way in which confabulations, accusations and confusion have all come together in a peculiar blending of the meaning and non-meaning of what might constitute a New Turkey, have resulted in deeply antagonistic and fantastical claims. Conspiracy theory has been described here as both catalyst and outcome, the rule as much as it is the exception to the rule. It is the supposed 'proof' of the reason behind paranoid politics as much as it is its contestation. Or, to employ a different imagery, conspiracy theory is both the 'tell' of Turkish politics, as much as it is the 'bluff'. In the antinomies of truth and lies, it takes on both creative and destructive roles.

As such, the exploration of conspiracy theory, in all its dynamism, its seductive powers, and its seeming power to shape the future of Turkish politics, should not simply be dismissed as a curiosity of the Turkish political experiment. Rather, I believe it warrants being placed centre stage, viewed not as a causal outcome of political upheaval, but as a systematic indicator of the contradictory powers underlying the events

themselves. Or, to put this more succinctly, the antinomies of conspiracy deserve to be unpacked, in order to demonstrate how they give rise to what somewhat facetiously has come to be referred to as a conspiratorial politics.

To argue such necessitates a novel conceptualization that frames accusations of conspiracy as a constitutive force rather than relying on the traditional notion of either ‘unearthing’ or ‘debunking’ conspiracy.²²⁸

²²⁸ In this light, what becomes clear is that the simple reproduction of conspiratorial frames is more than a historical or political or even purely academic curiosity, but rather a struggle by which a relation to the real is fulfilled and reproduced in its own paranoid negative image. It bears repeating that this observation on the true recurring mechanisms that drive the accusation of conspiracy must also imply again that the veracity of the claims themselves, i.e. the existence of conspiracy, can only ever be secondary to the primary importance of these relations of forces under which the accusation occurs and acts out its intended outcomes. Indeed, I would argue that the conspiracy itself has next to no purpose or relevance in the matter at hand, save its propensity for the theatrical, which in turn facilitates the colonization of both the imaginary revolutionary and the dream-space of politics, of a righteous leader and villainous opposition, of cathartic antagonism above consensual democracy. We should therefore move away from our fixation on verifying or seeking to rationalize the truth ‘behind’ conspiracy theory, to instead think in strategic terms of the possibility that what constitutes post-truth, and distinguishes it from conspiracy theory, is its deliberate strategic implementation to unsettle the parameters of truth and untruth. In that sense, the focus should move away from ‘diagnostic’ approaches to conspiracy theory, which in turn should lead us to avoid prognostic analyses regarding the supposed societal effects of Gezi or the coup. Indeed, many studies in the field, including more popular conceptions of what Hofstadter referred to as ‘the paranoid style’, seem excessively occupied with a desire to determine whether or not conspiratorial rhetoric is a sign of the relative health or decline of a given society.

The goal is not to rationalize supposedly fantastical claims, but instead to analyse how and why accusations of conspiracy become internalized in elite framing strategies, and how these can be seen as a response to shifts in political opportunity structures in contemporary Turkey. In other words, accusations of conspiracy do not, as it were, in and of themselves bring to light previously existing but hidden structures of opposition. Rather, elite accusations of conspiracy cast the accuser in the central subjective position, and hence reaffirm their dominant political authority. In so doing, the framing of conspiracy undergoes an ontological transition or shift away from acknowledging resistance, towards instead leaving the subject of the accusation a passive recipient of determination.

Certainly, the Gezi protests and the coup provide a highly visible and opportune target for accusations of conspiracy, yet this does not in and of itself explain or take into account the dynamics of resistance that mirror the conspiratorial frame, and provide it with a parameter for its most effective employment. When, for example, members of the Turkish political elite accuse protestors of being controlled by means of psychic powers (the same accusation arose after the failed military coup of 2016)

Instead of employing such a normative approach, the current method has allowed for a more nuanced and ultimately more valuable assessment of the structural processes that drive accusations of conspiracy as political language. The state response to the Gezi protests and the coup provides an interesting case study for a vivid and dramatic employment of the conspiratorial framing strategy, yet should also be considered indicative of the possibility of a wider trend of conspiratorial state response to social turmoil, and indeed as a possible theory-building opportunity for further study.

we cannot simply put this down to a slight of reason in the midst of turbulent times. Rather, the accusation becomes part of a wider struggle for what can be deemed an ‘imaginary revolutionary’; a narrative as it were, by which to decide not the interpretation of events, but a contestation over the authority to interpret them in the first place.

Conspiracy in this context should therefore not be about ‘debunking’ the obviously erratic and unsubstantiated nature of the claims. Instead, the dynamics and power structures that give rise to them, and under which they are uttered and cast into the public realm, merit genuine scrutiny.

In a sort of negative inversion of the Wittgenstenian truth process, the fear of post-truth is thus best considered as a form of latent nonsense, whereas conspiracy theory should be recognized as patent rather than latent nonsense. What I mean to say by this is that while conspiracy theory is usually treated at best with a smug hint of relativism, the current alarm surrounding post-truth elevates all political antagonism to a form of conspiracy theory. Both interpretations make a categorical error, which is to treat conspiracy theory as incapable of producing truth, and in turn, attributing to post-truth the undeserved centrality of it constituting a fully fledged, if alternate, truth system. The solution to this dilemma, I would suggest, is as follows: Let us take conspiracy theory more seriously, by beginning with the idea that conspiratorial politics entails as

much of a 'real' system of forces, as would a supposedly non-conspiratorial, 'pure' politics.

Recommendations for practice and comparison of findings to the literature

It cannot be stressed enough that the current fascination with normative or historicist accounts of Turkey's relative democratization or, on the other hand, authoritarianism is folded into the very conspiratorial dynamic this thesis describes. What I mean to say by this is that contrasting studies evaluating the 'demise'²²⁹ or 'rise'²³⁰ of Turkish democracy, while relevant in their own right, contribute towards a false binary of viewing Turkish politics as de facto progressive or regressive. In the above-referenced texts, both accounts are even written by the same author. This is not to say that they are not insightful and well-researched accounts, for evidently they are. But the danger of any normatively tinted account is that it becomes internalized in the idea that Turkey must be scrutinized either as a model of success, or a model of failure.²³¹

²²⁹ Soner Cagaptay, *The New Sultan: Erdoğan and the Crisis of Modern Turkey* (London, 2017).

²³⁰ Soner Cagaptay, *The Rise of Turkey: The Twenty-First Century's First Muslim Power* (Lincoln, NE, 2014).

²³¹ Furthermore, it becomes evident that this form of reasoning relies too heavily on singling out the figure of Erdoğan as the main culprit of the current political instability,

This does not mean that such analyses are invalid. Nevertheless I would suggest that one needs to take into careful consideration the extent to which they feed into the politics of post-truth in Turkey, where the relative rise or demise of the Turkish nation is seen as being in the subjective hands of experts and academics. One way to defuse this tension is to begin to think perhaps somewhat more critically about the impact of such normative interpretations of Turkey's politics. So a good way to begin to remedy this is to avoid normative, historicist, analyses of the coup, Turkish democracy or the Gezi protests, and instead – as I intend to do here – to think them, as it were, 'against' one another. In

rather than searching for more systemic contradictions and impossibilities. So while it may be tempting to depict the state of emergency and the referendum vote as being essentially an opportunity for voters to elect their own dictator, the truth is that the contradictory dynamics of the state of emergency as a paralysed society deserves to be acknowledged as part of a systemic dilemma of conspiratorial politics. To see Erdoğan simply as a Machiavellian despot, engineering chaos and manipulating the dissatisfaction therewith into personal gain, is to underestimate the long-term impossibility of the overtly optimistic expectations, and indeed impossibilities, of a Turkey that could continuously experience growth while simultaneously ramping up social tensions and limiting opportunities for political participation. In the cracks that emerge between the two extremes of globalized free-market style democratization and conservative populist isolationism, the tightrope that Erdoğan, and by extension the AK Party, has sought to walk, in and of itself gives rise to a quasi-conspiratorial belief in either the inherent success or demise of Turkish democracy. Any writing on Turkey that seeks to validate one or the other position is unlikely to remain relevant for long, nor, it would seem, can it remain particularly responsive to the ever-fluctuating contingencies of contemporary Turkish politics.

either case, the attempt to pinpoint whether the coup attempt should be interpreted as part of a downward or upward trajectory – either a new beginning or an end for Turkish democracy – has proven at best contradictory and ambiguous. At worst it has contributed further to paranoid suspicions of international plots against Turkey.

So what can we do to protect ourselves against this type of generalization, the temptation to either ‘celebrate’ Turkish democracy or to write it off entirely? First, let us consider how the coup attempt and Gezi fit within the same parameters of the conspiratorial framing strategy. There exists a noteworthy similarity between the state response to Gezi and the state response to the coup, even though the two events are clearly dramatically different in origin, execution and outcome. Secondly, it requires formulating a critique of conspiratorial politics that does not rest solely on indignation at the polarizing tenor of Erdoğan’s political rhetoric. Thirdly, we would do well to consider how the very idea of the parallel state in its uncanny suggestion of ever-evolving stasis comes to mirror the authoritarian dynamics of Turkey under the state of emergency; a situation in which everything changes, yet everything stays the same. In other words, there are alternatives to writing about Turkish politics in a normative manner. And these alternatives are equally –or, I would argue, even more – useful in aiding us in our pursuit of a greater understanding of the role conspiracy theory has come to play in Turkish

politics and whether or not this merits the description of an emergent conspiratorial politics.

If anything, one might well conclude that the politics of conspiracy is fuelled by this very mode of normative, and, in some cases, historicist analysis of Turkey's democratization. What I mean to say by this, is that both (a) the over-optimistic projections for Turkey's continued growth (in all areas, from economic to democratic, but mostly within the secular confines of a belief in Turkey's supposedly uniquely successful merger of secularism and religious conservatism' (also referred to as the 'Turkish paradox'))²³² in the international and domestic imagination, coupled with (b) a desire to believe in the AK Party's liberal credentials, – as well as the (c) subsequent clash with that other overarching myth, which is that of a neo-Ottoman strongman project, a blend of nationalism and religious identity with a generous sprinkling of nostalgia and ontological mythos, ensue from which the conspiratorial strategy derives its strength.

Decreasing political opportunity structures and growing economic inequality have confounded the expectation of perpetual growth and democratization in Turkey within the past decade. These contentions in turn led to popular manifestations of dissent, including Gezi, to which the State responded by fomenting further polarization. In the adversarial

²³² Michael M. Gunter and M. Hakan Yavuz, 'Turkish Paradox: Progressive Islamists versus Reactionary Secularists', *Critique: Critical Middle Eastern Studies* xvi/3 (2007), pp. 289–301.

framing that ensued, the possibility of armed resistance to this form of political paranoia was increased. The suspicion arises that, perhaps somewhat counter-intuitively, the ambiguous idea of a supposed 'New Turkey' undergoing a 'quiet revolution' towards democracy is in part to blame for the political turmoil we are seeing today.²³³

For there is a tragic irony to the way in which the failed coup, and the democratic atrophy that followed, is being interpreted along the lines of pessimist historicism. In such accounts the current crisis is but proof that Turkey was never a viably democratic ally in the first place; or for that matter, that secular Turks have invited the current resurgence of conservatism by having gone too far in breaking with religious traditions.²³⁴ In my estimation, both such accounts are fundamentally flawed. In this way, the coup became plausible, if not predictable, not simply as an exacerbation of the increasingly religious and authoritarian sympathies of the AK Party government, but as a result of the internalization of a conspiratorial expectation in Turkish politics, and by proxy, Turkish society. The increasingly critical attention devoted to Turkey by Western countries and their political leaders, contrasting

²³³ Chris Morris, *The New Turkey: The Quiet Revolution on the Edge of Europe* (London, 2006).

²³⁴ Timothy Waters, 'Coups have consequences: including making more room for Islam', *Los Angeles Times*, 24 July 2016. Available at www.latimes.com/opinion/op-ed/la-oe-waters-turkey-coup-islam-constitution-20160724-snap-story.html (accessed 22 May 2017).

sharply with the previous optimism regarding Turkish secular democracy, further heightened the stakes of such suspicions. Thinking of future avenues of research, one might also take into consideration the geopolitical dimensions of Turkey's Gezi and Coup developments.

As such, it seems to me that only within a critical analytic understanding of the structural ways in which conspiratorial politics arises can any steps towards resolving Turkey's crisis be realistically achieved. By now, the idea that Erdoğan resembles a proto-progressive harmonizer – let us keep in mind that this was originally how he was depicted in the West – now remains as a tragically ironic example of the dangers of such historicist jubilation. Seen in this light, one might also think of how Turkey was once considered a so-called 'global swing state', that is to say, as a strategic partner not merely in terms of the fight against terror, but as one with a willing populace, whose hearts could be made to beat faster for democracy and of course for the brand of free-market capitalism that has come to be sold in tandem. An older idea, and perhaps a more accurate one, is that of considering Turkey a 'tilt' state, leaning either one way or the other, but never fully committing to the subservience implied in meeting Western expectations which are seen as overly didactic and moralizing.²³⁵ In some ways, one might even say that the speed with

²³⁵ For a comprehensive analysis of the 'tilt' idea, see Svante E. Cornell, 'Understanding Turkey's Tilt', *The Journal of International Security Affairs* 27. Available at www.securityaffairs.org/issues/number-27/understanding-turkeys-tilt (accessed 28 May 2017).

which Turkey was able to develop, both in democratic and economic terms, may have contributed towards conspiratorial narratives, rather than made it immune to them. To this extent, conspiracy theory in Turkey might not be seen as indicative of democratic shortcomings, but instead counter-intuitively be regarded as a sign of its rapid development. There is a theory-building potential here that would seemingly demand further exploration as events continue to unfold.

So I would suggest that the central dilemma of conspiratorial framing, is that it inherently creates a form of stasis, a political limbo that constitutes neither an open society nor a truly closed one. In the blending of the old and the new, and the suspension of the experience of time in the state of emergency, the country finds itself in an uncanny state of being frozen in perpetual turmoil, or, in other words, paralysed by its own momentum. And not just a motion as such, but in fact what might well be deemed a form of 'un-motion', a state of stasis which can only fulfil its paradoxical requirements within the perverted golden mean of the pendulum's rotation, which seems a more realistic characteristic of the swing state's lapidary motion. For even in the 'swing' analogy, what becomes lost is that the axis of the movement must always remain a fixed point; or, inasmuch, we might well conclude, as it is the swing motion itself that requires the axis to remain fixed in place, stationary to the extent that it enables an objective point of return on which to hook the force of the swing's momentum.

The grim truth of the contemporary obsession with either Turkey's 'progression' as a beacon of democracy in a troubled region, or alternatively the presupposed inevitability of its regression, is therefore not merely that both accounts adopt a historicist view of Turkey's supposedly inevitable progress, but that in so doing they perpetuate a linear mode of reasoning in which Turkey can only be conceived of as going either forward or backwards, depending on a relative and normative expectation of what such a movement might entail or how it can be measured. The concept of conspiracy theory, and the imagery it invokes, is therefore deeply vulnerable to totalitarian conceptions of an ordered and centrally controlled vision of society.

First, it denies the possibility of conceptualizing Turkey's destiny as anything more than a subjective object of historicist musing, which in turn allows a reactionary Turkish nationalism to accuse its international allies of secretly meddling with its domestic politics. Secondly, it subsequently fails to see that the system itself can remain rigid exactly because of this fixation on the back-and-forth motion, and the ensuing obsession with determining a 'turning point' for Turkish democracy. And thirdly – and to me this is the most important feature – such analyses and interpretations, commentaries and think-tank reports become blind to the fact that nationalist factions, and populist leaders in Turkey, will relentlessly exploit this spotlight on Turkey's 'future' as a way to argue for increased isolationism, and as part of the paranoid stance towards foreign meddling.

And that in this perpetual rediscovery of the back and forth, no true movement as such occurs, allowing increasingly totalitarian figures to emerge within the vacuum of such a distorting political experience.

In essence the historicist expectations of Turkey's democratization come to mirror that of the belief in the parallel state. For while the democratic 'promise' of Turkey goes unfulfilled it remains essentially in stasis – at least to the extent that one continues to hold on to the rather useless idea of Turkish politics as consisting of a binary forward or backward movement. Perhaps this would seem counter-intuitive, as progressing and regressing also implies a necessary beneficial, even consensual, stasis of checks and balances. It would be a form of stability, rather a rigidity enforced through perpetual turmoil. What becomes implicit therefore, in the realization that the idea of Turkish democratization currently orbits around a moving axis, is that even such genuinely historic events as the failed coup attempt, or Gezi for that matter, occur in a self-contained contestation of framing strategies, yet above which looms the conspiratorial expectation of a sui generis democratic or totalitarian Turkey. To remedy this, we must look not at Turkey as either progressing or regressing, but instead consider the extent to which this very binary expectation has contributed towards the rise of conspiracy theory in the political sphere.

Recommendations for future research, and methodological considerations

In an ideal world this thesis would be able to benefit, so to speak, from hindsight. During the process of writing it, many political changes and shifts have occurred and continue to occur. While time does not stand still, certainly in the past years it has felt as if time has accelerated in Turkey, and processes that might have occurred over decades have at times been shaped in a matter of days. Therefore, at the mercy of rapid developments, the thesis had to address events even as they developed, even if it could be difficult to interpret situations that only with the progression of time may be fully clarified. An example of this would be the coup attempt. Due to limited resources, evidence and research regarding its occurrence and outcome the thesis must acknowledge the speculative nature of any interpretations thereof. Fortunately, due to the focus on conspiracy theory, the research did not rely too heavily on the verification or 'debunking' of any account thereof as accurate or inaccurate, but could instead locate the forces of the contesting narratives within their relationship to each other.

At first glance the study may appear to be overly critical of the current government in Turkey. However, to ensure that there is no bias in the analysis of conspiracy theory, I on many occasions highlight the extent to which the proliferation of conspiracy theory also forms part of the

protest-narrative, in that it simplifies the political process into a for-or-against position. The thesis applies its findings and theoretical approach to all forms of political conspiracy theory, not simply that promulgated by state actors. I am also aware that I have not presented any data in a quantitative sense. However, through a critical analysis of the driving forces, paradoxes and contradictions of conspiracy theory, I presented a series of theoretical conclusions that bear upon the problems of what has been referred to as ‘the paradox of political representation’, ‘managed democracy’ or, as the thesis proposes, ‘conspiratorial praxis’, the ‘conspiracy frame’ and ‘post-truth’ politics. The thesis has related these topics to elite framing, social movement theory, political thought, and critical approaches to knowledge production and conspiracy theory.

The thesis assumes that conspiracy theory as elite framing can also function in a dialectical sense. This posits that the thesis and antithesis of truth versus falsehood in the political sphere creates a mutually reinforcing relationship. The methodology can therefore best be described as a counter-intuitive approach to the ‘reason’ underlying seemingly unreasonable political justifications: in sum, the study of conspiracy theory as the sum and unity of opposites, as an internally contradictory force that gives rise to a fruitful struggle, an unfolding of the relations of truth versus untruth in light of perceived political legitimacy. The thesis posits that the best way to circumvent the impossibility of ‘verifying’

conspiratorial beliefs in contemporary Turkey is to instead study the separate parts, the unity of which is framed as a struggle for political legitimacy, a consolidation of agency and power that can only be achieved through negation of the other position.

I do not think that a different method would necessarily be considered better, at least not unless one takes into account subjective expectations of the nature of the desired outcomes. Conspiracy theory by its very nature is very difficult to quantify, and even strictly qualitative assessments of it quickly become descriptive and mired in normative assessments as to their relative truth content.

The thesis did not take include in-depth analysis of the Turkish media and the ways in which conspiracy theories are popularized in popular interpretations and news reports, both sympathetic and critical to the ruling party. Future research could include a more detailed analysis of the ways in which conspiracy theory becomes codified through repetition both online and through various forms of traditional and modern media. The topic is slowly gaining in momentum, as conspiracy theory becomes a more serious object of study. Most recently, a study appeared on conspiratorial framing of Gezi online, and at conferences I have spoken

with other academics who are currently in the process of collecting data on conspiracy theory in Turkey.²³⁶

Looking back, I would have liked to engage more directly with Turkish scholars, activists, and perhaps even politicians through interviews, fieldwork or collaborative research. Due to the relatively taboo nature of conspiracy theory as a legitimate political subject, I thought it would prove difficult to conduct interviews on the matter. It would have been fascinating to include more firsthand accounts of the experience of conspiracy theory in Turkey and the relative impact it has had on Turkish politics according to Turks themselves. I realize that as an American writing about Turkey I must always be considered somewhat of an outsider, and at risk of misinterpreting cultural intricacies and socio-political nuances that may have been more evident to Turkish researchers or interviewees.

It is also good to note that alternatives to my approach exist, all of which may have merit in their own right. For one, there is a growing interest in transnational studies of contentious politics, especially as social

²³⁶ Türkay Salim Nefes, 'The impacts of the Turkish government's conspiratorial framing of the Gezi Park protests', *Social Movement Studies* (2017), pp. 1-13. Also: Kristin Guiler at the University of Texas is currently researching the impact of conspiracy theory on Turkish social media users. Some of her writing on conspiracy was featured in the *Washington Post*: Kristin Fabbe and Kim Guiler, 'Why there are so many conspiracy theories about the Turkish coup', *Washington Post* July 19 (2016).

movements increasingly identify themselves globally. In turn, a more detailed historical or anthropological study of conspiracy theory in Turkey would certainly warrant scholarly attention. Finally, as mentioned above, if one were to implement a more interview-driven approach, this might allow for a more accurate method of process tracing that could help verify or perhaps contradict some of the findings contained in this thesis.²³⁷

It would no doubt also prove worthwhile to pursue a transnational case study. For example, one might choose to conduct a study into the response to the 2013 protests in Brazil, the so-called 'Free Fare Movement'. The comparison would be especially interesting because of the strongly divergent state response. However, in both the Turkish and Brazilian cases, conspiracy theory has come to play a central role in the continuing contentions following the outbreak of protest four years ago. It would furthermore be interesting to put together a broader study of conspiracy theory in developing countries, or, on the other hand, to contrast the findings on Turkey with the recent surge of so-called 'post-truth' politics in the West, most notably the United States and Great Britain.

While it is difficult to say with certainty whether the current study presents the best possible research design, I believe that the outcome of

²³⁷ James Mahoney, 'The logic of process tracing tests in the social sciences', *Sociological Methods & Research* 41.4 (2012), pp. 570-597.

the research outweigh any shortcomings that might have been addressed by a different methodology. While my research sample, to the extent that there is one, may appear large, it is only so as to emphasize the prevalence and high frequency, indeed the impact, of conspiracy theory as part of the political decision-making and framing process in Turkish politics.

In sum, I stand by my choice to implement a critical and dialectical reading of conspiracy theory in Turkey, while reserving judgement as to the possibility of further and alternative research approaches to the topic, which I hope might take my own approach into consideration as possible inspiration.

My findings can be generalized to the extent that they indicate wider trends with regard to the rise of conspiratorial framing in contemporary political rhetoric. While my study does not suggest that this is a distinctly new phenomenon, nor for that matter that conspiracy theory alone is to 'blame' for the increasingly contentious divides that mark Turkish politics today, it does lay the groundwork for a critical consideration of the structural ways in which narratives of conspiracy theory can be used to justify political repression and so-called 'purges'.

To cope with known problems in the field, I began by identifying what appear to be some of the most pressing problems and puzzles relating to the study of conspiracy theory. This has led me to deviate from a positivist approach that may have revolved around ‘debunking’ or ratifying conspiracy theories, or otherwise normatively evaluating those who subscribe to conspiratorial beliefs.

While the study cannot claim to have fully ‘solved’ the problem of conspiracy theory in Turkish politics, it is nevertheless my contention that a significant contribution has been made towards what might be considered a more critical approach to the dilemma and puzzle of conspiratorial politics in Turkey.

The research did not pose any ethical problems. However, regarding the contentious and indeed contested nature of the political events described in the thesis, I have sought throughout to present what to me appears to be an unbiased view of both the constructive and destructive forces of conspiracy theory and their political outcomes, while avoiding to the best of my abilities any impulse to show bias towards either the opposition or the ruling party in Turkey. Nevertheless, the findings, and perhaps one might even say the structure of my research, suggest a critique of the current mode of politics in Turkey, and hence produces what to some might seem to be overly critical views and conclusions regarding the state

of Turkish democracy today. While this was not my goal, and I believe I have done what I can to eliminate any accusation of bias, I nonetheless understand that the topic of my thesis may be exposed to such criticism.

Personal Reflections and Conclusion

In hindsight, it appears to me that there exists an unwarranted and indeed somewhat Orientalist expectation regarding the inevitability of conspiratorial politics in Turkey. As a result of undertaking my research I instead have come to believe that the structural forces underlying conspiracy theory are much more global, and can readily be traced in other cases around the globe.

During the three years in which I put together the doctoral thesis, my views on conspiracy theory in Turkey changed, but only to the extent that I began to appreciate and understand the extent to which conspiratorial narratives form a systemic mode of political rhetoric designed to cement and consolidate existing power structures and to reignite existing social contentions. In turn, I began to understand that the ways in which this process occurs is not necessarily unique to Turkey and may well be identified in other cases, most notably in what have come to be referred to as so-called 'managed democracies'.

On a general level, the most interesting thing to come out of my thesis was the way in which the deterioration of democratic principles, and indeed the rise of Turkish authoritarianism under the Erdoğan regime, became a more or less commonly accepted media narrative in non-Turkish and particularly Western countries. When I began my research there was a much more optimistic consensus regarding Turkey's democratic development, an optimism which increasingly has given way to alarm at Turkey's rapid undoing of its democratization and civil progress.

I have already put together a proposal for a subsequent study into the global impact of 'conspiratorial politics', and intend to implement my findings on Turkey, and the ideas contained within the thesis, for a broader comparative study of the relative merits, or lack thereof, of the idea of a conspiratorial politics beyond Turkey.

Finally, if the true antidote to conspiratorial politics is not to take seriously the demand for a licensed form of empirical truth, but to instead re-evaluate how conspiracy theory comes to inform the political in Turkey, then there is clearly much work to be done. And if there is something humbling in such a realization, then perhaps it is that the experience of post-truth can provide us with a foundation upon which to build a more shockproof democracy, and hopefully, a wiser one as well.

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