



## «ΤΙ ΜΑΣ ΚΡΥΒΟΥΝ;» ΔΙΑΛΟΓΟΙ ΓΙΑ ΤΗ ΣΥΝΩΜΟΣΙΟΛΟΓΙΑ

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ΚΑΤΕΡΙΝΑ ΧΑΤΖΗΚΙΔΗ  
[UNIVERSITÄT TÜBINGEN]

ΟΙ ΘΕΩΡΙΕΣ ΣΥΝΩΜΟΣΙΑΣ  
ΩΣ ΑΝΤΙΚΕΙΜΕΝΟ ΕΡΕΥΝΑΣ  
ΤΩΝ ΚΟΙΝΩΝΙΚΩΝ ΚΑΙ  
ΑΝΘΡΩΠΙΣΤΙΚΩΝ  
ΕΠΙΣΤΗΜΩΝ

10 ΑΠΡΙΛΙΟΥ / 19:00 / ONLINE

ΣΥΝΤΟΝΙΣΤΗΣ: ΔΗΜΗΤΡΗΣ ΤΣΙΡΙΜΠΑΣ [ΑΠΘ]

ΣΥΖΗΤΗΤΗΣ: ΓΡΗΓΟΡΗΣ ΜΑΡΚΟΥ [ΠΑΜΑΚ]



*"What Are They Hiding From Us?": Dialogues on Conspiracism: 2nd Seminar (10/04/2025)*

**“Conspiracy Theories as a Research Object in the Social Sciences and Humanities”**

Speaker: Katerina Chatzikidi (Postdoctoral Researcher in the ERC PACT: Populism and Conspiracy Theory program at the University of Tübingen)

Discussant: Grigoris Markou (Post-doctoral Researcher at the Department of Balkan, Slavic and Oriental Studies, University of Macedonia)

Moderator: Dimitris Tsirimpas (PhD Candidate, School of Political Science, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki)

NEWSLETTER

Dear readers,

This newsletter includes a summary of the presentation that took place at the second seminar, key points from the ensuing discussion, information on the next scheduled event, an introduction to the members of the group, as well as ways to stay informed about future activities.

Acknowledging from the outset the widespread public interest in conspiracy theory discourse—particularly in the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic—the presentation began by highlighting the paradox between the social acceptance/popularity of conspiracy theories and the stigma attached to them.

Transitioning into the core of the presentation, Katerina Chatzikidi provided a thorough and rich overview of the academic and research-based treatment of the phenomenon in its historical context. She began with Karl Popper’s early critical reference to conspiracy theories as antithetical to scientific research. The talk then traced how conspiracy discourse, initially viewed as dangerous and stigmatized, evolved—particularly through the lens of the Frankfurt School—toward interpretations involving psychopathology. Special attention was given to Richard Hofstadter's contribution to the negative framing of conspiracy theories, especially their association with paranoia.

A significant shift occurred in the 1940s through the work of Lowenthal and Guterman, who redirected attention from individual pathology to broader social analysis. This marked a departure from the dominant view, suggesting that conspiracy discourse deserved scholarly study.



However, as shown in the work of Katharina Thalmann, the stigmatization of conspiracy theorists as both paranoid and unscientific persisted. By the 1950s, the term “conspiracy theory” had become a pejorative shorthand. Four decades later, as public interest in the phenomenon declined, academic focus moved toward the situational expression of such theories. Hofstadter’s legacy began to be questioned, and conspiracies started being seen as ironic commentaries on dominant truths, raising Foucault-inspired questions about the interplay of knowledge and power. This ushered in deeper layers of analysis from the 1990s onward.

Toward the end of her presentation, Chatzikidi raised parallel themes concerning the interaction between conspiracy discourse and the social/human sciences—particularly the Western (often U.S.-centric) orientation of existing research, which contrasts with global realities. Contemporary approaches now consider how conspiracy theories intersect with populist rhetoric or how they are instrumentalized online for various ends. While current debates—especially post-Trump’s first election—often present the phenomenon as novel, historical references to previous American presidents and even British PM Winston Churchill showed that what is truly new is not the existence of conspiratorial discourse itself but its stigmatization.

In her proposals for deepening the academic understanding of conspiracy theories, Chatzikidi emphasized the value of social anthropology and ethnography as ideal methodologies for exploring under-researched cases, referencing her own fieldwork in Brazil.

In the brief commentary that followed, discussant Grigoris Markou highlighted the similarities between how academia has treated conspiracy theories and populism—both of which were deeply shaped by Hofstadter’s framing. He pointed to a shift in evaluating conspiracy theories, influenced either by the real-world validation of some claims or by a subject’s experiential relationship with them. He stressed the need for research to not only examine content but also the function of conspiracy discourse, its potential connection to anti-systemic sentiment, and the value of comparative analysis to reveal continuities and discontinuities across cultural contexts.

During the open discussion with attendees, key topics included:

- The concept of belief in conspiracy theories and its implications
- The anti-conspiracy narrative, including institutionally supported counter-discourses that may become politically instrumentalized



- The use of conspiracy rhetoric in political communication to delegitimize opposing viewpoints
- The association between conspiracy theories and the far-right, despite the latter not being inherently ideological
- Similarities and differences in how conspiracy discourse manifests in Greece and Brazil
- The relationship between conspiracy theories and critical epistemologies
- How conspiracy theory and society influence each other
- The role of epistemic pluralism in fostering such theories
- Strategies for managing conspiracy discourse in daily life, especially in light of individual belief intensity

In summary, the second seminar approached the phenomenon of conspiracy theories through a scientific-analytical lens that brought out crucial dimensions for better understanding it. Special emphasis was placed on the role of social anthropology as a valuable path to explore the topic further.

The next scheduled seminar will take place online on Thursday, May 8, 2025, at 19:00, featuring Theodoros Rakopoulos (University of Oslo), speaking on “The ‘Other Theory’: Conspiracy Theories as Our Familiar Stranger”.

Thank you sincerely for your time and participation!

Stay tuned for more updates from the seminar series!

Sincerely,

The Organizing Team

Team Members:

- Leonidas Karakatsanis, Scientific Supervisor, Member of POLIS LAB, Assistant Professor, Department of Balkan, Slavic and Oriental Studies, University of Macedonia
- Grigoris Markou, General Coordinator, Post-doctoral Researcher, Department of Balkan, Slavic and Oriental Studies, University of Macedonia



- Georgia Rina, Post-doctoral Researcher, Department of Balkan, Slavic and Oriental Studies, University of Macedonia
- Katerina Ppseniskof, PhD Candidate, School of Political Sciences, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki
- Dimitris Tsirimpas, PhD Candidate, School of Political Sciences, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki
- Konstantina Kastoriadou, Alumna, Department of Balkan, Slavic and Oriental Studies, University of Macedonia

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The seminar is available on the POLIS Lab's YouTube channel [here](#).

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