CONCEPTUALIZING AND UNDERSTANDING THE CONTEMPORARY
POPULARITY OF CONSPIRACY THEORIES:
RE-THINKING KARL POPPER

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ABSTRACT

CONCEPTUALIZING AND UNDERSTANDING THE CONTEMPORARY POPULARITY OF CONSPIRACY THEORIES: RE-THINKING KARL POPPER

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This thesis attempts to understand and conceptualize the contemporary popularity of conspiracy theories. While doing this, conspiracy theories are approached as symptoms of current society. Moreover, the issue of what peculiar characteristics of contemporary society are responsible from conspiracy theories has been discussed. Heretofore, the concept of conspiracy theory is defined and its dangerous traits such as, being anti-scientific knowledge types and their ability to be used by fundamentalist ideologies, have been elaborated. In this regard, the success of conspiracy theories is associated with a crisis of modern ideals of society. In this context, Karl Popper's "Open Society" ideal and his scientific methodology was updated and stressed upon to widen the discussion on conspiracy theories with the reason that Popperian logic offer crucial solutions about widespread conspiracy theories.

Lastly, and in parallel to Popper's deductive logic, the arguments about the reasons of conspiracy theories are tested within the context of two different discussions. First, a discussion on Turkish cultural transformation after 1980s was made in order to understand whether the symptoms which were held responsible from popularity of conspiracy theories are applicable and observable in the Turkish case or not. As a

second part, the analysis of a book *Efendi*, which is a popular conspiracy theory in Turkey will be discussed. In consequence, conspiracy theories and conspirational thinking are presented as important and dangerous symptoms of current society, whose reasons should be understood and conceptualized for the sake of peace and democracy.

Key Words: Conspiracy Theories, Globalization, Karl Popper, Turkey, Efendi.

ÖZ

KOMPLO TEORİLERİNİN GÜNCEL YAYGINLIĞINI ANLAMAK VE KAVRAMSALLAŞTIRMAK: KARL POPPER'İ YENİDEN DÜŞÜNMEK

Türkay Nefes

Yüksek Lisans, Siyaset Bilimi ve Kamu Yönetimi Bölümü

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Bu tez komplo teorilerinin güncel yaygınlığını anlamak ve kavramsallaştırmak amacıyla yazılmıştır. Bu bağlamda komplo teorilerine günümüz toplumsal yapısının birer semptomu olarak yaklaşılmış ve güncel toplumun hangi özelliklerinin komplo düşüncesini yaygınlaştırdığını anlamaya çalışılmıştır. İlaveten, tezde komplo teorileri tanımlanmış ve bu teorilerin bilim karşıtı bilgi kaynakları olmaları ve köktenci ideolojilerin kullanımına uygunlukları gibi tehlikeli özelliklerine dikkat çekilmiştir. Bu bağlamda, komplo teorileri modern toplum idealleriyle bir zıtlık içinde ele alınmış ve bu teorilerin bir modernlik kriziyle alakalı olduğu iddia edilmiştir. Bu çerçevede, Karl Popper'in "Açık Toplum" ideali ve bilimsel metodolojisi komplo mentalitesi ile ilgili önemli ipuçlarına ve çözümlere işaret ettiği için, tanımlanan kriz durumuna öneri getirebilmek amacıyla tartışılmıştır.

Son olarak tezde, Popper'in kullandığı tümdengelim yöntemine uygun olarak, komplo teorileriyle ilgili argümanlar iki ayrı tartışma ile sınanmıştır. Öncelikle, Türkiye'nin 1980 sonrası kültürel dönüşümünde komplo teorilerinin yaygınlığından sorumlu tutulan özellikler ve nedenleri belirtilmiştir. Buradaki amaç Türkiye özelinde komplo teorileri hakkında sunulan tezin uygunluğunu veya geçerliliğini sınamaktır. Ardından, guncel bir komplo teorisi olan Efendi kitabi incelenmistir. Sonuç olarak, komplo teorileri ve komplo mentalitesi günümüz toplumsal yapısında

demokrasi ve barışın önündeki engeller olarak sosyal bilimlerce anlaşılması ve tanımlanması gereken kavramlar olarak ortaya konulmuştur.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Komplo Teorileri, Küreselleşme, Karl Popper, Türkiye, Efendi.

For İlyas and Hayriye Özçelik

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Chmliewski (1999: 170) stated that "In 1989 we all became liberals. And history has ended. Or so it seemed then." After the fall of the eastern bloc, some theoreticians like Fukuyama (1992) argued an end for the history, implying that humanity has found its ultimate ideological system. That view was relieving in the sense that democracy would be the dominant force and bring peace to the human kind. What we have afterwards on the contrary is deeply marked with violent ethnic and religious clashes, which is more similar to the picture described in the *Clash of Civilizations* by Huntington (1996).

This current conjuncture of the world manifests a dual structure as mentioned in Barber's (1996) *McWorld vs. Jihad*. There he claimed that, one side of this duality is represented by prosperous, more democratic and consumer oriented Western society. The other part, in contrast, is deeply marked with underdevelopment and fundamentalism. In this context, Barber compares and contrasts the problems within these two opposite sides, and finally concludes that neither of them is an ideal democratic option.

On the one hand, McWorld is oriented to individualism, wild capitalism and enormous consumption where class inequalities have reached to a peak. On the other hand, the remaining world seems to be more and more shaped by primitive or fundamentalist ideologies and their intolerance. It should also be added that, this apparently new binary opposition is not geographically bounded. For instance, poverty and fundamentalist ideologies are also remarkably visible in the developed parts of the world.

In a similar line of thought, in *The Reinvention of Politics* (1997), Ulrich Beck stressed that even though contemporary societies had an important potential for achieving equality and democracy, they were also vulnerable to opposite possibilities such as terror, neo-fascism and the like. As such, the contemporary condition of the world is one of a lack of the desired democratic level. In other words, while the new world order promises a stagnant ideology which freezes the cultural history to a constant happy end with neo-liberal politics, today's political arena is filled with clashing ideologies, paranoia, fear and feeling of panic which heighten the possibility of future conflicts, instability and tension.

Conspiracy theories in this context became one of the most popular ideological means used by both sides as described by Barber. For example, the U.S.A has declared a war on Iraq with the belief that Iraqi government was hiding nuclear weapons. After the end of the war, no nuclear weapons have been found in Iraq and that information was deemed to be a conspiracy. On the other side, people having fundamentalist and anti-American feelings, believed that in Gulf Wars Bush and his government were trying to accomplish their secret Evangelic plans.

Other than these two opposite examples, there are plenty of conspiracies spread in many diversified fields, be it political or not. Most of these theories function as a tool for blaming an imagined enemy for their evil plans and justifying the possible violence against them. In this sense, conspiracy theories might be termed as a narrative style of dangerous beliefs and violence about the "others". Therefore, it could be argued that conspirative way of thinking is one of the important means for the distorted communication between different cultures and identities, as well as being a symptom of the contemporary global hatred.

Besides being a crucial indicator and/or symptom of current politics and culture, conspiracy theories are also very popular phenomena. For example, Turkey being geopolitically a country of "in-betweens" (West and East, Islam and Christianity) has been affected by the global flow of the conspiracy theories. Currently, from football to politics, the widespread conspiracy theories in all aspects of life could be

observed. Important enough, conspirative way of thinking has become a popular phenomenon through popular cultural products like the television series *Kurtlar Vadisi - The Valley of Wolves*. In addition to being an important symptom of the era, conspiracy theories are at the same time a not so much discussed topic in social sciences in Turkey.

Under the light of those points mentioned above, this thesis presents conspiracy theories as an important symptom of the problems of contemporary society and politics. Therefore, one of the major motivations behind this thesis is to understand and contextualize conspiracy theories as threats to the democratic and open perspectives on the society.

As a general hypothesis, I argue that the popularity of conspiracy theories today is a result of the contemporary transformations on global level. For example, the transformation of the nation-state structure, pluralization of the identities in public space and increasing level of consumerism could be counted as some outcomes of contemporary transformation. Taking that into consideration, this study intends to concentrate on the underlying reasons of the current popularity of conspiracy theories. The aim is to answer such questions like: Why have conspiracy theories become widespread? What is the relationship between the conspiracy theories and the outcomes of contemporary neo-liberal transformation? Could we argue conspiracy theories as one of the distorted means of communication? How Popper could offer an alternative epistemological position to this picture?

As one of the central aims in writing this thesis is to understand the context in which conspiracy theories became popular, the relevance of the current *Postmodern Condition* (Lyotard, 1984) to the issue will be elaborated. To achieve this aim, this thesis will concentrate upon the contemporary discussions on public space, individuation, decreasing power of nation-states, the demise of meta-narratives, and multiculturalism as much as they are capable of exemplifying the reasons behind the common use of conspiracy theories.

In that vein, the possible relationships between conspirative way of thinking and the decentralizing and individualizing affects of the neo-liberal capitalism will be discussed. The theoretical perspective of this study supposes that countries such as Turkey might very likely to be vulnerable for conspirative way of thinking, since they are to a great extent experiencing the negative effects of the neo-liberal transformation. In this sense, it could be argued that the negative and alienating effects of globalization creates a new/post-modern style of resistance, which has strong affinities with neo-fascism, fundamentalism and the similar narratives of hatred about the "others". Thus, conspiracy theories, as befitting theoretical tools for those resistances, are important indicators. Therefore, understanding conspiracy theories would help to grasp major mottos and motivations of the essentialist ideologies, cultural and religious clashes as threats to democracy and freedom today.

While conceptualizing conspirational thinking as a potential threat to democracy and open society, Karl Popper has become an important figure for this thesis. Karl Popper's concerns about the politics of his time, dictatorship and democracy as well as his parallel approach to the scientific methodology seem to be quite relevant to the discussions on the threats of conspirative way of thinking to democracy. Henceforth, he could be situated as a key figure in conceptualizing the conspiracy theories and conspirative way of thinking. Thus, his scientific and political approach, as much as they are applicable to the issue of conspiracy theories, will be updated and discussed to conceptualize and to analyze those theories. In other words, this study attempts to approach and discuss the problem by emphasizing Popper's analysis, as his reflections on science and politics seem to provide an alternative ground on which contemporary discussions of conspiracy theories could be built.

Parallel to the deductive logic of Karl Popper, the major hypotheses of this thesis are going to be tested in three distinct discussions. At first the characteristics of contemporary society or globalization, which are outlined as underlying reasons of the popularity of conspiracy theories, will be tested in Turkish case. In other words, a discussion about the Turkish cultural transformation during the 1980s will be

made in order to see and test whether the universal characteristics of neo-liberal transformation are deducible for Turkey. For that reason, the peculiarities that are previously held responsible from conspirational thinking will be shortly searched in Turkish transformation during the 1980s. While doing this, this thesis will be aiding from Polanyi's theory too.

Secondly, this work intends to focus on one of the very well known conspiracy theories in contemporary Turkey. It will take Soner Yalçın's *Efendi: Beyaz Türklerin Büyük Sırrı – The Master: Big Secret of White Turks* (2004) into consideration. This book is among one of the most controversial conspiracy theories in contemporary Turkey. Therefore, analyzing it would be a very fruitful event in understanding conspiracy today in Turkey.

Thirdly, a survey is conducted for understanding the relationship between the level of belief in conspiracy theories and the personal feeling of security and anomie (this survey, however, does not constitute a part of the text, but is included as an appendix). A similar kind of research has been conducted in U.S.A by Ted Goertzel (1994). The aim of adopting this survey to Turkish case is to further test hypotheses. In the survey, the questions aim to figure out the relations between conspirative way of thinking and feeling of security and anomie, which will be mentioned as some of the underlying reasons of conspiracy theories. Here the purpose is to understand whether Turkish experience of the neo-liberal re-structuring would justify the main reasons that are supposed to be underlying the popularity of conspiracy theories. A copy of the survey is also attached as an appendix.

As to the general plan of the thesis, there will be three chapters and a conclusion following this introduction. In the first chapter, the general characteristics of conspiracy theories are going to be discussed. Special focus will be given to their relationships with the fundamentalist ideologies and the threats of conspirational thinking to democracy. While emphasizing upon this issue, I will resemble the ontological foundations of conspirative way of thinking to astrological thinking, in the way Adorno has conceptualized. In his work (1994), Adorno mentioned how

astrological thinking has close affinities with conservative ideologies like fascism. Besides, the popular conspiracy theories throughout the world and their shared characteristics will be outlined. As the main subject of this thesis focuses on the contemporary popularity of those theories, a historical analysis of the subject will not be given. Additionally, the discussion between Basham (2003) and Keeley (1999; 2003) will also be focused, as their arguments mainly outline for and against views to those theories. The overall aim in the first chapter is to discuss the main features of conspiracy theories, their deficits and the dangers.

In the second chapter, the analysis begins with describing the major political and cultural changes brought by the so-called globalization movement. The particular emphasis will be upon describing the subjects such as, de-centralization/de-nationalization (Featherstone, 1995; Bauman, 1999; Touraine, 2003), individualization – the fall of the public man (Beck, 1992; Sennett, 1992; Bauman, 2001), the demise of the meta-narratives, transition from the production oriented to the consumption oriented society. After this discussion, in parallel to the main argument, this thesis will continue to search and find out the possible relationships between these major changes and the commonness of conspiracy theories. Later, Popper's parallel ideas on *Open Society* (1966) and sciences will be introduced to further evaluate and conceptualize where those theories stand and what sort of obstacles they present to the democratic society.

In the third chapter there are two different parts. In the first part, the appropriateness of the general arguments on the prevalence of conspiracy theories will be tested in the Turkish case. While granting the peculiarities of the Turkish case, the chief intention is to show how Turkey is affected by the global flows of neo-liberalism, and to what extent these flows permeate conspirational thinking. In the second part of the chapter, there is the analysis of a book, *Efendi*, which involves a conspiracy theory in Turkey will be discussed. This book, while providing a chance to test my hypothesis about the prevalence of conspiracy theories, was also beneficial in understanding some parameters of conspirational thinking in Turkey. It, therefore, intends to test the hypothesis within the limits of this work.

In the conclusion part, I elaborate the main results of the discussions and the tests made in the previous chapters. In other words, the significance of conspiracy theories, its consequences and how social sciences should approach to the issue are going to be briefly discussed.

CHAPTER II

INTRODUCING CONSPIRACY THEORIES

2.1 Introduction

The growing importance of conspiracy theories has been attracting many scholars' attention throughout the world. Spark, as one of them, stated the popularity and importance of conspiracy theories today as:

> In July 1997 the supplement to the Oxford English Dictionary included the term 'conspiracy theory' for the first time. This was a recognition that in recent years, conspiracy has become increasingly popular as an explanation for unfolding events, most overtly in the United States. Whether it be widely held beliefs about the Kennedy Assassination, a government cover-up of extra-terrestrial contact, claims made by Patriot militia groups about a 'New World Order' and an imminent United Nations takeover, African-American suspicions of a deliberate program to flood the ghetto with drugs, the popularity of The X-Files or the speculations found in the National Enquirer or on the Internet, all point to conspiracy as a discourse which is now fully part of the public realm, and a popular cultural manifestation which is symptomatic of contemporary concerns" (Spark, 2000).

In parallel, the increasing importance and relevance of the issue to the contemporary societies was also mentioned as the following:

> …it should be apparent that we think a 'study of a real society' must include a study of conspiracy culture, and all its associated 'fringe' beliefs as a paradoxical but central feature of today's social surface" (Bell and Bennion-Nixon, 2001: 147).

Following the same line of thought, firstly the conspiracy theories should be defined and investigated in depth. In that sense, this chapter will attempt to introduce, define and discuss the general characteristics of conspiracy theories. To achieve this aim, main methodological properties of those theories and their implications will be

investigated. Lastly, Adorno's (1994) discussion on the functions of astrology will be brought forward and its resemblance with the contemporary functions of conspiracy theories will be scrutinized. This discussion is attached as an appendix. While doing this, the issue of how fundamentalist ideologies or deterministic approaches might benefit from the closed narratives of conspiracy theories will be presented by showing the ways through which conspirational thinking is affiliated with fundamentalist and totalitarian ideologies.

2.2 Main Characteristics of Conspiracy Theories

2.2.1 What is a Conspiracy Theory?

At the simplest level of articulation, conspiracy theories seem to be theories, which explain important events by conspiracies. This aspect makes the concept of conspiracy theories as almost an impossible task to be fully conceptualized, because conspiring is a very widespread social phenomenon. In this sense, the subject seems to be far wider than one, which can be theorized by sciences.

However, conspiracy theories are not mere theories constituting conspirative way of thinking. There is an important distinction between the word or act to conspire and conspiracy theory. Therefore, at first they will be defined separately for emphasizing the nuances between these concepts.

Let's start with the meaning of conspiracy:

> Conspiracy, in common usage, is the act of working in secret to obtain some goal, usually understood with negative connotations. Etymologically, the term comes from Latin *con-* 'with, together', and *spirare* to breathe and in contemporary usage it is a situation where two or more people agree to perform an illegal or immoral act. Legally, a conspiracy is an agreement between two or more parties on a definite plan to achieve an unlawful end or to achieve a lawful end by unlawful means (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Conspiracy).

This definition gives a literal but an incomplete definition of the term. The conspiracy has always been a part in daily life and one could witness conspiracies even in a relationship among three people. In parallel while preparing this thesis the author has often faced such questions as: "Conspiracies always happen, people lie so why do you think conspirative way of thinking is worthless or false?"

The daily interpersonal conspiracies, of course, are not very relevant to conspiracy theories, since these reflect an ideological standpoint and a perspective based upon hatred, exclusion and xenophobia. In other words, conspiracy theories reflect a choice or style of living but conspiracies are mere un-ethical acts of people, which do not necessarily reveal their life style, belief systems or ideological standpoints.

An answer to the question of the difference between conspiracy and conspiracy theory and a definition of what conspiracy theory is could be summarized as follows:

> That [a conspiracy theory] claims an event or series of events is the result of secret manipulations by two or more individuals or an organization, rather than the result of a single perpetrator or natural occurrence. Conspiracy theories often defy an official or dominant understanding of events, and proponents sometimes substitute zeal for logic. Colloquially, a conspiracy theory is any non-mainstream theory about current or historical events, with the connotation that theory is unfounded, outlandish, or irrational or in some way unworthy of serious consideration. In this sense, the term is sometimes used to refer to events with which no association to an actual 'conspiracy' in the legal sense (two or more persons plotting and one overt act related to the plot) is claimed. In this sense "conspiracy theory" is often presented by its detractors as simply an allegation of clandestine action, based on little or no solid evidence. Thus the expression 'conspiracy theory' is often used by opponents of such theories as a term of derision for an allegation that they consider unproven, unlikely, or false (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Conspiracy_theory).

After emphasizing the important distinction between the act of conspiracy and conspiracy theories, let's look at some definitions of the term conspiracy theory. Keely defines a conspiracy theory as:

> …a proposed explanation of some historical event (or events) in terms of the significant causal agency of a relatively small group of persons – the conspirators- acting in secret (Keeley, 1999: 116).

In parallel, Nelson (2003: 499) describes conspiracy theories as:

> …[striving] to expose the shadowy bosses who communicate behind the scenes to pull the world's strings. They premise that paranoia is unappreciated prophecy: We have secret enemies, and 'they' have been scheming (with real success) to get us.

On the other hand the Internet web site Sourcewatch, provides a more detailed explanation:

> A conspiracy theory is an allegation or conjecture in which historical or current events are explained as the results of the actions of a powerful, secretive individual, clique or organization. In general, conspiracy theories propose that such conspirators have been involved in a plan or series of actions — anything from manipulating governments, economies, or the legal system, to hiding important information of cultural or scientific significance — and have successfully suppressed most every trace of the plan or their involvement in its implementation. In the most highly developed conspiracy theories, it is argued that a very powerful shadow organization is secretly influencing the course of history. Organizations often believed to have manipulated history include the Jesuits, the Freemasons, and Bilderbergers (http://www.sourcewatch.org/wiki.phtml?title=Conspiracy_theory).

In parallel, Basham (2003: 91) claims that:

> A 'conspiracy theory' is an explanation of important events that appeals to the intentional deception and manipulation of those involved in it, affected by, or witnessing these events. These deceptions/manipulations involve multiple, cooperating players.

McArthur (1995) states that conspiracy theories:

> By the widest definition… encompass any secret plot by two or more people to reach their end… it implies a belief held by sizable number of people that there are influential and malevolent groups seeking more power for themselves and/or harm to others.

To sum up those definitions, it could be claimed that conspiracy theories, which take conspiracy plots as the major motto of human history, are deterministic ideological narratives pre-supposing an *a priori* hidden mechanism behind important events. Hence, while conspiring corresponds to widespread human social activity conspiracy theories are ideological approaches. Thus they offer not only the stories

or narratives but also a belief system and a specific cognitive tool for comprehending the world.

Moreover, creating and/or writing conspiracy theories are at the same time a process of de-coding the reality. For that respect, conspiracy theories might be resembled to understand the world from a police or detective perspective, as there are always hidden structures that need to be decoded by conspiracy theoreticians. These aspects will be dwelt in detail in the methodological discussions.

2.2.2 Subjects of Conspiracy Theories

The subjects of conspiracy theories cover a massive field of events. They mostly involve some crucial events, which are not clarified yet but speculated much about. Those events are often not justly clarified by official explanations in public mind. In that sense, conspiracy theories are usually constructed upon a suspicion in the society. Therefore, conspiracy theories are always about the "others" or "unknown/unusual" parts of the society.

Secret groups and societies consist one part of this suspected and not-so much known sides of the society:

> These societies [in conspiracy theories] are always interested in more power and use subtle and hidden means to obtain it. For example, they recruit members in key positions of power, not necessarily in open or public view. (www.faqs.org, 2-3)

Fear and horror created about Masonry, Illuminati, Zionism and even United Nations can be included to conspiracy theories about unknown groups.

Moreover, assassinations or even some deaths of celebrities are popular concepts of conspiracy theories. The main question asked is who benefits from the death of that celebrity? In that scheme, celebrities or important people in the society are not dying accidentally. Some important examples to this category are; Mahatma Gandhi, Pope John Paul I, Petra Kelly, George Patton, John F. Kennedy, Robert F. Kennedy,

Abraham Lincoln, Malcolm X, Martin Luther King Jr., Enrico Mattei, Lee Harvey Oswald, Olaf Palme, Salvador Allende, John Lennon, Hale Boggs, Yitzhak Rabin, Elvis Presley, Jim Morrison, Princess Diana, Marilyn Monroe, Bob Marley, Peter Tosh, Kurt Cobain. The celebrity deaths and assassinations, like secret groups and societies, also share the characteristic of not being justly clarified (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Conspiracy_theory).

One of the other types of conspiracy theories could be mentioned as the suppressed inventions or hidden discoveries. In those theories some kind of new innovation or discovery is hidden from the general public and/or from other governments. We could count conspiracies about alternative medicine, intelligence agencies, UFOs, AIDS/HIV, cancer, free-energy, mind control, Area 51 in this kind. Important historical epochs are also rich in terms creating conspiracy theories such as the World War I and II, Cold War, Nazism, and 1929 Great Depression.

Other than these, the stories or myths about the "invisible others" could also be mentioned to be a case in the most of the nation-state structures. The ideology of nationalism in order to make the distinctions bolder from the other nationalities, usually create myths about foreign people. This sort of prejudices, although harmful in itself, is effective in creating a cohesive nationhood. We can give several examples from Turkish political history to that kind: The conspiracies with regard to Soviets plans of invading Istanbul, communist spies, about the religious and ethnic minorities such as Armenians and Kurds. The tension about the great dangers waiting at the door is an important official source of conspiracy theories. This point will also be dwelt more in the methodology of conspiracy theories section.

To sum up, it could be argued that, conspiracy theories tend to explain non-clarified but crucial events taking place in the society. In this sense, their explanations attract the attention of the public, so when important people unexpectedly die, or assassinated or even when an important economic crisis occurs, the conspiracy theories as alternative sources of explanation tend to flourish. Conspiracy theories

supply for the demand for more information about such events and owe their popularity much to this aspect;

those events that are most important are hardest to understand, because they attract the greatest attention from myth makers and charlatans (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Conspiracy_theory).

2.2.3   How Conspiracy Theories Work?

It is suggested that (www.faqs.org), there is a typical pyramid structure in conspiracy theories. In this structure, the knowledge is dispersed very hierarchically. People at the top know everything and the knowledge/power decreases all the way through the bottom.

> Members on the bottom are pawns and dupes, who can be manipulated through their beliefs and vices. The tendency of members to fight among each other is useful to their controllers as it keeps them focused on a narrow view of reality, precluding the discovery that they are pawns. "Dupes" outside of the group are people who can be tricked into following the group's agenda because of their ignorance or belief system (www.faqs.org).

The other groups consist of double agents or agent provocateurs and middlemen. The agent provocateurs are secret agents who infiltrate to the government and take important positions in order to create distractions and diversions. This provocateur figure has always been used in the nationalist narratives to point an existence of an outsider enemy to the nation-state. The middlemen, as their name gives it away, are people who neither belongs to the upper nor the lower classes of the society.

The elites in this picture do only care about resuming their powerful positions and therefore represent the evil power. In this sense, they constitute a binary opposition with the ordinary innocent people, who are fooled by the lies of the upper classes. This fooling often occurs with the control of media means by powerful people:

> Authors sometimes refer to this class as the 'sheeple' for their timidity. Convincing this class of its inability to effect any change is another key ploy required. Toward the ends of herding the 'sheeple', the media must be controlled using various means. Stories that are critical or expose anything the Elite is interested in need to be snuffed out or muffled with

smokescreens. The earlier players such as 'pawns, dupes, double-agents, agent provocateurs' etc. are ideally involved in part in the media (www.faqs.org).

As the quotation above indicates, conspiracy theories' approach to the society involves a hierarchical view of the society, which is controlled by the upper strata. Hence, they are dangerous stories, which are quite likely to create enmity or hatred among different strata of the society. Additionally, the conceptualization of conspiracy theories define people strictly in terms their power relations. As a result, it contributes to a hostile, hierarchical and paranoid environment, where people only act for their own good.

In this regard, the idea of equal, democratic and progressive society directed towards common goals is diminished in conspiracy narratives. The working of conspiracies is in a way an actualization/realization of the documentary narratives about the wildlife. Big one eats the smaller, and the exceptions are not welcome!

2.2.4   The Psychology of Conspiracy Theories

The psychological investigation of conspiracy theories could be divided into two different types of analyses. Firstly an analysis of the human weaknesses as mentioned by those theories and secondly an analysis of human psychological characteristics which lead people to believe in conspiracy theories. As such, it is intended to show how the state ideology might be effective in the psychological mechanisms of its citizens. The issue of what roles the state ideology has in people's cognitive mapping and similar subjects would be discussed to better understand the macro-level political effects on conspirative way of thinking.

Beginning with the psychological weaknesses, a hierarchical structure could be seen here too. In conspiracy theories, similar to those mentioned above, three kinds of personalities are available. There are the rulers or dangerous others, middlemen, dupes. In that picture, the conspirators or the rulers tend to be the main actors and active agents of those stories. On the other hand, common people or dupes/pawns

who believe in conspiracies are playing the role of the innocent believer. In this respect:

> Conspirators are motivated to control those below them by their ego, greed, fear, vice, and megalomania [and] they can be readily manipulated by their higher controllers through their mistaken but rigid belief systems. Pawns and Dupes are subject to conspiracies because of their psychological weaknesses as well.... They are naive and gullible and do not seek to question the world as they perceive it. They are close-minded to alternative explanations to events other than that which they are fed. Their thinking is black-and-white and is incapable of seeing a more sophisticated reality beyond 'friend' and 'enemy'. Their controllers can cultivate this 'knee-jerk' reaction. Their cynicism and apathy mean that they are unlikely to try alternative approaches (www.faqs.org: 8-9).

This gives a hierarchical psychological structure, where common people are duped by their worldly ambitions. On the other hand, a minority of others makes profit from that situation by manipulating the public and feeding them with the junk information. In this regard, conspiracy theories resemble religious texts, because besides having rigid separation between the good and the bad, they both punish the ones who dwell in worldly issues too much.

Some psychological deficiencies such as "paranoia, denial, and schizophrenia" are also affiliated with the reasons of belief in conspiracy theories and the increasing amount of anomie and personal mistrust are held responsible for the commonness of the conspiracy theories. In this context, the most common psychological trait, associated with the belief in conspiracy theories, is paranoia.

The paranoid-schizoid attitude actually is a normal process of childhood psychological development as well as being a necessary and an inevitable part of the adult psyche. This attitude begins as a natural part of healthy child development. Children develop an anxiety towards unknown others, which are termed as "the stranger anxiety" as explained by Robins and Post:

> The young child is a raw bundle of powerful feelings, of terrifying fears and uncontained aggression. It is the task of socialization to transform this raw bundle into an adult who can contain and alter these basic powerful emotions

and derives, tolerate frustration, trust others, and function cooperatively in society (Robins and Post, 1997: 78).

Child's approach to unknown and unfamiliar is vacillated between two opposite sides. One side is shaped by love and the other is hatred. In that sense the world for a child is built up simply with friends and foes. This attitude changes in socialization, when people learn to use their psychological defense mechanisms to cope with the stress of everyday life. Instead of the early demonization in the childhood, people build sophisticated ego defense mechanisms. In other words, paranoid-schizoid approach to the outside could be linked with a basic instinct towards others, which is shaped and normalized in the socialization process. Therefore:

> by developing these increasingly mature coping strategies, most individuals progress beyond the world of polarized idealized love and hateful persecutory evil, where the good object and the internal persecutory object are widely separated… They combine the split objects of the good mother and the bad mother [take it as badness and goodness] into one object [good enough mother] (Robins and Post, 1997: 78).

This process happens with the help of psychological defensive mechanisms such as, projection, denial, and distortion. For that reason, it could be said that, human's primitive schizoid-paranoid position is masked and controlled with those mechanisms. Thus, paranoia could be argued to exist partly among all people's psyche. Paranoid people are the ones, who are in a state of psychosis or who cannot use their ego defenses properly. As those people's defensive mechanisms do not work in proper condition, they became entrapped in paranoid position. In other words, paranoid personality is marked with insufficient defense mechanisms and communication abilities.

The paranoid person, in a case of crisis or depression, simply externalizes the blames, and demonizes the people and/or society that surround him. Therefore, he or she could be named as the one who searches for hidden causes or essences

responsible from his/her conditions. This is an example of external reflection. The other side of the same issue goes to internal persecution and/or suicide.

The Freud's famous case of Schreber[1] exemplifies this externalizing process very effectively. Schreber has blamed the outside world as a permanent danger to him. Freud has evaluated his case as:

> The patient [or paranoid], has abandoned his libidinal investment to the outside world and the people around him. Therefore, everything for him became unimportant and indifferent. The end of the world is a reflection of this disaster; because he took his love back from the world his personal/subjective world has been destroyed… Then the paranoid reconstructs the world; true that it is not a better world but at least he can live in it. He creates this by his delusions… The human subject has rebuilt his intensive relationship with the outside world. Moreover, while the old relationship was a peaceful one, new relationship style becomes a hostile one. Thus, we could say that the real process of suppression is aroused from a radical separation of libido from the previously loved people and objects (Freud, 1999: 101, 102).

Henceforth, the paranoid personality is a result of one's distracted and unhealthy relationship with the outside world. This relationship, points to a destruction in the psychological defense mechanisms. Conspiracy theories and their ideological apparatuses create and contribute the level of personal paranoia and so they present a psychological problem as a normal condition of humanity. Therefore conspiracy theories boldly underline some crucial symptoms and problems of the society, because the paranoid-schizoid personality is an unhealthy condition, which makes social life and communication a problematic, even impossible, task.

Since this thesis concentrates on the contemporary macro level social changes and its effects on conspirative way of thinking, it should not go without mentioning that, the idea of nation is deeply related with the psychological defense mechanisms of individuals. In other words, the concept of nation and the ideology of the state consists an important part in psychologies of the citizens.

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[1] Schreber case is an important work of Freud about the paranoid-schizoid position. Schreber is the name of the patient, who was an important judge and institutionalized at the age of 42.

The idea of nation is transferred to the citizens during childhood with socialization. Thus, the formation of psychological defense mechanisms occurs also with the effects of nationhood. The idea of nation is presented as home or the good mother, so it gives a sense of relief and familiarity to its subjects. As Anderson (1991) mentioned, the idea of nationhood presupposes a familiarity among the people of the same country and so, the nations tend to socialize their citizens by creating a father-like state figure. Tauber had long ago stressed upon the same point as quoted below:

> The state according to Freud's formulations is nothing but a symbol into which are displaced or projected the attitudes which the individual has learned to assume toward authority and which, introjected, form the first, or unconscious, level of super-ego. As such it is not different… from religion or other ideologies inculcated into children at a very early age. In either case, the family patterns of relationship and the concomitant psychological mechanisms are largely transferred to the political and religious systems of belief. The introjected father image becomes with the conscious ego ideal, which is then projected- with the enlargement typical of all projections- upon the anthropomorphized political authority. Thus the state, the recipient of the highest secular loyalty, is enabled to delimit the manifestations of the individual's desire for aggressive self-recognition and power (Tauber, 1952: 277).

Hence, the idea of nation, as well as anthropomorphizing the divine power, is effective in shaping the psychological defensive mechanisms of the people. While, the nation creates a feeling of community, it at the same time projects hostility and anger towards outside.

> Thus the propagandistic appeal to a powerful enemy beyond the borders of one's fatherland assures the dynamic focusing of personal aggressiveness on an external entity, thereby making possible the closer integration of the community (Tauber, 1952: 277).

The feeling of modern community is produced through the idea of nation so it has an important part in people's psychological maturation. Besides, the ideology of the nation-state produces an important distinction between outside and inside the borders, which is very effective during the socialization process. Consequently, it is sufficient to know here that, personal paranoia is not only an individual disorder but

in some ways it might have strong affinities with macro-social structures like the state ideology. In the second chapter, this study will attempt to show this by emphasizing upon the connections between the level of paranoia and the change in the nation-state structure.

2.2.5   The Methodology of Conspiracy Theories

Some of the methodological aspects of conspiracy theories need to be further elaborated. As was suggested earlier, these theories display unified explanations, provide very clear and simple solutions to the complex structures of power, define a powerful enemy (McArthur, 1995: 42), and present history as a detective research.

To begin with their unified approach, conspiracy theories are capable of connecting and explaining very distinct events in one unified explanation (Keeley, 1999: 117). In this regard, those narratives are:

> fantastic, not because they entirely belong to the realms of human fantasy, but because they are narratives composed from remote fragments, diverse nodes correlated and fitted together in unusual fashion. Like hyper-links stretching out on the World Wide Web, conspiracy narratives are hyper-narratives, weird and wonderfully interconnected spiders' web plots; Weberian meanings and theories of accusation sharing affinities and extraordinary premises with the magic and divination logic (Skinner, 2001: 102).

In parallel, conspiracy theories are easy to learn narratives because of this peculiarity. For that reason, radical right or left ideologies tend to use these characteristics as propagation tools. Quinn gives an example about this by using the right wing extremist party, Front National, in France as the following:

> One of the most striking characteristics of the Front's [far right wing party] particular take on conspiracy theory is that it explains 'Everything in Life'. It provides 'the citizen' with a reading of politics that sees the immigrant, the corrupt government, the media, the lack of rigor in academic texts et cetera as nothing more than different facets of a single interlocking plot in which the detail proves the whole just as the whole gives meaning to the details. This is the reason underlying the Front's central tenet 'Tout est Lie-Everything is connected' (Quinn, 2001: 114).

In this sense, conspirators mainly regard historical events as mysterious puzzles to be deconstructed or solved. As Taburoğlu (2002: 152) stated, "…For conspiracy theoreticians, there are hidden structures, which hold the society in balance. In lack of them society simply cannot function." This kind of approach is problematic in terms of being a detective-like work, because the trial to find a rational path of a plot or a conspiracy leads conspiracy writers to make up some of the necessary empty parts of the story. In other words, human behaviors are not perfectly rational and instrumental actions. Therefore conspiracy theories, which essentially connect and unite everything under the sun into one major reason, became filled with lies and fantasies. As a result, conspiracy theories' method is incapable of understanding the ambivalences and grey parts in human's nature and so they often turn out to become myths.

Skinner summarized this problem as:

> Conspiracy theory has become a mode of cognition for those outside the pluralistic consensus, as conspiracy theorists convert singular events into larger frameworks, sometimes deliberately misreading or misinterpreting evidence and thereby rocking the boat of consensus history… In doing this, critics argue that history becomes travesty as complex events are reduced to superstitious plots (Skinner, 2001: 102).

The pursuit of simplifying the complex social reality leads conspiracy writers to create "errant data" Keeley (1999) or "degenerating research program" Clarke (2002). Errant data and degenerating research program stand for and explain the act of covering up by conspiracy theorists for proving their theories. In other words, they present the act of researcher to change the original results for the sake of proving the general hypothesis of the research. As stated above, social reality often seems more complex and non-linear than what conspiracy theories write. Consequently, one of the main methodological problems of conspiracy theories lies in their unified and detective-like approach.

One of the basic methodological characteristics of conspiracy theories that might be lastly mentioned is their definition of a powerful enemy in control. McArthur stressed (1995: 42) that: "Though few in numbers, the subversive foes are always portrayed as cunning and in possession of nearly supernatural powers and organizational acumen." By that trait, conspiracy theories become important labeling mechanisms towards the minorities.

2.2.6   Major Discussions on the Methodology of Conspiracy Theories

There is an important and very basic question on the worthiness of conspiracy theories as explanatory sources. In this general discussion, conspiracy theorists and their believers or consumers tend to argue that those theories are warranted, unorthodox and alternative explanations. On the other side of the coin people critical to conspirative way of thinking, approach them as products of paranoid minds and as dangerous narratives. In this approach, the concept conspiracy theory is a kind of urban myth.

One of the theorists who approach conspiracy theories more sympathetically is Basham. According to him:

> Are such conspiracies 'really possible'? There's no denying that we live in a remarkably secretive, hierarchically organized civilization. The major bases of power – national governments and global corporate empires – combine enormous institutional, financial, and technological resources with extensive mechanisms of secrecy, both preventative and punitive. Financial gain, political power, and maniacal ego amplification have always proved strong temptations for unaccountable authorities. Such a civilization is ripe for allegations of organized, society-wide manipulations and deceptions affecting most everyone's life. It is no surprise that such allegations are exceedingly common (Basham, 2003: 92).

Pigden in a similar line of thought has argued that:

> My claim is that conspiracies, successful and otherwise, are often among the causes of historical events. By this I mean to imply that successful (or perhaps partially successful) conspiracies are not unheard of. The fact that event X occurred is not prima facie evidence that nobody conspired to bring

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it about… [Henceforth] the belief that conspiracy theories are somehow superstitious is itself a superstition. Conspiracies abound – some successful, others not. Where the evidence suggests a conspiracy, we are quite at liberty to believe in it (1993: 13, 25).

Other scholars, like the ones quoted above, emphasize upon the point of normality and commonness of conspiracies. In other words, they imply that, a conspiracy theory is an unavoidable and a widespread phenomenon from everyday life to multi-national corporate structures. For them, disinformation and lies are quite common in many areas of life. Henceforth, they claim that conspiracy theories should not be seen perverse explanations. In contrast, they have the power to acknowledge what could not be conceptualized by scientific methods. Erol Mütercimler (2005) has stressed upon the same point by regarding conspiracy theories as cognitive tools, by which future scenarios in politics could be written.

In this regard, the positive attitude towards conspiracy theories attempts to present those theories as alternative explanations. While arguing this they back their ideas to non-reliability of people and the easiness of lying. Therefore, it could be argued that the positive attitude towards conspiracy theories seems to take those theories as something, which could explain what sciences and politics could not. In the end, it is something unorthodox and valuable for them.

Academics or independent thinkers who criticize the methodology of conspiracy theories dwell upon the affects of those theories. Some of them (Clarke 2002; Keeley, 1999) use Hume's approach to miracles to understand the effects of conspiracy theories. Hume stated that:

> the passion of *surprise* and *wonder*, arising from miracles, being an agreeable emotion, gives a sensible tendency towards the belief of those events, from which it is derived (Hume, 1975 cited in Clarke, 1988: 150).

In a parallel line Clarke (1988: 151) noted that: "Belief in the ability to conspirers to carry out their plans, while duping other into believing in a cover story, may inspire similar feelings."

In other words, scholars like Clarke (1998) and Keeley (1999) argue that conspiracy theories are very common because, like miracles, they provide fancy and easy explanations for the very complex events. In this sense, conspiracy theories in Marxist terms could be named also as opium of the society like religion as those theories seem to reflect the peculiarities of religious texts. Since, conspiracy theories relieve the burden to know what will happen in the future or they help people to easily identify the enemies and people responsible from bad situations. For that reason, they give the feeling of relaxation and capability to know everything for a moment.

Importantly enough, those theories like religious texts have the capacity to unify the reasons of existence. Like the idea of God in religious texts, conspiracy theories often have a figure responsible from everything. However, unlike religious texts conspiracy theories are anthropomorphic narratives. In other words, they secularize religious narratives, by replacing the divine wisdom to human plots.

Conspiracy theories, in this context, are effective tools in creating a hostile, xenophobic and paranoid environment. They methodologically bring an anthropomorphic explanation about what is really going on in the society and so they bring divine justice down to the world and disrespected psychoanalytical or religious interpretation of man/woman identity consist of a constant lack. Therefore, they fit into the fascist and racist ideological approaches with respect to the fact that all of those ideological narratives secularize the divine power, and give human a sense of mastering his/her own faith.

This mentality could be exemplified from a discussion of Diken and Laustsen on the Nazi period:

> The camps were a radical manifestation of bio-politics. Whereas ordinary bio-politics targets the health of the population – as a kind of 'life politics' - the Nazi bio-politics aimed the opposite... The politico-theological background here is central. Bio-politics is at the same time totally 'profane' and deeply 'religious'. Profane, because one acts, as a master of life and death, without recourse to higher authorities, and religious, because, one acts

without limitations, e.g. without any consideration of justice, as if one had divine powers. The Nazi positioned itself as a master over the judgment day and attempted on earth to realize both paradise (The Reich of Thousand Years) and hell (the concentration camps) (Diken and Laustsen, 2005: 8).

Herein it could be argued that conspirative way of thinking is mean and illustrious of and relative to the extremist mentality. Anthropomorphizing the religious explanations and producing essentialist narratives in their place, would lead conspiracy theories as a part of the camp mentality of anti-democratic ideologies.

In conclusion I claim that the attitude favors conspiracy theories as alternative explanations seem to miss the ideological implications of those theories. Since, they tend to confuse the definitions of conspiracy with conspiracy theory. Once again, conspiracy theories are ideological approaches to human history, which argues that conspiracy activity is the prior activity shaping the history. That approach, as stated above, also has their *a priori* conditions of human psyche and relations.

Henceforth, people may conspire but this should not lead anyone to say that scientific approach should include conspiracy theories, because there is not enough evidence to argue that conspiracies are the major mottos of the history. Meaning, some conspiracy theories might be really true and crucial but this is not enough to take all of them seriously. Since, regarding them as valuable knowledge sources would also lead widespread feeling of panic and paranoia. In the Appendix I, I articulate more on this point by emphasizing on the similar functions conspiracy theories share with astrology as Adorno has elaborated it.

2.3 Concluding Remarks

Through outlining and discussing the basic characteristics of conspiracy theories, this chapter aimed to introduce the subject. In order to do that, the psychological and methodological characteristics of conspiracy theories and their results have been mainly emphasized.

In those discussions, conspiracy theories' hierarchical and paranoid look towards the society was emphasized. Besides, a distinction between the definitions of conspiracy theory and conspiracy has been introduced and by that distinction it became apparent that conspiracy theories are not merely theories that are composed of some conspiracy acts. Instead, it has been explained that, conspiracy theories reflect an ideological approach to the world. In that vein, conspiracy theories and their ideological affiliations were also discussed in this chapter. Different discussions, in the end, has pointed that conspiracy theories seem to be relative to fundamentalist and extremist ideologies.

As a result, conspiracy theories have been approached as important symptoms and the communication style of fundamentalist ideologies of the contemporary society. In that sense, understanding them would give crucial opportunities to grasp some of the major cultural obstacles in front of the contemporary society.

In the next chapter, the main issue is devoted to this point. I will try to understand what characteristics of contemporary society give way to popularity of conspirative way of thinking. To achieve this task some transformations in contemporary society such as, decentralization, individualization and the pluralization of identities will be discussed. In other words, the main issue would be what characteristics of today's society are effective in the popularity of those theories.

In addition to that, Karl Popper's philosophical approach will be mentioned to provide a deeper analysis as well as to show alternatives ways of being which leaves no room for widespread conspiracy theories.

CHAPTER III

CONCEPTUALIZING CONSPIRACY THEORIES AS SYMPTOMS OF CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY

3.1 Introduction

After discussing the main tenets of conspiracy theories, this thesis will dwell upon the issue of conceptualizing these theories in contemporary society in this chapter. In other words, the intention here is to understand the significance and relevance of conspiracy theories in the present-day social context. For that reason, the discussion will focus upon the main features of the contemporary, so called postmodern society, and will try to understand those characteristics that lead to the widespread conspiracy theories.

The chapter will continue with answering the question of what Popperian philosophy might offer under these circumstances because the thesis claims that understanding Popperian philosophy together with its scientific methodology can offer important solutions and can provide deep insights to contemporary problems related with the popularity of conspiracy theories. The pervasiveness of the conspiracy theories, besides being an important symptom of the current political discourse, does also show social sciences' inability to become valid and to provide cogent knowledge basis for humanity.

In other words, the popularity of conspiracy theories indirectly indicates the postmodern mistrust and criticism of sciences in particular, and the crisis of modernity in general. Thus, the popularity of conspiracy theories could not be counted as a mere discussion, fluctuating in between politics and popular culture. In contrast, the discussion should be dispersed to understand different phases of the

issue in the same framework, and introducing Karl Popper should be seen as one of those attempts.

Henceforth, this part of the thesis, after taking the discussions such as postmodernism and globalization into consideration, analyzes the thought of Karl Popper in order to understand conspiracy theories in a broader perspective. Indeed, Popperian approach seems to show an alternative ways of thinking. To sum up, the chapter intends to understand the major reasons and sources of conspirative way of thinking and therefore the sources of fundamentalist ideologies in contemporary social and political change with the aid of Popperian philosophical approach.

3.2 The Postmodern Society and its Major Characteristics

The major traits or the main aspects of the contemporary society, that might be associated with the success or popularity of the conspiracy theories, are decentralization in modern society, pluralization of identities in public space, increasing level of individualization and consumerism.

By decentralization in modern society I mean the processes of shrinking power of the nation state, weakening of the modern society ideals and similar changes being experienced nowadays. Another symptom that might be related with the popularity of conspiracy theories is the pluralization of the identities in public space. This concept refers to multi-culturalism, emergence of previously repressed identities and declining central identity in the society. In addition to these macro level transformations, increasing level of individualization and the growing importance of consumerism in everyday life could also be an effective motive in the widespread conspirational thinking. The next section discusses these transformations.

3.2.1 The Decentralization of the Modern Society

At the foremost, this thesis is written with the idea that the major reason of the popularity of conspiracy theories are due to the transformation of the nation-state structure and the decentralization of the powers of the modern society. In that sense, the discussion will begin with the decentralization of and the transition in the nation-state structure then move on to other traits.

It is a classical formulation that modern societies are governed by a central state structure, which provides its citizens basic services such as, education, health services and so on.

> Processes of modernization produce the state as a container of rationalized power based on claims to sovereignty, and as the creator and protector of citizenship rights (Crook, et al. 1992: 221).

In addition, the state as Anderson (1991) argued creates an "imagined community" or a nation in order to restore its central power and provide a cohesive public.

In this regard, as stated in the first chapter, the state is the central institution of the society.

> The modern state becomes a corporate manager, securing a 'grand armistice' between warring socio-economic interests. Its functions include internal and external stabilization, economic regulation, infra-structural development, the amelioration of social problems and social-political legitimation (Crook, et al. 1992: 221).

In contrast to this modern picture; today dissolution and a transition in the powers and functions of the state structure could be seen.

> Processes of post-modernization 'shrink' the corporatist state, causing a shift from centralized to decentralized apparatuses and from authoritative to manipulative forms of social control. Postmodern conditions challenge the idea of the state as an autonomous entity enjoying privileged links with politics and public sphere (Crook, et al. 1992: 221).

In other words, today with the increasing amount and speed of global flows of capital, there is a transition in nation-state structures from their privileged and central places to another condition. This process corresponds to Touraine's (2003) concept of "deinstitutionalization of the society". This major transition is the genesis of the vital changes on all social levels. Again Touraine defined this transition as:

> ... collapse of this social 'model' of modernization is the result of the separation of its three main components (1) The industrial society and, more widely a society based on production, of which social democracy was one of the main political expressions. (2) The suppression of the controls and regulations that political variety imposed on it. In other words, the return to extreme capitalism... (3) Finally, the withdrawal of the state into itself, abandoning its role as the central agent in national development, let the juxtaposition of a heavily state-supported public sector and of a much larger private sector, a large part of which was exposed to accelerated economic change without any protection from the central power (Touraine, 2003: 467-468).

In this sense, the decreasing power of the nation-states could be argued to be understood in a parallel line with a paced and wilder capitalism, with less interventions and protections from the state structure. This new situation has caused important consequences on all levels. Touraine, as well as others, claimed a decomposition of the society, which means that contemporary society could not be conceptualized by modern categories:

> Social phenomena should no longer be analyzed in the light of only one image of social life. The failure of social democracy is inseparable from that expressed in Durkheim's work, which sought to explain the social purely by the reference to the social. We no longer live our political life – and, more broadly, our collective life – in purely 'social' terms. Society is a notion which slips through our fingers like sand, when we thought it was as solid as concrete (Touraine, 2003: 470).

This again illustrates the fact that the deconstruction of the main traits of the society is seen as a fact with globalization. In the process of globalization while the overall transformation changes the general structures of societies, the nation-states retreat the arena to the multi-national organizations and international finance. As a result, the ideals and the composition of modern society could be seen as degraded:

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> The decomposition of the idea of society, set off by the fragmentation of the world in which that idea developed, got worse, and became fatal, when the following idea spread as if along a trail of gunpowder: We cannot choose our future, our political choices are empty because right and left are equally powerless and dominated by the global economy the functioning of which cannot be controlled by national authority... since the mid eighties, the current predominance of the theme of globalization has been accelerating the decline of the social representation of public life (Touraine, 2003: 470-471).

Accordingly, mistrust to the modern ideals of society has grown. In other words, the modern societies' main motto of universal human progress through sciences seems to be evaded. The belief in sciences is decreased, and new forms of alternative sciences, new sorts of postmodern belief systems have become dominant. This situation takes place, with a growing disbelief in avant-gardism in a community, which will be at the front to pull the society forward.

In parallel, the difference between the high and low culture tends to be intermixed. Most of the contemporary cultural products seem to be loaded both with high and low artistic aspects. For that reason, it is very hard to strictly classify what belongs to low and high art today. Similarly, Featherstone calls that period as "the end of art" (1995: 4), and Harvey as "anti-avant-garde" (1989: 59). Consequently, the de-differentiation has created a hesitation among *avant-garde*. Turner stated that as:

> The cultural elite especially where it has some pretension to radical politics, is thus caught in a constant paradox that every expression of critique of the mass culture of capitalist societies draws into an elitist position of cultural disdain, refraining from its enjoyments of the everyday reality. To embrace enthusiastically the objects of mass culture involves the cultural elite in pseudo-populism; to reject critically the objects of mass culture involves distinction, which in turn draws the melancholic intellectual into a nostalgic withdrawal from contemporary culture (Turner, 1994: 87).

To sum up, there are three parallel things going with the decentralization of power in postmodern society. Firstly, a decentralization of the power of the nation-state structure is seen, which abolished its social functions and so created a wilder capitalist system. Secondly, 'a decline in the social' or erosion in the classical

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formations of the society is one of the symptoms of contemporary culture. Thirdly, while the importance of modern ideals is degraded, the belief in sciences as a central explanatory power has been lessened and new belief systems have become popular. As a result, it could be argued that the transformation of the nation-state structure as a central figure of the modern society, has led important consequences, which might also be understood as a part of the crisis of modernity nowadays.

3.2.2   The Pluralization of the Identities in Public Space

Another important symptom of the transformation in the contemporary society, which could be related with the success of conspirative way of thinking, is the pluralization of the identities in public space. This process occurs hand in hand with the decentralization of the power. As mentioned above, the state, which propagates one central identity and therefore oppresses minority identities has become less powerful nowadays. In this process the previously oppressed identities find the chance of expressing themselves more freely. This situation, within the limits of this thesis, will be termed as pluralization of identities in public space.

This concept could be counted as one of the positive social effects of the decentralization of power in the society. The repressed identities such as ethnic and religious minorities living under the nation-state regime in this period attempt to gain democratic rights. They began to have more freedom of expression in the public space, although this process has created new problems. While, the repressed identities find their chances to speak up, a hostile relationship among different groups has also become a more visible phenomenon. Partly as a result of this, one of the most popular contemporary concepts in social sciences is "the other". Henceforth, unlike the premises of the popular ideology of multiculturalism, a hostile relationship also becomes a widespread case during the process of decentralization or pluralization of identities in public space.

Some of the important reasons responsible from the hostile environment among different voices could be found in economy. As a result of the fall of the welfare state, the class inequalities have increased. In that context, as class inequalities increase the fragmentation and camp mentality in the society also increases. In that sense, there seemed not so many solid bases to hold up the multiple identities within the same society. This fact is also put forward by Bauman; he referred new multiculturalism has turned into multi-communality. By that concept he meant that, the promise of the different identities living peacefully and democratically together in one society has been made impossible with the economic discrepancies of the system. Therefore, one of the main reasons of the hostile relationship among different identities or groups might quite likely to be lying in economic reality.

Zizek seems to read this uneasy relationship between the economic realities and multiculturalism. Accordingly, he argued that:

> Today we witness a thriving of new multiple political subjectivities (class, ethnic gay, ecological...), alliances between whom are the outcome of open, thoroughly contingent struggles for hegemony... The result is what one would expect. The Populist Right moves to occupy the terrain evacuated by the Left, as the only 'serious' political force that still employs an anti-capitalist rhetoric... While multi-cultural tolerance becomes the motto of the new and privileged 'symbolic' classes, the far Right seeks to address and to mobilize whatever remains of the mainstream 'working class' (Zizek, 2000: 38).

There Zizek points the incapability of multiculturalism under the effects of neo-liberal capitalism, since the increasing amount of class inequalities made it very hard to provide a common shared ground for all identities.

Consequently, it could be argued that the pluralization of identities in public space gives an ability to different identities to co-habit in the same public sphere with their authentic voices. While, this progress is beneficial for democratic purposes, it is at the same time hardened by the widening gap of the class inequalities. Thus, living within the same society in different ways would sometimes become a dangerous issue, because people had the potential to blame others about their bad conditions

and the common grounds by which people share similar conditions of living have been lost in the increasing level of fragmentation. In that sense, violent ideologies such as far Right sometimes fill this gap of "the decline of the social or center" with dangerous solutions. From former Yugoslavia to Rwanda we have seen how painful such solutions are.

3.2.3   Individualization and Consumerism

While talking about the class inequalities and other important macro effects of the contemporary transformation, the effects of individualization as a micro-level aspect of present day society could be associated with the success of conspiracy theories. Therefore understanding consumerism, individualization might be a worthy task for examining the conditions, which has contributed to the conspirative way of thinking.

We are experiencing an increased amount of individualization in the society of consumption. "The individual is becoming the basic unit of social reproduction for the first time in history" (Beck and Beck, 2002: xxii). The consumer orientation of today contributes the individualization in the society. Therefore, it increases the deviation or transition from the classical social structure. In that sense, Beck and Beck has further argued that:

> … Individualization is becoming the social structure of second modern society itself. Institutionalized individualism is no longer Talcott Parson's idea of linear self-reproducing systems; it means the paradox of an 'individualizing structure' as a non-linear, open-ended, highly ambivalent, ongoing process. It relates to a decline of narratives of given sociability. Thus the theoretical collectivisms of sociology end. A 'micro-foundation of macro-sociology'… may not be possible. But sociology as an institutionalized rejection of individualism is no longer possible either (Beck and Beck, 2002: xxii).

Diken and Laustsen has corroborated to this view by pointing the increasing level of individualization on political level:

The diagnosis that follows is this: the most significant and the most fundamental anxiety of the citizens of the West is not their democratic participation but their security… the politics is pushed, as in Schmitt's analysis of the Weimar years, from the state to the individual level... It then becomes an individual task to identify the friend and the enemy. The individual 'hero' is again, Schmitt's partisan who can elevate himself to the position of sovereign (Diken and Laustsen, 2004: 8).

As mentioned above, the ideology of consumerism seems to go in a parallel line with the individualization. Contemporary consumer products usually target individual as an independent unit. In that sense, it could be argued that individualization is also a product of present-day reflexive consumerism. As we know from Lefebvre (1991), Baudrillard (1993), Debord (1996), consumerism and its ethics create a different sort of standardization of everyday life.

In parallel, if Ritzer's (1993) or Urry's (2004) studies on the sociology of tourism are to be remembered, it can be seen how contemporary consumption attempts to create a society of sharp predictability and efficiency. The consumerism targets a sort of alienated individual, who is made obese with the pre-planned menus of the producers. Hence, it could be said that contemporary lonely individual is prone to surprises and individual creativities, which could be understood as a part of individualization and standardization of the society.

As a conclusion, Bauman (2001) claimed that today people do not organize things around them, instead they are organized by the things surrounding them. In that sense contemporary ideology of consumerism might be argued to be creating a more incapable, passive and isolated individual type.

Lastly, it could be argued that the level of individualization, especially for the Western countries as well as the developing world should be taken into account in understanding the changes in society. Likewise, Beck (1997) and Bauman (1999) also boldly underlined the transition of the society and its crisis. In addition, they defended that new kind of politics are needed for this new structure. Thus, it might be said that, in parallel to de-institutionalization, individualization is another major

aspect of change, which could be related to the popularity of conspiracy theories in contemporary society. I will dwell on this issue more deeply in the coming section.

3.3 The Reasons Underlying the Success of Conspiracy Theories Today

The decentralization of the state power has created an ideological void within the society. Some people, who felt comfortable with the past system, might be disturbed with the pace of the changes that are taking place. In that sense, some of those people have ceded back to and been attracted by far right nationalist ideologies. Accordingly, conspiracy theories as narratives for far right ideologies, urge people to take action to stop loosing their country or something else. The examples vary from Montserrat to U.S.A seem to exemplify this kind of trauma. Thus, it could be stated that people who are reactionaries to contemporary political changes have used conspiracy theories to defend the ex-borders of their nationalist cognitive map.

Spark in parallel to this stated that:

> The sudden visibility of the contingent therefore suggests a reason to account for the swift rise in popularity of conspiracy theories in the 1990s, namely as popular attempts to re-conjure a lost totality, and cope with the randomness which now seems to propel the world- and the one thing more frightening than thinking that all events are controlled, is thinking that none are (Spark, 2001: 50).

Moreover, with decentralization, it is a common case that the previously repressed identities have re-gained some democratic rights. While this is a relatively democratic development, it at the same time created a new conflicting relationship among these newly emerged groups. Besides, a group of people who are not satisfied with the changes taking place in society also tried to re-suppress those groups. In that sense, conspiracy theories are materialized in the attempts of blaming others and raising the level of hatred towards their freedom again.

In addition, conspiracy theories as Jameson (1988) called them are "the cognitive maps of poor people" providing an explanation for people who are economically depressed in post welfare-state period. As the state has abandoned its welfare functions, the gap between the poor and the rich has increased. Conspiracy theories in this picture provided easy answers and short cuts to why is that so. This point was also emphasized with reference to Zizek (2000), who thinks multiculturalism is the ideology for the middle and upper classes. In his view the crowded rest is open to violent choices such as far right, which unsurprisingly makes use of conspiracy theories.

Furthermore, the effects of the increasing level of individualization and the consumerism are effective on the popularity of conspiracy theories. First, conspiracy theories provide easy politics for people, most of which can be seen even in Hollywood movies. In other words, the narratives of conspiracies are like action movies such as *The Fight Club*. In that sense, they are commodified entities or explanatory packages provided by the market. Second, the increasing level of individualization also corresponds to an increase in the level of anomie. In contemporary society, the situation went much further than the Simmel's descriptions (1997) of the life in the Metropolis. This anomic situation also created a widespread paranoid attitudes, fear from the others.

Third, the consumerism in everyday life and increased standardization of consumption create a dependent individual, who became addicted to the services of the market. In that case, personal creativity is degraded, and people become obese of the consumer products and their advertisements. Thus, they could be seen as incapable of understanding and theorizing what is going on around. Additionally, they demand some easy consumer packages of explanations. Therefore, for these kinds of people conspiracy theories are very likely to become musts for understanding the outside world. Discussions on gated communities very well represent such fear from the others. In Turkey Sencer Ayata's discussion (2002) is an example to the case.

Likewise, people became used to the comforts of mass consumerism, by which it is meant that the people who can at least afford to go to McDonald's. As it is well known the major principles of consumption are calculability, security, efficiency and reliability. The consumption has offered such principles, which in turn have destructed the immune system of the social against the unknown or the alien. In that sense, when people want to go to another place as a tourist they mostly prefer planned activities as they do not want to bother with the bad surprises. Henceforth, it creates a society where security and predictability becomes a major task in social life and ambiguity becomes something to be scared of. Therefore, as Beck stated:

> the ambiguity has returned to the society; what was meant by that is today most of the social conflicts are not taken as a problem of the system but rather as risk. [Therefore] the basic conflict of the Risk Society takes places in between secure and non-secure. (1997: 45, 46).

While the quest for unknown become one of the most avoided things, conspiracy theories become important by their claim of explaining and predicting everything. Like in astrology they are supposed to explain everything going on with a single variable, in that sense people might also prefer such products for the relief they provide. Lastly, it should not go without saying that there are also risks in contemporary capitalism in which people might lose their jobs in any minute, and thus, the demand to know the future is a very much-demanded task for relief today. In that sense, conspiracy theories work as "opium of the society" it gives the joy of knowing everything.

Furthermore, the tendency to nostalgia (Turner, 1994) of avant-gardism might be counted as one of the important reasons underlying the conspiracy theories. Indeed, conspiracy theories, by explaining the unknown phenomena and showing that it has one hidden structure discovered only by the author, provide new meta-narratives. In this sense, it still implies that there is a need for educated people to deconstruct the hidden structure and explain everything to common people. The role of cultural elite is saved by conspiracy theories by that way: the world is still an esoteric place and only few people can grasp what really goes on. Therefore, one of the major reasons behind conspiracy theories can be the crisis of the cultural elite.

Parker has showed this avant-garde attitude by claiming:

> Plots, plans and conspiracies share this grammar of a series of 'events', and some 'causes' to tie them together, but they also share the sense of an elevated place for the observer… Importantly then, in order to see the plan, you must be elevated, lifted from the terrain, standing on the earth will not do for a plan – the earth must be presented from above, from somewhere else (Parker, 2001: 199).

Moreover, the methodology of these works discloses an explanation based on meta-narratives. For most of these works, there could still be one unified reason for events. In this sense those works also resist new approaches and theories proposing multi-explanatory models, such as complexity theory (Urry, 2004). In other words, they prefer old methodology on the new phenomena. As mentioned in the previous chapter, in this context conspiracy theories become forced to make up those lacking parts in their explanations. Thus they propose fairy tales about these parts in their theory.

Finally, it seems to be fair to comment on the change by quoting an evaluation of Douglas Kellner of a typical source of conspiracy theories nowadays, the X-Files. If I am to change the name X-Files as conspiracy theories, it could be easily seen that he made a similar conclusion to the arguments presented above. Kellner has stated that:

> *The X-Files* [Conspiracy Theories] shows a society in transition, with its institutions, values, and identities in crisis. *The X-Files* [Conspiracy Theories] thus, in a postmodern register, uses the generic forms and figures of media culture to comment on some of the most frightening aspects of contemporary society, including government out of control, science and technology out of control, and threats to the body and individual integrity during an era of rampant disease and novel societal and technological forces literally creating new species. The alien can thus be read as a figure for what human beings have become in an era in which individuals no longer feel that they control their own destiny, in which their own bodies mutate out of control, and their minds and bodies are invaded with new societal, technological, and hybrid forces. In exploring this new and disturbing space, *The X-Files* [Conspiracy Theories] inhabits a liminal space between mind and body truth and untruth, fantasy and reality, science and belief. Providing

a modern mythology for our time, *The X-Files* [Conspiracy Theories] probes our deepest fears, most disturbing fantasies, and most dramatic transformations. Whether an artifact of media culture can adequately illuminate the crevices and novel spaces of the present is questionable, though *The X-Files* [Conspiracy Theories] gains its power and effect precisely through attempting to do so (Kellner, 1999: 174).

Last, but not least of all, as discussed above the popularity of conspiracy theories is due to the crisis of modern society. The crisis of avant-garde, of sciences, of nation-state structure might account for this popularity. Since this is a thesis in a graduate study in Political Science one needs to think about how science could be capitalized on this situation to create alternative ways in which conspirational thinking is not as popular as today. In this regard, there will be a discussion on Popperian approach, since this thesis argues that understanding Popper and his concerns might shed light on discussions on conspiracy theories.

Popper was an intellectual figure, who was ontologically against conspirative way of thinking. Therefore, Popper's epistemology and his contributions to both the political science and scientific methodology might be a solid base on which the problems emerging from the popularity of conspiracy theories can be discussed. In the end, conspirative way of thinking has caused non-repairable damages in the history, and it is likely for them to cause such damage again. Thus the discussions on the issue should at least be able to offer practical solutions. As a result, in the remaining part of the chapter, I intend to introduce and discuss Karl Popper's philosophy, with the hope of showing alternative epistemologies and adding depth to the discussion.

3.4 Understanding Karl Popper in Contemporary Context

The thought and biography of Karl Popper will be mentioned with the belief that the contemporary situation of modernity, including the crisis in modern nation-state, modern sciences, is preceded and well captured by his philosophical approach. Therefore, his approach would provide alternative ways of doing politics and sciences in which conspirational thinking is not as effective as today. In other

words, remembering Popper might be a very fruitful enterprise in discussions on the popularity of conspiracy theories in contemporary society.

Before opening the discussion, it should be noted that, Popper's philosophy is, to a major extent, shaped by an ethical stance. A central ethical concern makes itself felt in his overall scientific activity. Artigas (1999) claimed that: "Popper's philosophy becomes crystal clear when we look at it through ethical glasses." This central ethical concern makes it possible to explain his stance in politics by giving an example from his methodological approach such as deductive logic. In other words, Popper' philosophy, in addition to and as a result of his ethics, is deeply marked with a coherent worldview. O'Hear stated this peculiarity as:

> Popper's philosophy is marked by a breadth and coherence unusual for a modern philosopher. While his fundamental insights may stem from the philosophy of science, what he has to say there reaches out into politics, into the theory of rationality and into the nature of life itself (O'Hear, 1995: 2).

For that respect, in the following pages, the discussion will also cover some parts of his biography as much as the events that are related with his approach in science. Since, as it will be shown below, his life experience made his intellectual career one against fundamentalist ideologies and essentialist thinking. In this regard, the important moments of his life, which shaped his epistemological approach, will be mentioned. Later, his scientific approach will be related to his political views on *The Open Society* (1966) and the discussion will conclude with how his philosophy might be materialized to comprehend the main aspects of the contemporary society. To sum up, his strong commitment to scientific rationality might leave traces of recovery for degradation of scientific knowledge today, which is an important symptom of the widespread conspiracy theories.

3.4.1   Some Remarkable Points in Popper's Biography

Karl Popper was born in Vienna on 28th July 1902, as the third and last child of his family. His family had Jewish origins, but later converted to Protestantism. His childhood atmosphere was intellectually vivid or 'decidedly bookish'. His father, a

lawyer, was more like a scholar. His mother was interested in music. His parents from both sides had very positive effects on intellectual progress of Karl Popper. As Baudouin argued (2003: 7), they had contributed to multi-dimensionality of his thinking in sciences and arts.

Popper's university years were also very effective on his thinking. As a poor student, he experienced many social difficulties in post-First World War Austria. His economic conditions have helped his rapprochement to Marxism (Artigas, 1999: 5). Moreover, he was morally a pacifist, and the Brest-Litovsk Treaty of Soviet Russia has deeply affected him.

> Popper recalls several times that he was impressed by the pacifist propaganda displayed by the communists with the occasion of the treaty of Brest-Litovsk… [B]y the Brest-Litovsk treaty on the 3 March 1918 the new communist Russia recognized the independence of Finland and Ukraine, renounced the control over Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and a great part of Belorussia; and ceded three other territories to Turkey. This treatise meant the victory of Germany over Russia, but at the same time... Lenin presented the new communist Russia as fully involved in peace, even at the expense of losing political power (Artigas, 1999: 5).

Then Popper joined the Austrian Communist Party. During his membership, he criticized the party's murderous instinct against the class-enemies and the lies of the party bureaucracy (Artigas, 1999: 6). More importantly, as a responsible intellectual he decided to leave the party, after the event of June 1919. In that event, Popper, other party members and some workers were in a demonstration in Vienna. Later a shooting broke out and several workers and party members died in the incident. Popper felt himself partly responsible from those deaths and Party's less caring approach towards those deaths distanced him from the party. Popper describes this as follows:

> The incident that first turned me against communism, and that soon led me away from Marxism altogether, was one of the most important incidents in my life… In Vienna, shooting broke out during a demonstration by unarmed young socialists who, instigated by the communists, tried to help some communists to escape who were under arrest in the central police station… Several young socialist and communist workers were killed. I was horrified

and shocked at the police but also at myself. For I felt that as a Marxist I bore part of the responsibility for the tragedy (Artigas, 1999: 7).

In sum, Popper's pacifism and high level of intellectual ethical responsibility, have disposed him to end his affiliation with the communist party. He felt himself guilty about those deaths. While he has been slowly changing his political views during his membership in communist party, the traumatic event also affected his thoughts in scientific methodology. He said the following;

I arrived, by the end of 1919, at the conclusion that the scientific attitude was the critical attitude, which did not look for verifications but for crucial tests; tests which could refute the theory tested, though they could never establish it. (Popper, 2002: 39)

In this sense, it could be argued that his frustration with Marxism at the same time corresponds to his refusal of dogmatism in science and other aspects of life.

Moreover, Popper was also affected by the discussions of the Vienna Circle in his youth. Vienna Circle was the name of a group of scholars, who adopted the scientific view of logical positivism. Their approach could be crudely summarized as eliminating all metaphysics in sciences. While being affected by the discussions of Vienna Circle in his youth, Popper later opposed their views of science and inductive logic. This opposition went in parallel with his opposition to Marxism and historical determinism. He refuted trials to find an essence or central aspect of human progress. Since, for him all knowledge will be faulty in time, there would never be any everlasting valid statements in any branch of science. In different conjunctures, our theories are deemed to be falsified. In this sense, the main motive in his thinking through his life experience could be called as being open to criticism.

World War II also affected Popper's life and intellectual career. Like most of the other Jewish origin scholars, he fled from Austria to New Zealand. There, by the help of being away from the rest of the world, he wrote his major political piece: *The Open Society* (Popper, 1966), which he called as his "war effort". That piece condemned the "Closed Society" and tried to seek the roots of "Closed Society" from Ancient Greek to modernity. It could also be seen from this attitude that Karl

Popper even being away from the pains of World War II, he could not depart himself away from the events. Therefore, he wrote about an ideal of Open Society, far away from the place, which he wants to be more democratic or open.

3.4.2   Popper's Approach in Science: The Opposition to Induction

Popper in his book *The Logic of Scientific Discovery* (1965) opposed the positivist approach in science and its inductive logic. In inductive approach, a scientific research begins with individual observations in nature and the scientist goes to the conclusion by building a theory on observed events, occurring next to each other. Indeed, the scientist estimates a relationship between two events, according to individual observations. In consequence, the inductive approach consists first observing the events then creating a theory from those observations. Henceforth, the verification of the observed event is the significant factor of sciences; the theories are validated through verifying the observed events.

David Hume challenged this belief by arguing that even though we might perceive the two events, we don't have to perceive any necessary connection between the two. Popper, in parallel, criticized the inductive logic and argued that verification was not a sufficient criterion for a scientific study. He alternatively offered falsification or testability as the basic criteria. In other words:

> Popper wants to reject the widely held principle that inductive logic provides an adequate criterion for the differentiation of the empirical sciences from metaphysics or other forms of non-scientific knowledge... [arguing that]: there is no induction, because there is no way of deducing, universal theories from particular statements; all the numerous observations of white swans, for example, never logically justify the conclusion that all swans are white. Thus if we consider the objective, public, and therefore testable, aspect of a theory... then it becomes an object of discussion that can be criticized even before it is summoned for empirical testing (Corvi, 1997: 20).

His opposition to inductive logic is important in the sense of questioning the sciences' limits and scope. Therefore, by arguing that everything has to be tested in order to be validated, he is in opposition against scientific dogmatism. With regard to this, we see how ethical approach of Popper is intermingled with his scientific

views. He opposed conservatism and bureaucratic thinking in sciences. In this regard, some influences of Weber and Simmel are deducible in Popper's epistemology (Baudouin, 2003).

Popper's assessment of logical positivism and evaluation of inductive method was further developed in his analysis of metaphysics. Positivism was trying to censure all metaphysical aspects in knowledge by giving itself a priority in human knowledge. Popper argued against this point by stating that, metaphysics was unavoidable in sciences. Scientists are not machines; therefore subjectivism was involved in every part of the scientific research. By this argument, in a way he annihilated the dogmatic look to sciences. Although, Popper gave priority to scientific thinking, throughout his life he was always careful about its limits.

In summary, his criticism of inductive logic clearly showed that how he was aware of and careful about the limits and the scope of sciences:

> When we propose a theory or try to understand a theory, we also propose, or try to understand its logical implications; that is, all those statements which follow from it. But this, as we have just seen, is a hopeless task: there is infinity of unforeseeable nontrivial statements belonging to the informative content of any theory, and an exactly corresponding infinity of statements belonging to its logical content. We can therefore never know or understand all the implications of any theory or its full significance (Popper, 2002: 26).

3.4.3   Relating Popperian Scientific Methodology to the Open Society

Popper has a simple definition of two types of societies. One form is "Closed Society", which is a very common one in history. The second and ideal form of society is "Open Society" in which democracy is prevalent. Proper to his approach, the "Open Society" is one in which people are free to criticize and change the institutions of the society. That kind of freedom for Popper is beginning with the Ancient Greek. Open Society is a society, capable of dealing with problems and developing ideas. Indeed, life for Popper is a problem-solving process, as one of the titles of his translated works (Popper, 2005) in Turkish indicates; *Hayat Problem Çözmektir – Life is a Problem Solving Process.*

As mentioned above, his political ideals go very much in parallel with his scientific approach. Notturno (1999: 48) stated that, "Popper likened the principles of open society to the principles of scientific inquiry." For example, his critiques to positivist epistemology and inductive logic are very parallel with his thoughts on inductive logic and communal, bureaucratic thinking. According to Notturno:

> These two things – communalist thinking and inductive logic – are more closely related than one might think... It is only communalist thinking that gives the impression that the conclusion of an inductive argument is supported by its premises. This is because there is no contradiction whatever in asserting the premises of an inductive argument, and that are what Kierkegaard called 'a little leap'. This statement is said to be true and that one too. And this and that are often said to provide justification for a third that, quite simply, does not follow. And this is how little tyrannies begin. First inductivist takes a little leap and calls it "justified." And then, if nobody objects he takes a bigger leap and calls that "justified" too. In this way, he finally gets so good at leaping that all hell breaks loose… this kind of conservative thinking would not help the evolution of the human kind as a step to be furthered. He gave the example of the dangers of communalist thinking by Nazi's dismiss of the Einstein's theory as Jewish Physics"(Notturno, 1999: 48-49).

In addition to that, Popper offers and gives priority to a principle of testability of deductive logic in scientific enquiries, instead of inductive logic, to overcome scientific dogmatism. This point coincides with his idea of "Open Society" in which the criticism is free and encouraged (Popper, 1966). In this society, bureaucratization is argued to be avoided by a permanent evaluation of the institutions:

> The Popperian approach involves subjecting institutions to a permanently critical evaluation in order to monitor how well they are solving the problems they exist to solve and involves moreover a permanent willingness to change them in the light of changing requirements (Magee in, 1995: 266).

In parallel to that, Popper stated that:

> the best sense of 'reason' and 'reasonableness' was openness to criticism – readiness to be criticized, and eagerness to criticize oneself; and [I] tried to argue that this critical attitude of reasonableness should be extended as far as possible… Implicit in this attitude is the realization that we shall always have

to live in an imperfect society. This is not only because even very good people are very imperfect; not it is because obviously, we often make mistakes because we do not know enough. Even more important than either of these reasons is the fact that there always exist irresolvable clashes of values (Popper, 2002: 132).

However, this should not lead anyone to assume that Popper is a moral relativist, who supports the belief that all different knowledge types are equally valid:

> …the main argument of *The Open Society* is directed against the moral relativism. The fact that moral values or principles may clash does not invalidate them. Moral values or principles may be discovered, and even invented. They may be relevant to a certain situation, and irrelevant to other situations… But all this is quite distinct from moral relativism; that is from the doctrine that any set of values can be defended (Popper, 2002: 133).

The intention in Popperian theory to be inferred is to make people aware of their rational capacities and the need to organize their lives according to use and organize those capacities with the help of sciences. For him, sciences help people to overcome the obstacles, and science progresses through trial and error. Therefore, he places sciences to a privileged place in his epistemology and his critique against "Closed Society" is also emerging from that point of view. Closed Society, with its bureaucratic and hierarchical organization would not let people to criticize or test the validity of the institutions. By that way, "Closed Society" is an obstacle in front of the human progress, it makes things worse. Obviously, this society is not ruled according to scientific and democratic ways.

Although Popper gives importance to the trust in sciences, he also warns about the possibility of sciences turning into dogmatism. His critiques to the logical positivism of Vienna Circle and inductive logic emerge from this point. He asserts that a human mind can verify most of the theories, but that is not enough to make them scientific. On the contrary, like conspiracy theories they could turn out to become paranoid narratives. Henceforth, he argues that scientific knowledge is conjectural.

In other words, sciences are bound with the problems of their ages, and different circumstances would demand new solutions. In psychoanalytical terms, he accepts the castration of sciences as well as politics. As a result, in Popperian epistemology,

sciences and knowledge are aware of their limits and scopes, which at the same urge them to constantly test their hypothesis. For that reason, sciences can only be possible with criticism as well as Open Society can only exist in systematical evaluation of its institutions. In consequence, his parallel approach to sciences and democracy promoted a unified method, which is against unified, and essentialist explanations.

3.4.4 Putting Popper into Practice: Understanding the Relevance of Popper Today

Based on the arguments above, Popperian central epistemological approach to politics and sciences could be summarized in a few points.

1. Popper gives a central place in his epistemology to the human reason and rationality.
2. At the same time, Popper does not provide a hierarchical place to sciences and thus, his epistemology attempts to prevent bureaucratization and unnecessary hierarchy at all levels.
3. Popper abhors violence and hence; he refutes all violence against the "others".
4. Popper denies all the essentialist explanations and disregards them by arguing that real knowledge is contextual.
5. Popper unites his democratic approach with his scientific thinking. In other words, his democracy approach is also a scientific ideology.

These principles might acknowledge that Popper's intellectual stance as well as his life experience was against the essentialist, fundamentalist thinking. In that respect, Popper's stance might be at least counted as providing an important experience against all that could be associated with conspirative way of thinking.

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In Popper's articulation, the democratic thought and scientific approach go hand in hand. Therefore, an ideal of democracy is a task that could also be reached through applying or considering a value-free science. In contrast to these hopes, there lies the concept of hierarchy and the logic of bureaucracy. According to Popper, these are traps that both democracy and science could easily fall into.

After the fall of the state as the central and only power figure in society, a chance for differences for living together has emerged. This process also created different types of fundamentalist and racist reactionary ideologies, which try to promote these new ways of hierarchies for their own favor. In this regard, remembering Popperian thought becomes important as it stands against any sorts of hierarchies in society and sciences.

Moreover, the idea of "Open Society" contradicts the society that conspiracy theories describe. Conspiracy theories talk about a hostile, deeply fragmented and hierarchical society and present this as a normal form. Popperian approach and ideal society is an attempt against these aspects of societies. In addition to that, Popperian pacifism and his abhorrence to violence could also be counted as another aspect, which contradicts his thought to the logic of conspiracy theories. As mentioned before, conspiracy theories seem to agitate masses towards violent tasks and they carry a tendency to urge people towards sharp ends.

While talking about Popperian stance, his view of knowledge also becomes a central task. As mentioned above, all knowledge is deemed to be falsified for him. In this sense, Popperian approach is in direct contrast with the logic of conspiracy theories. Since, conspiracy theories are narratives, which argue to have certain knowledge about the events. In other words, conspiracy theories are essentialist narratives. Therefore, while Popperian approach is very careful about the limits of knowledge, conspiracy theories are built on a negligence of this peculiarity.

In summary, this thesis proposes that Popperian thought could provide a base on which new discussions on establishing democracy and freethinking could be made. In the end, he trusts human reason and at the same time does not give hierarchical place to it. By that way, he closes the ways where secularized mythologies or quasi-religious narratives like conspiracy theories could be written. In that sense, Popper's epistemology is an effort against conspirative way of thinking.

In other words, instead of giving a detailed analysis of what Popper might offer or how he might think about conspiracy theories this thesis attempted to analyze the background of his thought. Since, his epistemological arguments seemed to offer an alternative way on which a conspiracy theory free sciences and politics might be built. As a result, the main components of Popperian thought was articulated to show an alternative basis over which further discussions on conspiracy theories might be dwelt.

3.5 Concluding Remarks

The first task of this chapter was to understand what sorts of changes in contemporary societies affected or lead the popularity of conspiracy theories. Towards this end, affects and/or results of the decentralization of the modern society, pluralization of identities in public space, individualization and consumerism has been elaborated.

This chapter additionally has mentioned and explained Karl Popper's biography and stance to deeply analyze the reasons of conspiracy theories as well as hoping to find or at least to discuss possible solutions. It is shown that his attitude towards essentialism, violence and fundamentalist ideologies reflect a solid base, which should be and actually is taken as a solid base for contemporary discussions of conspiracy theories.

In accordance with Popperian deductive approach, there will be two different discussions in next chapter, which aims to test the general hypothesis of this thesis.

Firstly, I intend to discuss Turkish transformation after 1980 and its relationships with the popularity of conspirative way of thinking. By that way, I will be testing the general hypothesis of my thesis in a specific locale. In addition to and as a part of that, I will be analyzing a popular conspiracy theory book in Turkey. Besides, results of a research attempting to measure the relationship between the level of feeling of security, anomie and the belief in conspiracy theories, will be outlined as an appendix. Contemporary societies' instability and individualization affects were conceptualized among the reasons of popularity of conspiracy theories. Therefore, the results of the survey might be a first attempt to test this part of the hypothesis.

CHAPTER IV

TESTING THE HYPOTHESIS: THE TURKISH CASE

4.1 Introduction

As it could be seen from the examples of the popularity of the television series of *Kurtlar Vadisi - The Valley of Wolfs*, *Deliyürek – The MadHeart* and the books of Soner Yalçın, such as *Efendi: Beyaz Türklerin Büyük Sırrı – The Master: Big Secret of White Turks* (2004), *Mr. Pipe- Bay Pipo* (2004) and, Yalçın Küçük's *Şebeke-Network* (2004), in contemporary Turkish society the conspiracy theories constitute a big and important sector of the media market[2]. In that sense, it is important to understand and conceptualize the main reasons behind this commonness. The issue of conspiracy theory and the threats it poses has currently become a crucial issue and therefore, some discussions on this subject have already been started in Turkey too (Polat, 2004; Bali, 2004; Bozarslan, 2004; Özdoğan, 2004).

In this chapter, the issue of understanding the popularity of conspiracy theories in Turkey will be dwelt upon. In order to do that, the reasons outlined as responsible from the conspirative way of thinking in the second chapter will be tested in Turkish case[3]. In other words, how would the theory of this thesis fit the Turkish case is the central theme of this part.

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[2] There is even one work, which makes fun of those popular conspiracy theories (Erdem, 2004).

[3] I have applied a survey to understand the conspirational thinking in Turkey. I will give the results and the discussion of this survey as Appendix II. This survey is conducted to understand or test the relations between the level of anomie, feeling of insecurity and the level of belief in conspiracy theories. The results of this study will be briefly discussed to test the validity of the hypothesis in previous chapters. This methodological choice is in accordance with and inspired by Popperian deductive logic. In the end, it is hoped to find or validate the characteristics, which are thought as responsible from the popularity of conspiracy theories in Turkish case.

In order to achieve this, the first task will be discussing the Turkish transformation during the 1980s. While doing this, a special emphasis will be given upon whether we could read similar symptoms mentioned in the second chapter in Turkish transition or not. The section also uses Karl Polanyi's analysis in *The Great Transformation* (2002) in exploring the Turkish transformation. This attitude will be helpful to understand the relevance of Turkish transformation with the logic of conspiracy theories.

Afterwards, in the second section, this chapter intends to focus on one of the very well known conspiracy theories in contemporary Turkey. It will take Soner Yalçın's[4] *Efendi: Beyaz Türklerin Büyük Sırrı – The Master: Big Secret of White Turks* (2004) into consideration. The major aim here is to understand a Turkish conspiracy text and discuss the methodological, ideological and textual similarities it shares with the others.

Before going into detail, it should be stated that this thesis is not an effort in the discipline of history. Henceforth, the main concentration would be upon the methodological inconsistencies and the characteristics that the book shares with global conspiracy theories. In other words, I will not try to refute the historical analysis of the author of the book with historical data; instead, the main intention is to analyze a conspiracy approach in contemporary Turkey.

4.2 The Major Parameters of the Political Transformation in Turkey during the 1980s

The discussion on the transformation of Turkey during 1980s will be mainly discussed on two levels, economic and cultural. Then a brief discussion of Polanyi's perspective will be presented to promote a deeper understanding of the case.

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[4] Soner Yalçın is a famous journalist nowadays in Turkey. He makes TV programmes such as 5N1K and also an advisor to the well-known series *Kurtlar Vadisi - The Valley of Wolfs*. He is the writer and co-writer of seven books; (Yalçın, 2004: 2003: 2001: 1999: 1996), (Yalçın and Yurdakul, 2003), (Birand and Yalçın, 2001).

4.2.1 The Economic and Political Change

In 1980s, Turkey thanks to the neo-liberal government policies opened its economy more to the world. Like in other neo-liberalizing countries, Turkey downsized the state functions and power in economy and opened its market to the world. Akçay (1997: 282) claimed that, a restructuring of the state after 1980 in the direction of market economy is among one of the main reasons of the Turkish transformation.

These policies have economically opened Turkey to the global flows of international capital. Henceforth, similar economic structures and new classes that are widespread on global level are begun to be seen in Turkey too. In Keyder's words as a result of economic transformation:

> A new breed of entrepreneurs emerged who had to compete in globalized markets, and indexed their behavior to commercial and consumer signals rather than bureaucratic decisions; hence their dependence on policy was less direct… [Moreover] 1980s saw the emergence of new sectors, new markets, new forms of labor organization and new geographies. Exports increased from $3 billion in 1980 to $13 billion in 1990 and to $50 billion in 2003 (Keyder, 2004: 66).

Moreover, cooperating more with the global economy led Turkey to experience the universal problems caused by the falling of the welfare state. While a new professional class in global qualities has emerged, the growing number of underclass and the increasing level of poverty of the average man have also become a common fact. In other words, one part of society was adopting the white-collar values and their consumption patterns and the remaining majority became relatively poorer. In consequence, both the ideology of consumerism and expanding underclass became more apparent in Turkey after 1980.

In addition to that, the decreasing power of the state is also summarized briefly in Akçay:

> The main transformation in Turkey, thus, was the international conjecture. As the semi-closed economy of the country began to open, inevitable changes, in the society at large as well as in its political and everyday ideology, began to occur. Meanwhile, the center was powerful and confident enough (after sixty years of domination) to redefine its basic references, which actually, proved unnecessary under the present circumstances. Furthermore, these turned out to be obstacles to efforts to restructure the system in accordance with the conditions required on the global scale (Akçay, 1997: 282).

To sum up, with the increasing speed of neo-liberalization and decreasing welfare functions of the state, Turkish transformation during the 1980s shows similar traits with the global level of transformation. In this sense, general symptoms of the neo-liberal globalization were more apparent in Turkey after 1980.

4.2.2 The Cultural Change

The transformation in the political and economic arenas on macro levels has also resulted in a transition on the cultural level. Therefore, one of the most popular tasks in social sciences in Turkey have become discussing the cultural consequences of the neo-liberal transformation during 1980s (Kozanoğlu, 1995, 2000, 2001; Bali, 2002; Oktay, 1994).

The pluralization of the identities in public space was a remarkable aspect of the cultural transformation in Turkey. As Gürbilek (1992) has stated; different identities have begun to exist in public space with their authentic voices. In other words, Turkish public space during the 1980s began to consist of a more multicultural environment compared to its past. In this context, the ideologically legitimate stance, which was once only occupied by the central state ideology, has been opened to different and previously repressed identities. Akçay has summarized this transition as:

Thus for the first time in its history, the Republic 'allowed', although reluctantly, its citizens to express themselves from various points of view, with a critical and oppositional color. Marginal groups ranging from ecologists to feminists, from human rights activists to gays and lesbians, from anti-militarist movements to Alevilik (another branch of Islam repressed by Sunni branch) began to have a legitimate voice in public and criticized the bases upon which the Republic had been founded (Akçay, 1997: 282-283).

This relatively democratic approach in turn caused a nationalist resistance. The freedom for the previously repressed groups/minorities has awakened the psychological defense mechanisms of the majorities. For example, when Islamic identity, one of those repressed ones by secular state ideology, has gained enough support to win the elections with nearly 20% of votes, the term "silent majority" has been introduced in Turkish political culture. This concept was used for implying that; there is a majority of people who are happy to stay secular in Turkey. Another implication of this concept was, with the results of that election this majority is silenced by an Islamic minority. Therefore, this concept was a mean for threatening the "other" or "outsider" identity to the state ideology. As a result, this term could be counted as one of the very clear-cut symptoms of the dissatisfaction from and reaction to pluralization of identities.

Jenny White (2000) also gave more examples on those reactions, jokes and phrases after that election. For instance, she mentioned that those jokes were about the possible reinforcements on women who did not wear according to Islamic codes or to people who do not live in accordance with Islamic life-style. Besides, these types of jokes were results of an unknown horror fantasies and found a correspondence in the statements of Hayri Kozakçıoğlu the republican mayor of those times. He said that he would not anyone to disturb the everyday life of Istanbul dwellers.

This new pluralization/polarization and reactionary stance in public space was effectively used by nationalist parties and extremist ideologies. Hakan Yavuz has explained the nationalist party's (MHP) success right after the leadership of an Islamic oriented party, according to these parameters. He stated that:

I believe that the MHP's rising status is an outcome of three complementary processes. First, the neo-liberal economic policies of the early 1980s generated the transformation of new opportunity spaces in media, education, politics, and market. Second, these opportunity spaces, in turn, empowered ethnic and religious groups to demand recognition and reconfiguration of the state ideology. Third, the state establishment, mainly the military and civilian bureaucracy, reacted to these identity claims as security threats, and the secularization of Kurdish and Islamic identity claims further politicized the society. In effect, the MHP was able to benefit from an emerging socio-cultural polarization that primarily is along an ethnic (Kurdish vs. Turkish) and religious (Alevi Islam vs. Sunni Islam) axis (Yavuz, 2002: 200).

Moreover, the flag incident in 2005 could be taken as another important symptom of this process. In one of the celebrations, which was associated with the Kurdish population, a Turkish flag was assaulted by two teenage kids[5]. The reactions to this event were massive; some nationalist demonstrations has been planned and in most of them violence has occurred towards Kurdish and leftist people who are seen as threats. Moreover, for about a month most of the population has demonstrated their respect to and belief in Turkish flag by raising it in their balconies.

Such examples might be counted as an example of the existence of a nationalist reactionary side against the transformations in contemporary Turkey. This stance is not happy with the new rights given to the minorities and willing to mobilize masses in times of crisis. In that respect, the reactionary movements also need and use conspirative way of thinking, to agitate masses.

This point seems to be in parallel line with the contemporary transformations, which were related to the success of conspiracy theories. In Turkey the transition as well as creating a more multi-cultural environment has increased class inequalities. That eventually led to a nationalist reactionary side against the major changes in the society. Henceforth, it can be argued that these ideologies like their counterparts on global level, made use of conspirative way of thinking. In consequence, it seems fair to argue that contemporary changes in Turkey have created a suitable environment for conspiracy theories.

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[5] For more information on this issue, the following websites can be visited (http://www.cnnturk.com.tr/HABER/haber_detay.asp?PID=318&HID=1&haberID=116294; http://www.radikal.com.tr/haber.php?haberno=147394).

In summary, the relative democratization in Turkey, especially within the process of becoming a European Union candidate, has created negative reactionary tendencies, some of which are mentioned as reasons of conspiracy theories in the second chapter. A discussion that would aid from Polanyi's approach would better clarify this point.

4.2.3 Remarks on the Relationship between Turkish Transformation and the Popularity of Conspiracy Theories: The Great Transformation

Karl Polanyi's perspective, in his major contribution *The Great Transformation* (2002) seems to be helpful in conceptualizing and better analyzing the transformation in Turkey during 1980s and its affects on conspirative way of thinking. To do this firstly some of the main aspects of his thought will be shortly touched.

Polanyi states that the major distinction of capitalist economy from its predecessors lies in the concept of the "market economy". This concept refers not to a society with a market, because in the end most of the societies had some form of market. Rather, Polanyi meant that the market society is the society in which the market mechanism is the main institution of the society. In other words, it represents a society working according to the interests of the market. Besides, the market society became a reality only when the land, labor and money become commodities.

A society dominated by the market for Polanyi is a not a healthy and natural system. In parallel, he rejected the widespread idea that an invisible hand, as a myth, governs society and economy. Thus Polanyi claims that the market cannot be the central organization in the society, since this will cause a chaotic and instable environment. In this perspective, ideologies like socialism and fascism are results of the problems created by market domination over the society. They are reactionary movements and therefore the symptoms of the problems of the market society.

Following the same line of thought, Polanyi argues that societies vacillate between unregulated market/liberalism and reactionary movements such as fascism. For him the ideal situation should be searched in between these two opposite poles. Therefore, by giving Great Depression-World War II relationship as an example, he claims that capitalist market economy and market freedoms bound to create reactions. He mentions this tension as creating double movement [fascism-market dominancy], which is a result of institutionalizing an unnatural institution, the market.

Taking Polanyi's basic theory into consideration, it seems possible to argue that contemporary neo-liberal transformation creates similar resistances on global and local levels. A double movement of the two opposite sides emerges: the globalization on one hand and fundamentalism or fascism on the other, which seem to be the opposite sides of the same coin.

In the same line of thought, Turkish transformation during the 1980s, which affected important amounts of people, has created a suitable conjuncture for a double movement. People who felt uncomfortable with the ongoing changes in the society became vulnerable for fascist or fundamentalist agitation and so similar reactionary resistances, which contribute the popularity of conspiracy theories were seen in Turkish neo-liberal transformation. In other words, Turkey's transformation during 1980s has created an unhappy multitude, which is today attracted by conspirational thinking. The degradation of small shopkeepers against big markets could be counted as an example to that process.

In consequence, Turkish transformation as a part of globalization reveals a similar cultural/political/economic environment. Therefore, its economic instabilities and inequalities create masses, which are vulnerable for agitation. In that context, conspiracy theories fill the need to explain the negative conditions and by especially that trait it becomes a popular phenomenon. As a result, in Polanyi's theory conspiracy theories represent the fascist side of the double movement.

4.3 The Summary of the Book *Efendi - The Master*

In his book Soner Yalçın basically discusses the importance of Sabbataianism[6] and/or Sabbataian people in Turkish political history. He mainly tries to argue that Sabbataianism and/or Sabbataian people played an important role in Turkish politics. Yalçın argues that the normal history books do not cover this fact and denies facing the reality of Sabbataianism in Turkish politics. In that sense, the aim of the book seems to prove and show this unseen but crucial role of this minority in Turkey.

To achieve this aim, the author starts his discussion from the 19th century Ottoman Empire. He firstly talks about the big city Izmir and the most powerful families living there. Then the reader meets the family of Evliyazades along with the Usakizade family, since, as we see throughout the book, the members of these families tend to get married within the group [Sabbataians]. The main reason for these intra-marriages among Sabbataians was argued to be their religious orientation.

After talking about the descents of Sabbataianism and the Evliyazade family, Yalçın begins discussing the politics of the late Ottoman period and the important people from Evliyazade's affecting the political destiny of those times. He begins with Dr. Nazım, who is a member of the *Ittihat ve Terakki Cemiyeti* (Party of Union and Progress) and plays important roles for the party. He is not originally from the Evliyazade family but later he will be a groom to the family.

During the fall of the Ottoman Empire, Dr. Nazım was narrated, like the other fellows from the *Ittihat ve Terakki Cemiyeti*, as an idealist patriot who does not hesitate to put his life into danger for his country. Dr. Nazım's story was told till the end of his political career, when he was hanged by the Kemalist regime. But then, the book focuses more on the major political changes and the World War I, especially, two other politician members of the Evliyazade family, Ali Adnan

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[6] Sabbataianism is an un-orthodox sect of Judaism.

Menderes and Fatin Rüşdü Zorlu. Ali Adnan Menderes was the prime minister from the Democrat Party between 1950-1960 and Fatin Rüşdü Zorlu had important bureaucratic and political positions during his leadership. Like Dr. Nazım, these political figures were hanged too.

In summary, the book narrates the political life in Turkey roughly from 1800s to the mid 1950s with respect to the Evliyazade family. In these terms, the book flows more like a piece of literature or a diary rather than an academic work belonging to the field of history. Trying to detect the effects of a particular family and the Sabbataians in general on the political history of Turkish republic, gives the sense of a detective work to the book. The author, while trying to establish necessary relations between several people, investigates family trees like a detective. He also looks for some hidden causes and not clarified facts; in that sense the book sometimes gives the taste of Sherlock Holmes adventures (Doyle, 1893) to the reader.

Last not but not the least of all, the major theme of the book suggests that normal people living in Turkey would not know the roots or the origins of people who governs them. For the author, this unknown origin is Sabbataianism and the Turkish politics were shaped to an important extent by Sabbataian families. Yalçın grounds his ideas to the fact that during the fall of the Ottoman Empire, one of the centers of the opposition had come from Selanik[7] and the percentage of the Jewish and Sabbataian populations living there was very high. In that respect, some of the leaders of the Turkish Republic have come from there with Sabbataian origins. In this regard, the author wakes the feeling of illumination and deconstruction of a hidden mystery; Sabbataians have governed and/or are governing us.

The writer even involves into implying silently that the founding father of Turkish Republic Kemal Atatürk was also a Sabbataian (Yalçın, 2004: 298). He generally tries to show how those people from Selanik marry among each other, he complains or he underlines the fact that they have a very high rate of intra-marriages among the

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[7] Now in Greece and called Thessaloniki.

group. At the end, this book is an attempt towards deciphering the origins of the ruling elite in Turkey.

4.3.1 Is this a Conspiracy Theory?

This thesis argues that Soner Yalçın's book *Efendi* is a conspiracy theory. If we are to remember the definitions of the term and the discussion about these theories, *Efendi* seems to be a kind of conspiracy theory. Before going into details of how, I should also warn that in the book the writer tries to name some other works as conspiracy theories and changes his tone in the end. In other words, the author seems to be aware about the fact that this piece could be termed as a conspiracy theory. As a conclusion, he says (Yalçın, 2004: 566) that "Sabbataianism is a reality in Turkey and the history cannot be written by denying it." However this attempt is not sufficient to label this book as an unorthodox history work.

In addition to that, the author's similar attitude of doing but denying could be seen in other sections. For example the author irrelevantly jumps into the private lives of individuals but he also denies it by claiming that he would not aim to penetrate into private lives (Yalçın, 2004: 471).

In the first chapter of this thesis, conspiracy theories were defined as unorthodox attempts to explain unclear points of historical phenomena. *Efendi*'s intention to narrate the Sabbataian affects in Turkish political history seems to be fitting to the definition. Moreover, like most of the conspiracy theories the book includes important amount of essentialism. The most obvious manifestation of this could be found in the deterministic approach towards kinship relations. Although, the writer also showed evidences for some disagreements and hostilities among Sabbataian people individually, he also infers that Sabbataians are a united focal point of power. In other words, people might be related to each other religiously or ethnically but showing this as a hidden fact and targeting a group of people, who sometimes acted even against each other, is a subject of conspiracy theories.

In summary, as mentioned above, the book's attempt to find secret paths and its essentialism could be counted as a proof of its conspirational tendency. Moreover, the book simplifies the complex historical structure of Turkish politics to a simple conspiracy or to a family history. In this regard, it also shares the methodological characteristics of conspiracy theories.

4.3.2 How Does *Efendi* Work?

As was mentioned in the first chapter, conspiracy theories have hierarchical pyramid structures. In this context, I defined three major strata in the working of conspiracy theories: dupes/pawns, middlemen, elites. A similar hierarchical structure could be seen in *Efendi* too. Sabbataians seems to be the elite of the Turkish politics; people and families around them are the middlemen; and normal citizens who do not know anything about Sabbataianism and their powers are the dupes or pawns in this picture.

The book presents Sabbataians as the hidden ruling elite of Turkey and therefore it includes a hierarchical structure along with an anti-Semitic stance. For example, the name of the book means two different things in Turkish: firstly it means sir and the writer claimed that Sabbataian people are called as "Efendi or Sir"; secondly it means master. The name of the book implies both of these meanings, because the subheading of the book is "the hidden history of the White Turks[8]". Therefore, Sabbataians, especially the Evliyazade family, is reflected as the elites of the Turkish politics.

Besides, at the back cover of the book the writer asks questions such questions: do you have a relative who became a vice-president of a big football club or do you have a relative who was a prime minister? By these questions, the difference between the reader, who was supposed to be a descent citizen and his or her "masters" are underlined. In this sense, there is a hierarchical relationship among

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[8] White Turks is a concept, which is firstly used by Ufuk Güldemir (1992) to imply the ruling elite of Turkey.

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people, between their master and themselves. The reader and any other people in this case could be classified in the dupes or pawns class.

However, there is not an ideal middlemen class, since the book attempts to emphasize on the differences between the Sabbataian families and normal people. Even though, some rich families around Evliyazade family or Sabbataians could be categorized as the middle strata of the story, there seems to be a hierarchical structure in *Efendi*, like in the other conspiracy theories.

4.3.3 The Psychology of Efendi

It might be remembered that in the first chapter of the thesis, the psychological characteristics of conspiracy theories were sorted into two different themes: human weaknesses mentioned by conspiracy theories and human psychological characteristics, which lead people to believe in conspiracy theories. When we look at *Efendi* from this perspective, the following arguments could be made.

Firstly, the psychological weaknesses, which were mentioned in the first chapter, are not clearly deducible in *Efendi*. As we mentioned, conspiracy theories pose three kind of hierarchical psychological moods: Dupes, dangerous others and rulers. However, as we have told above, the book has a hierarchical structure in itself. Therefore, even though people were not specifically mentioned with their psychological characteristics, the hierarchical structure at least infers such a thing. Besides, private lives and psychological weaknesses have important places in the book. In that sense, while we cannot directly see a caste system according to psychological traits, the reader can at least sense it.

When we come to the psychological mood that *Efendi* poses, we could see important paranoid-schizoid tendencies. To start with, as a conspiracy theory the book offers to demystify something that is very important, yet hidden for our political history. In that sense, its aim in the first instance is to provoke the idea that there is a crucial

knowledge of things that normal people are not allowed to have an access to. Henceforth, the idea behind the book infers a paranoid mood.

Besides, in individual cases we can also find individual paranoid approaches throughout the text. Hacı Ali Paşa's reaction to the demand of Ibrahim Edhem, who wants to marry with his ill daughter is an example. There might be very different reasons for this situation but the writer (Yalçın, 2004: 191) claims that there is in fact only one real reason:

> Today, as was yesterday, people believe that marriage would solve the illness of the young women therefore, Hacı Ali Paşa had to have a different reason to refuse the marriage demand of the Ibrahim Edhem.

Here, the attitude seems to be a clear one, the writer uses his reason and seeks a different reason behind the decline of the marriage offer.

In another circumstance, the author talks about another man who borrowed money from Sionists (Yalçın, 2004: 105). The man's name is mister Ahmed Reşid Rey, the writer warns that Rey means "the King" in Spanish and says no more. However, there he alluded that Ahmed Reşid's surname is coming from an Ashkenazi[9] background. Since, Ashkenazis were speaking in Ladino, which is a Jewish usage of Spanish. In other words, from two different events, Yalçın infers a relationship. In a similar fashion, he mentions about a minister of coordination, Sebati Ataman. In a footnote related to the name, he states that:

> It is not really related with the subject but I just remembered! Gersom Scholem in his book, Messiah or a fake Prophet, in 1971 has written that the name of Sabetay Sevi[10] as 'Sabatai Sevi'.

Therefore, Yalçın refers that Sebati Ataman might be a Sabbataian and therefore a minister in the cabinet of Adnan Menderes, who was also seen as a member of that religious group. The message becomes again clear at that moment, many members

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[9] Ashkenazi Jews are the ones, who were the Jewish communities of Europe, established between the 10th and 19th centuries.

[10] Sabbatai Zevi is the religious leader and the founder of Sabbataianism.

of the ruling class are Sabbataians and they back each other. However, this tendency is a paranoid one, Sebati is a name, which also comes from the Turkish word "Sebat-Perseverance". In that sense, there might be other possibilities for the name, but the writer chooses to focus only one and seems to be sure about the idea that we do not know who really governs us.

Lastly, about Dr. Resid Galib he states that: "Missionary is not an unfamiliar feeling for Dr. Resid Galib. [Since] He was educated at Israelite Universelle in his birth place Rhodes" (Yalçın, 352). Dr. Resid Galib might be a missionary and he even might become one during his education. However, the writer's attitude towards an education institute is paranoid. This school might be a missionary school and Dr. Resid Galib might not be unfamiliar to the concept but here the writer argues that it is a shared feeling at the institution. In other words, it cannot be an unfamiliar feeling to him, because everybody there should feel the same.

As was told earlier, the book in general is built on the basic paranoid idea that we do not know the true knowledge about the people at the top. Therefore, it seems possible to argue that the book includes a certain degree of paranoid look.

4.3.4 The Methodology of *Efendi*

In the previous parts of this thesis, unified explanations, easy to learn narratives, errant data, and powerful enemy in control were mentioned as some of the important characteristics of the methodology of conspiracy theories. In this section, this thesis intends to discuss how *Efendi* would fit into this scheme.

One of the shared methodological characteristics of conspiracy theories is that, they provide simple and unified explanations to the existing phenomena. In the case of *Efendi*, this attitude is very apparent. As mentioned above, *Efendi* is a narrative about more than one hundred years of Turkish politics, and it simplifies the complex relationships to family relationships or to a Sabbataian conspiracy. Therefore, it

could be said that the narrative in a sense explains what is really going on in Turkish politics by only one variable, which is the religious background of Sabbataianism.

However, this should not go too far to say that the author explains everything only with one factor. Instead, he tries to fit the family relationships and religious peculiarities of Sabbataianism to everywhere that might be related. Thus, while he does not exactly explain the complex phenomena with one variable, he attempts to describe Turkish politics from family relationships as much as possible. In other words, he pushes the limits. In the end, the reader gets a unified text about Turkish politics, which is supposed to be shaped by the hidden hand of Sabbataianism.

As mentioned before, while doing this, the writer claims that both the Sabbataian people match within the group and they have the key positions in the government. The author usually complains about "some key positions" that are transferred "from fathers to sons" (Yalçın, 2004: 462), or the "coincidence" that "some families always bring up politicians" (Yalçın, 2004: 409). In that sense, the book is an attempt to have a unified understanding of Turkish politics.

Another outcome of this monolithic understanding is the simplification of the historical phenomena. The other variables, which might be affective in the course of events, are hardly mentioned in the book. Actually, if one takes the Sabbataian arguments out of the text, the other variables are mentioned as much as a high-school history book. For example, deterioration of the Ottoman Empire was partly explained as the fault of women in high-school history books in Turkey. That perspective states that women interfered into the palace politics. In a parallel line, the writer infers that some of the women of the Evliyazade family have interfered into the politics. Fatin Rüşdü Zorlu, who was hanged after the army intervention in 1960, had tried to get out of the politics before the coup (Yalçın, 2004: 483-484). However, "At that point, the women of Evliyazade interfered… and the women won, Fatin Rüşdü Zorlu did not continue his work as a consular." Obviously, in the end Fatin Rüşdü Zorlu was hanged, therefore, the victory of women has ended in a catastrophe. There, the reader could sense an antipathy against women's affiliation

in politics. In this regard, it repeats the same masculine explanation in the high-school curriculum.

This simplification that I tried to demonstrate with an example is very effective throughout the book. The author additionally explains the course of events like a literary piece of work. In that sense, the book is like a fascinating story. It may be the reason of its high level of sales.

On the other hand, this also creates what we earlier called "the errant data" (Keeley, 1999) or "degenerating research program" (Clarke, 2002). The author tries to push politics to be reduced to the family business. In this regard, some of the missing points of the story seem to be "made up" by the author own reasoning. Take the following example into consideration:

> The question without an answer: Dr. Aras, Makbule and the 'fellow wife' lived twenty five years together. Dr. Aras, who strongly opposed to the divorce of his daughter from his groom, acted in the same manner in his marriage. He married with Bahire [the fellow wife] only after the death of Makbule! So why didn't he divorce Makbule and marry Bahire years before? Why is it so difficult for them? They grew up in a culture like Ottomans, in which divorce is between the lips of the man! I always say; the divorces and marriages in the Evliyazade family are very hard to understand! (Yalçın, 2004: 519)

In this piece, the writer's intention to explain everything and try to connect the missing parts is available. He also puts his reasoning to complete the picture. First of all, he takes a personal issue into consideration and reaches a general conclusion about the whole family. Secondly, he also neglects all of the possible other reasons that Dr. Aras might have had to keep his marriage. Thirdly, he uses a very well known orientalist cliché about the Ottoman Empire and the easiness of divorce, to prove his point. In the end, as this thesis tries to argue, he dares to use his subjective reasoning to fill the empty spaces in his story.

Another example could be seen in the following passage: "Why did the Menderes family give the name of Mutlu-Happy to their children? Is it because of the fact that

it means the same thing with 'Sevin-Be Happy!'?" (Yalçın, 2004: 374). Here he makes yet another guess.

In another page, the author again tries to reach certain conclusions rather quickly:

> Is there a relationship between the reasons of the following; İbrahim Müteferrika and Humbaracı Ahmed Paşa's cemetery are in the Mevlevihane of Galata and the first masonry lodge is in Galata? Let's ask without any hesitation: in other words how would the Mevlevis and Masons were related?... We know that who first brought the press to Ottomans; mason İbrahim Müteferrika. Do you know when this happened: during the grand vizierate of the first mason Mehmed Saim Paşa! 'Aristoteles logic': in this case the people who brought the press to Ottomans have discussed this issue in the Galata masonry lodge! (Yalçın, 2004: 83)

In summary, as these different examples suggest, the writer seems to fill the empty parts of the story by his own logic and terms it Aristotelian. This also points to the essentialist approach of the writer to history. There are no lacking points, complexities and black holes in this narrative. He asks the following question: "Is it a coincidence that the 'the centre of the nerve system' of the state is controlled by some families?" (Yalçın, 2004: 138). The answer to this question seems to be clear.

Powerful enemy in control is also among one of the main symptoms of the conspiracy theories. In *Efendi*, Sabbataian people actually were not represented as bad people or they are not held responsible from the bad conditions. In this regard, the narrative is an unorthodox story about Turkish politics, although Sabbataianism could be argued to be indirectly pointed by the author.

As mentioned above, *Efendi* also means the master, and the writer accepts the Sabbataian people as "White Turks". In other words, the Sabbataian people were seen as the upper classes and alien people and the author sounds dissatisfied with this. That tension is very clear in his discussion about the bourgeoisie in the early years of Turkish Republic. Yalçın (2004: 228- 229) generally states that during the process of the evolution from the Ottoman Empire to the Turkish Republic, some of the minorities have lost their prestigious economic positions, since the state

attempted to create a loyal, national bourgeoisie. During this process, even though there were people who were idealistically contributing for the establishment of modern Turkey, the economic subsidies have gone mostly to Jews and some Sabbataians. In this case, the author concludes that the state unequally favored the Jews and Sabbataians.

This sort of attitude is also seen on the back cover of the book, where the writer asks to the readers whether they have relatives as important as Evliyazades and replies that the Evliyazade family or the Sabbataians do have such important relatives. In consequence, the writer sounds to be highly concerned by the amount of successful members of the Evliyazade family and the Sabbataians, and so he wrote his book to reveal this "hidden" fact. This also seems purposeful: to create a hostile attitude on the part of the reader to the Evliyazades and/or Sabbataians. The writer also removes the barriers between Jews and Sabbataians and therefore leads a sort of anti-Semitic attitude.

Lastly, as mentioned above, the book gives the sense of a detective investigation to find the criminals. Therefore, it has an intrinsic accusation to Sabbataians. To sum up the discussion about the methodology of *Efendi*, it can be argued that the book reflects most of the typical characteristics of conspiracy theories.

4.4 Concluding Remarks

As a last word, the author of *Efendi* states the following: "The conclusion: Sabbataism is our reality, we cannot write history by denying that" (Yalçın, 2004: 566). As I mentioned above, the main emphasis of *Efendi* is how a family (Evliyazades) or a religious sect (Sabbataism) could be that effective in Turkish politics. In the concluding sentence of the book, the writer tries to ease the tension, although, this is not be enough to consider the book as an objective and academic piece of work.

The basic idea behind the author's claim is that the Sabbatains get married within the group. Therefore, the elite positions in politics and other endeavors are secured among the Sabbataians. While the writer did not serve enough proof for that, it is also a well-known fact that people with the same class, ethnic and religious backgrounds are more likely to get married. In this case, Selanik was one of the important capitals where the idealists met to constitute Turkish Republic. Some, even most of those idealists might be originally Sabbataians and as a result, some of them might be in the high places of the early republic. In other words, if Tirana in Albania were the centre of the nationalist opposition, the book might be about Albanian-originated politicians.

These kinds of explanations also seem possible, but the writer chooses a conspirational one. One important thing is that he brings his analysis well into the 1960s. After that date, we do not know how many people exist at the high levels of Turkish politics. They may have been decreased in numbers or vice versa. In conclusion, it could be said that *Efendi* is a typical example of conspiracy theories in contemporary Turkey.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

This thesis has been prepared with the intention of understanding the contemporary popularity of conspiracy theories. It has mainly tried to emphasize that the contemporary society is structured with rapid transformations. In other words, the contemporary conjuncture seems to be quite suitable to the Marxist phrase used by Berman (1982) as a title of his book *All the Solid Melts into Air*.

Today's rapid transformation has created negative consequences or traumas, such as the feeling of panic, insecurity and paranoia among the people. Kroker (2000: 7) stated that: "Panic is the key psychological mood of postmodern culture." Conspiracy theories as a paranoid world-view contributing to and aiding from panic feeling and insecurity, are becoming popular texts in this context. Therefore, this study argues that conspiracy theories have become popular in the ongoing trauma caused by the transformation in contemporary society.

In an environment of constant risk, instability and fast changes, conspiracy theories are successful in providing easy answers and cognitive short cuts to the complex issues. Thus it seems fair to argue that, because of their methodological peculiarities, conspiracy theories fulfilled a particular need created by contemporary transformations.

However, it should also be added that the methodological peculiarities of conspiracy theories are not tools for healing the sense of panic, insecurity or xenophobia in society. As discussed before, they have heightened tensions and hostilities. Besides, their short-cut solutions to the complex phenomena have also intensified the level of hatred and mistrust about the "others". Taking these into consideration, it might be

argued that conspiracy theories have served as communication means for fundamentalist and extremist ideologies.

From another perspective, conspiracy theories also represent an anti-scientific world-view, in the sense that, they provide or even dictate alternative explanations to the social scientific approaches. Therefore, their commonness marks a crisis in the modern sciences. Henceforth, conspiracy theories were presented as examples of anti-democratic and anti-scientific thinking during this thesis. Karl Popper was introduced with the hope of providing valuable grounds for discussions about this crisis. In other words, Popper's parallel stance in sciences and politics was mentioned to provide a deeper and an outsider analysis on the subject of conspiracy theories.

Some of the important points of Popperian contribution to the discussion might be shortly outlined as follows: firstly, it gives a non-hierarchical but crucial or central place to the reason and rationality. In other words, Popper sees scientific look as the central task in peoples' life. At the same time, he does not give a bureaucratic and hierarchical place to sciences. In this sense, his epistemology promotes rationality and reason as the central and necessary part of human activity, and so Popper opposes to the mythological explanations, such as conspiracy theories.

Secondly, his deductive logic necessitates a constant testing of the hypothesis, and therefore, accepts the true knowledge as temporarily valid. In this way, the scientific approach would have the capacity of renewing itself in changing circumstances and thus people would not need to search for alternative sources of explanations like conspiracy theories. Moreover, his critiques towards inductive logic and determinist principles are opposite to the logic over which conspiracy theories are constructed.

Furthermore, Popper in a similar line with his methodological preferences condemns the essentialist and hierarchical thinking in social life and politics. Therefore, it could be argued that, his philosophical stance constitutes an anti-conspirative

approach. Henceforth, this thesis claims that Karl Popper's epistemology have the potential to be an important base for further discussions on conspiracy theories.

At last, the short discussion on Turkish transformation during the 1980s and on Soner Yalçın's book, *Efendi*, showed that similar symptoms, which might be claimed as the reasons of the popularity of conspiracy theories, are also apparent in Turkish case. In addition to that, the results of the survey at the appendix confirmed one of the main arguments of this thesis: there is a positive relationship between the belief in conspiracy theories and the level of feeling of security and anomie. This result also contributed to the validity of the reasoning behind this thesis.

Besides, throughout analyzing *Efendi*, we also see the methodological and ideological deficiencies that Popper has warned us about. First of all, it is clear that the writer has stuck to one variable family relationship and to an important extent he explains the elite structure of Turkish politics with that variable. Moreover, he also did not hesitate to provide essential links between the events. While doing so, he also posed his reasoning as truth. In this sense, his text is basically closed to any other possible reading of the phenomena as well as testing of his hypothesis. In other words, basically the book takes inductive logic to its extreme and therefore produces a conspiracy theory. Lastly, the text also ideologically reflects a covered hatred and tension towards an invisible minority. In this sense it is also a prototype of what Popper calls as "Closed Society". As a result, the book reflects most of the prototype problems against Popperian ideal of "Open Society".

In conclusion, the threats of conspirational way of looking at the world have become an important symptom of the contemporary society. That stance seemed to represent and contribute to the anti-scientific and anti-democratic approaches about the society. In this sense, conspiracy theories could be seen as illustrative manifestations of the problems of democracy and scientific thinking today. Henceforth, today one of the most important tasks for social sciences should be to understand and conceptualize them. In the end, this thesis is an early contribution to the literature towards that goal from Turkey.

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APPENDIX A

THE COMMON FUNCTIONS OF CONSPIRACY THEORIES AND THE ASTROLOGY

Adorno (1994) has described astrology's functions very similar to conspiracy theories logic. According to him, astrology provides a feeling of relief for people who want to know the knowledge of the future. In this sense, both Astrology and conspiracy theories might be related with the modern pursuit of controlling the nature and its negative results. How would that be a case?

As Nietzsche's famous phrase summarizes it, in modern times the idea of god is an impractical one. With the Enlightenment trust to the human rationality, people started to put reason to the place, which was once filled with metaphysical or religious texts. In consequence, while people became free to decide what and how they will do the things, or how to arrange the society, they also became free from the restrictions of religious norms and rules. This process, which could also be seen in Kantian phrase of *Spare Aude!* or dare to know, at the same time put enormous burden or responsibility to human shoulders.

In parallel, Nietzsche (1999: 23) has argued that, "the consequences are the most problematic side of the modernity". By this aphorism, he emphasized upon the consequences and the responsibilities those came with the Enlightenment. In other words, whereas rationality gave enormous freedom to people compared to the past, it also brought many burdens with itself. This aspect could also be seen in Nietzsche's (1999) division between the last man and the *übermensch* or the homo superior. For him the last man is the one who cannot cope with the stress and responsibilities of modernity. On the other hand, his idealistic type of *übermensch* is the one capable of accepting the fate.

In this context, like supernatural explanations such as the astrological explanations, give modern people a sense of relief under these burdens and it assists people in coping with the feeling of anxiety about the future. On the other hand, these explanations for Adorno are products of semi-erudite knowledge, which signify an immature and dangerous stage of human intellect. It is an effort of trying to develop an understanding of the world, but not daring all demands and hard work of it. In this sense, it represents the human laziness to dare to learn the reasons, and to know the results of their actions. Consequently, astrological knowledge like conspiracy theories, signifies a failure of humanity to face the results of the "death of god" or modern secularization.

Moreover, some aspects and results of semi-erudite knowledge and its short cuts could also lead to dangerous consequences. As mentioned above, astrological thinking or conspiracy theorizing show parallel characteristics with the racist thought. For example; as being semi-erudite knowledge belief systems, they tend to project an alien figure or a supernatural force, which is responsible from the misfortune. They provide easy answers to people about their statuses and failures. In this regard, with their peculiarity of showing easy targets to people these kinds of beliefs also have the potentiality to mobilize mass hysterias as we have seen in the Nazi period. It should also be added that, while conspiracy theories and racist texts function to lead and mobilize people, the astrological pages as Adorno mentioned only advice.

To sum up, astrology, racism and conspiracy theories come from the same family of explanations, which tend to relief people about their future by providing essential, unified and, simple explanations. Therefore, as it is stated above they function as new sorts of anthropomorphized religious texts or opium in Marxist conceptualization. In consequence, in some respects they are dangerous entities which prevent human intellectual maturity as well as having capacity to direct people to hysterical movements.

APPENDIX B

THE CASE STUDY

Methodology

In the second chapter, the individualization and the feeling of insecurity and paranoia were presented as relevant to conspirational thinking. In this sense, for understanding how these concepts might be relevant in Turkey, I applied a survey about the relationship between the level of belief in conspiracy theories and the level of personal insecurity and anomie.

Henceforth, measuring the relationship between the belief in conspiracy theories and the level of personal insecurity, and individual anomie would give a first chance to see or test validity and suitability of the reasoning on the subject. It is argued that contemporary social conditions result in a more alienated, paranoid environment and create a feeling of insecurity. As such, if the test reveals some positive relationship between those variables, it would not be falsified. However, it should not go without saying that, a small sample in is taken in this study, a total of 227 people. Therefore, this survey should just be seen as minor first attempt.

This research is inspired by a similar research conducted by Ted Goertzel (1994) in the United States. His research was about the popular conspiracies in U.S.A and aimed to measure the same relationship with different questions. The survey applied by this thesis is adjusted to the Turkish case. While doing that, I have benefited from a study conducted in Marmara University (2005), in terms of which conspiracies are popular nowadays in Turkey.

Summary of the hypothesis;

1. H_1: There is a positive relationship between the level of feeling of security, anomie and the belief in conspiracy theories.

Subjects

The subjects who participated in this study were 227 people. Those participants are selected randomly. The locations that the survey took place were in Istanbul and Ankara. This survey was distributed mostly in university campuses of Middle East Technical University (M.E.T.U), and Gazi University in Ankara, and Istanbul University and Galatasaray University in Istanbul. In addition, the main districts of Taksim square in Istanbul and Kızılay in Ankara were other locations of conduct.

Instruments

The questionnaire consisted of two parts. The questions in the first part were about demographic characteristics. In that sense, age, education and ethnicity were questioned. In the second and the main part, the attempt was to understand and find out any relationship between the level of belief in conspiracy theories and the level of personal insecurity and anomie. I have attached the questions of my research in Appendix III.

Descriptive Results of the Data: Frequency Tables

Occupation

As could be seen from the table below, the most populated categories are, students (89), technicians (23), state employees (21), engineers (19), artisans (17) and, teachers (10). The other categories are below ten.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	-1	3	1,3	1,3	1,3
		13	5,4	5,4	6,7
	Academician	1	,4	,4	7,1
	Retired	6	2,5	2,5	9,6
	Artisan	17	7,1	7,1	16,7
	Housewife	2	,8	,8	17,5
	Journalist	1	,4	,4	17,9
	Public Relations	1	,4	,4	18,3
	Travel Agent	6	2,5	2,5	20,8
	Worker	4	1,7	1,7	22,5
	Unemployed	5	2,1	2,1	24,6
	State Employee	21	8,8	8,8	33,3
	Arcithect	5	2,1	2,1	35,4
	Engineer	19	7,9	7,9	43,3
	Client Represent.	6	2,5	2,5	45,8
	Student	89	37,1	37,1	82,9
	Teacher	10	4,2	4,2	87,1
	Service Sector	3	1,3	1,3	88,3
	Technician	23	9,6	9,6	97,9
	Guide	1	,4	,4	98,3
	Administrator	4	1,7	1,7	100,0
	Total	240	100,0	100,0	

Ethnicity

The table displays that, most of the respondents (108 out of 240) defined themselves ethnically as Turkish. However, 35 of the respondents define themselves in the category of members of Turkish Republic. This division underlies the fact that, while some of the respondents (108) refer to their ethnic origin, others (35) prefer to define themselves according to state definition of the citizen, which does not necessarily refer to Turkish ethnic origin.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	-1	67	27,9	27,9	27,9
		13	5,4	5,4	33,3
	Alevite	2	,8	,8	34,2
	Arabic	1	,4	,4	34,6
	Armanian	1	,4	,4	35,0
	Kurdish Alevite	2	,8	,8	35,8
	Kurdish	10	4,2	4,2	40,0
	Turkish Republic	35	14,6	14,6	54,6
	Turkish	108	45,0	45,0	99,6
	Zaza	1	,4	,4	100,0
	Total	240	100,0	100,0	

Gender

Out of 240 respondents there are 114 males and 113 females.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	**male**	114	47,5	50,2	50,2
	female	113	47,1	49,8	100,0
	Total	227	94,6	100,0	
Missing		13	5,4		
Total		240	100,0		

Education

After looking at the frequency table of education, it can be seen that out of 240 respondents, 30 were high school graduates, 144 were university graduates, 23 were holding postgraduate degrees and, 4 were PhD students.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	**no answer**	26	10,8	11,5	11,5
	high school	30	12,5	13,2	24,7
	university	144	60,0	63,4	88,1
	post graduate	23	9,6	10,1	98,2
	PHd	4	1,7	1,8	100,0
	Total	227	94,6	100,0	
Missing		13	5,4		
Total		240	100,0		

Reliability Analysis

The belief in conspiracy theories in the questionnaire was measured by nine questions (their numbers are as follows: 1, 2, 3, 4, 10, 11, 12, 14, 15), which are given at the Appendix I. The alpha reliability score is .6344. It figures a consistency regarding the questions that the scale has in terms of our main concern, which is the level of belief in conspiracy theories. In other words, the questions, created for measuring the level of belief in conspiracy theories, are consistently targeting the same end. See the table 3 below.

Table 3.

    R E L I A B I L I T Y   A N A L Y S I S

Reliability Coefficients

N of Cases =   227,0   N of Items =   9

Alpha =   ,6344

Anova Results

In order to test the hypothesis, which argues a positive relationship between the level of feeling of security, anomie and the belief in conspiracy theories, I have applied a One-Way Anova analysis of variance. This test is suitable for measuring the relationship between the variables more than two. In my case, as I tried to measure the relationship among three different variables (the level of belief in conspiracy theories, the level of anomie and the level of personal security), One Way Anova test is suitable for my purposes.

I have first grouped the questions measuring the dependent variable, which is the level of belief in conspiracy theories. Later, I have also grouped the questions which attempt measure the independent variables of the level of anomie and the level of

feeling of security. Then in One-Way Anova test I have compared the scores of these different groups in order to see whether there is a significant relationship between the dependent and independent variables. Finding a significance level smaller than .05 would refer to a significant relationship among those groups.

As a result of One way Anova tests, I have found a significance level<0.05, and therefore there is a significant relationship between feeling of security, personal anomie and the level of belief in conspiracy theories. In other words, Anova results show that, while feeling of security increases, the belief in conspiracy theories significantly decreases. However, while the level of personal anomie increases, the level of belief in conspiracy theories increases. See the table 4 below.

Table 4.

ANOVA

BINCON

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	826,140	13	63,549	2,173	,012
Within Groups	6228,714	213	29,243		
Total	7054,855	226			

ANOVA

BINCON

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	519,285	7	74,184	2,486	,018
Within Groups	6535,569	219	29,843		
Total	7054,855	226			

Limitations of the Research

There are important limitations about this research. First of all, the sampling was random and sample size was small. This has resulted in a diversified respondent profile. Therefore, an existence of intervening variables became an important possibility. In other words, there might be other variables affecting the responses, which would not be measured in the survey.

Another limitation of this research is regarding to the places in which the survey is conducted. As mentioned above surveys were conducted in some university campuses and major districts of Istanbul and Ankara. Therefore, I cannot claim that respondents represent Turkish people.

However, the fact that respondent profiles were diversified and subject size was small, this research achieved to measure what it had intended to. In other words, this research was an attempt to understand whether there is a relationship between the level of belief in conspiracy theories and the level of personal security and anomie. In this sense, even though the subjects were diversified and subject size was small, the general intention of the test was something else. The subject profiles did not matter so much, because, the hypothesis did not claim anything about the subject profiles.

Besides, this research should not be understood as a central task of this thesis. Instead, it tried merely to test the hypothesis. In addition to that, I have made contact both with the researches in Turkey and abroad. In this regard, this study is in parallel line with the literature. Moreover, it should also be accepted this small research was a first attempt in the field of conspiracy theories within the limits of a master thesis.

In summary, both theoretical discussions about the Turkish transformation after 1980 and the statistical test results of a field research resulted in a parallel line with the main hypothesis of this thesis, which claims that the popularity of the conspiracy theories today could be seen and examined in the contemporary transformations of

the society. In that sense, it seems fair to say that the discussion on Turkish transformation and the questionnaire contribute to the defense of the hypothesis.

CONSPIRACY THEORY FIELDWORK

H_0: There is no relationship between the level of feeling of security, anomie and the belief in conspiracy theories.

H_1: There is a significant relationship between the level of feeling of security, anomie and the belief in conspiracy theories.

<u>Questions:</u>

Age:
Gender:
Occupation:
Identity(If Possible):

1. As politics is done behind the closed doors, normal citizens cannot know what is really going on!

a. Definitely True   b. May Be   c. Don't know   d. Not Likely   e. Definitely False

2. Some hidden groups (Freemasons, Jews and the like), who constitute a wealthy population, prioritize their economic goals to country's social and economic common goods.

a. Definitely True   b. May Be   c. Don't know   d. Not Likely   e. Definitely False

3. Religious fundamentalism and/or Communism are threats to Turkey against which we should always beware.

a. Definitely True   b. May Be   c. Don't know   d. Not Likely   e. Definitely False

4. I watch the television series such as "The Valley of Wolfs/Mad Heart"; and/or documentaries such as "The Eye of the Hearth/The Files of Secret"; and/or read books such as "Mr Pipe" and belive that they tell what is really going on.

a. Definitely True   b. May Be   c. Don't know   d. Not Likely   e. Definitely False

5. I look at the future.

a. Very Optimistically   b. Optimistically   c. Don't think d. Pessimistically   e. Very Pessimistically

6. I define myself at least with an identity. (Rocker, Turkish, Muslim etc.)

a. Definitely Yes   b. May Be   c. Don't know   d. Not Likely   e. Definitely No.

7. I define myself with a group/somebody. (Family, Relatives, Lover etc.)

a. Definitely Yes   b. May Be   c. Don't know   d. Not Likely   e.
Definitely No.

8. I trust people.

a. Definitely Yes   b. May Be   c. Don't know   d. Not Likely   e.
Definitely No.

9. I trust politicians.

a. Definitely Yes   b. May Be   c. Don't know   d. Not Likely   e.
Definitely No.

10. I believe in the existence of UFOs

a. Definitely Yes   b. May Be   c. Don't know   d. Not Likely   e.
Definitely No.

11. I believe the 9/11 is the conspiracy of the American secret service or Israelis.

a. Definitely yes   b. May Be   c. Don't know   d. Not Likely   e.
Definitely No.

12. I believe in ghosts/angels can effect our lives.

a. Definitely yes   b. May Be   c. Don't know   d. Not Likely   e.
Definitely No.

13. Select your monthly income.

a. Below 500 NTL[11]   b. 500 – 800 NTL   c. 800 – 1000 NTL   d. 1000 – 2000 NTL   e. Over 2000 NTL

14. American secret services and/or Israel government secretly helps PKK[12].

a. Definitely yes   b. May Be   c. Don't know   d. Not Likely   e. Definitely No.

15. USA tries to establish a Kurdish government in Iraq.

a. Definitely yes   b. May Be   c. Don't know   d. Not Likely   e. Definitely No.

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[11] New Turkish Lira = NTL

[12] A Kurdish Separatist Organization in Turkey.