

‘Truthers’ and ‘Truth Defenders’: Understanding Conflicts over Conspiracy Theories

Lund University, 5-7 November 2025

CONSPIRATIONS ERC project

Venue: LUX, Helgonavägen 3



European Research Council

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Conference at a glance

05.11.2025: PhD workshop

10:00-12:00	General sessions
13:00-15:00	Parallel group sessions
15:45-16:30	Concluding session

06.11.2025

9:00-9:30	Introductory panel
9:30-11:00	Parallel sessions
11:30-13:00	Parallel sessions
14:00-15:30	Parallel sessions
16:00-17:30	Keynote speech

07.11.2025

9:00-10:30	Parallel sessions
11:00-12:30	Parallel sessions
13:30-14:30	Concluding panel

Keynote speech: Conspiracy Ambivalence

Clare Birchall, King's College
London

In this keynote, Birchall will explore conspiracy theory as a contestation over knowledge through the idea of ambivalence: holding conflicting feelings or contradictory ideas about something. Self-reflexively, this involves a re-examination of her stance, outlined in *Knowledge Goes Pop*, that conspiracy theory is a necessary possibility of knowledge, one that shows us how *all* knowledge is only ever speculation/theory and how legitimacy is conferred by mystical foundations. What are the implications of this considering the monopolisation of conspiracism by the populist right? She will also look at the ambivalence displayed by some former conspiracy content producers towards contemporary conspiracism. Contestations over knowledge do not, therefore, only occur between obvious factions (the counter-disinfo sector vs conspiracy influencers or FIMI operatives; medical institutions vs conspiritualists; fact-checked legacy media vs free speech evangelist online platforms etc.) but also within one realm or subjectivity. We can refer to this as conspiracy ambivalence. What can this condition tell us about the politics of knowledge today?

November 5: PhD workshop

Mentors: Anastasiya Astapova, Shaban Darakchi, Asbjorn Dyrendal, Ela Drażkiewicz, Denys Gorbach, Răzvan Nicolescu, Andrzej W. Nowak, Annika Rabo, Olof Sundin, Aaron Goldman (tbc)

9:30-10:00	Registration and coffee
10:00-11:00	Who are you? Introductions
11:00-11:15	Coffee break
11:15-12:00	What's your problem? Key issues in researching conspiracy theories
12:00-13:00	Lunch
13:00-15:00	Parallel group sessions Group 1: <i>Becoming and Remaining a Conspiracy Theorist: Biographical and activist trajectories of the non-vaccinated caregivers of the réinfocovid collective</i> Roman Derlich, ENS Lyon <i>'How do you wake someone up?' Outreach and awakened / normie dialogue via The Light newspaper, in the UK Freedom Movement</i> Campbell Thomson, UCL <i>The Order of Dissent: Narratives and Counter-Narratives during the Covid-19 Vaccination Campaign in Italy</i> Domenico Maria Sparaco, University of Siena <i>Conspiratorial Climate Obstruction: What a Global North/South Comparison Can Teach Us</i> Lara De Poorter, University of Amsterdam Group 2: <i>Doubting (the) State(s): The Political and Affective Role of Mistrust and Conspiracy Theories in Georgia</i> Mariam Shalvashvili, Ilia State University in Tbilisi <i>The Socio-Cultural Life of Truth: Countering Conspiracy Theories in Germany</i> Angelina Uhl, Lund university <i>Conspiracy and Spirituality: Authoritarian Coping in East German Protest Milieu</i> Masha Guzzo, Institute for Social Research in Frankfurt

	Group 3: <i>Contested Views of Democracy in Swedish Society</i> Marsanna Petersen, Lund university <i>Drawing a line: a case study of disinformation, controversy and legal intervention surrounding relationship and sexuality education in Dutch primary schools</i> Emma Van Der Tak, University of Amsterdam <i>“Everyone is conspiracist now!”: The use of “conspiracist” label by conspiracist movements as a stigma reversal attempt</i> Lola Le Flanchec, Sciences Po Bordeaux
15:30-15:45	Coffee break
15:45-16:30	What is your secret? Summary session

November 6

8:30-9:00	Registration and coffee	
9:00-9:30	Introductory panel	
9:30-11:00	Practices of belief and doubt <i>Motivation, positionality, and recommendations in the accounts of truth-defenders in Bulgaria</i> Shaban Darakchi, Bulgarian and Slovak Academies of Sciences <i>Teenagers and Conspiracy Theories: An Ethnographic Case Study of Second-Hand Narratives in Estonia</i> Anastasiya Astapova, University of Tartu <i>Building Resilience Through Laughter: Humor as a Tool to Address Conspiratorial Thinking</i> Leonie Heims, modus zad <i>Fake f(or) Real. A History of Forgery and Falsification</i> Anna Hadders and Helén Lilja, Regional Museum of Scania	Pragmatics of truth struggles <i>The two faces of solidarity. Border truth conflicts in a neighbourhood of relegation facing the EU reception crisis</i> Cecilia Vergnano, University of Barcelona <i>Who, how and why counters disinformation? Civic responses to the problem of disinformation and conspiracy theories in Poland</i> Elżbieta Drażkiewicz, Lund University <i>Chemtrails over Coventry: Examining the use of Chemtrail in Climate Change Debates within UK Based Online Conspiracist Communities</i> Joseph McAulay, Oxford University <i>"This Is Not Conspiracy Theory but Conspiracy Analysis": Rethinking Conspiracist Ideology from Southeast Europe</i> Bojan Baca, University of Montenegro
11:00-11:30	Coffee break	
11:30-13:00	Boundary-making by contesting truth <i>Goats, sheeple, and other animals. Conspiracy theories in feuds over rationality and citizenship</i> Asbjorn Dyrendal, Norwegian University of Science and Technology <i>Defending Truth: How Activists Make Sense of Combating Disinformation</i> Ann-Kathrin Benner, Wyn Brodersen, Maik Fielitz, Jena Institute for Democracy and Civil Society <i>The Conspiracies of Anti-Conspiracy:</i>	Collectivity, emotions, identities <i>'Awakening to reality'. Sentinels, conspiracism, and the monopoly of truth among Brazilian conservatives</i> Katarina Hatzikidi, University of Tübingen <i>Loneliness and marginality: an avenue to systemic skepticism</i> Răzvan Nicolescu, New Europe College <i>Gendered Narratives and National</i>

	<i>Critical Discourse Analysis of Boundary Work in U.S. Mainstream Media</i> Zea Szebeni, University of Helsinki <i>Cordoned off in a small country: The politics of doubt and civic education in Belgium</i> Denys Gorbach, Lund University	<i>Identity in Post-Soviet Conspiratorial Discourses</i> Shafag Dadashova, ADA University <i>The Affective Economies of the Great Replacement, on the Circulation of Fear and Love through Conspiracy Theories</i> Luis Manuel Hernández Aguilar, Europa University Viadrina
13:00 -14:00	Lunch	
14:00-15:30	Fact-checking and policy-making <i>INFOCLUDE: Inclusive information resilience and civic engagement in times of crises</i> Lisa Engström, Lund University; Hanna Carlsson, Linnaeus University; Lisa Olsson Dahlquist, Swedish agency for accessible media <i>Proactive state policies against disinformation in Poland</i> Agnieszka Lipińska, NASK (Scientific and Academic Computer Network) <i>Beyond the facts of the matter: Addressing Socialstyrelsen's efforts to counter the LVU-kampanjen conspiracy theory</i> Aaron Goldman and Jonathan Morgan, Lund University	Media in struggles for truth <i>Post-truth, conspiracies and biopolitical propaganda in Estonia: Visual analysis</i> Andrey Makarychev, Tartu University <i>Consensus and Conflict: A Great Replacement opinion piece and its aftermath(s)</i> Mathilda Åkerlund, Gothenburg University <i>Health Researchers' Voluntary Science-Communication with Non-Academics: Motivations, Barriers, and Practices Introduction</i> Bente Schøning, Arctic University of Norway
15:30-16:00	Coffee break	
16:00-17:30	Keynote speech: Conspiracy Ambivalence Clare Birchall, King's College London	
18:00	Dinner	

November 7

9:00-10:30	Which side are you on? Politics of conspiracism <i>Conspiracy Theories, Truthers, Truth Defenders, and Paul Ricœur's Hermeneutics</i> Patrik Fridlund, Lund University <i>"It's very hard to convey any arguments or facts to them:" Claims of zombification in the Donbas war</i> Emma Rimpiläinen, Uppsala University <i>Fascists are always the others: the fight against misinformation and the confusion of political categories in the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic</i> Ehler Voss, University of Bremen <i>Stigma reappropriation and narratives of victimhood in the German-speaking conspiracy theory scene</i> Danaé Leitenberg, University of Basel, and Florian Knasmüller, Sigmund Freud University	Polarisation and epistemic struggles <i>Anti-vaccine Experts and their Conspiratorial Meta-Expertise</i> James Slotta, University of Texas <i>The Disinformation Discourse in Public Debate: A Critical Review on the Experience of Declining Trust</i> Salla Tuomola, Roskilde University <i>Conspiracy theories as unreality: understanding QAnon through a Lacanian political theory of digital addiction</i> Vito Lacerza, University of Agder <i>The instrumentalization of language in the pursuit of truth, or How words do not lose their meanings</i> Ester Köverová and Jaroslava Rusinková, Slovak Academy of Sciences
10:30-11:00	Coffee break	
11:00-12:30	Speaking power to truth <i>'False class consciousness' and Political Ontology of Conspiracy Theories</i> Andrzej W. Nowak, Adam Mickiewicz University <i>Anti-Immigrant Conspiracy Theories and the Populist Politics of Fear</i> Eírikur Bergmann, Bifröst University <i>Sensing the State: Surveillance Narratives and Epistemic Uncertainty in the Belarusian Borderlands</i> Roman Urbanowicz, University of Helsinki	Spirituality and mystery <i>The Stakes that Spread: Polio outbreaks and Polyphonic Voices across Religious Worlds</i> Ben Kasstan-Dabush, University of Edinburgh <i>Beyond Truthers and Truth-Defenders: Ethnographic Reflections on Conspirituality</i> Giovanna Parmigiani, Harvard University <i>From Cult to Conspiracy Theorists: Tracing the Shift of an Evangelical Movement</i> Loïc Bawidamann, University of Zürich and EHESS

	<i>Anxieties of influence: manipulated speech and oligarchic publicity in pre-invasion Ukraine</i> Taras Fedirko, IWM	<i>Contesting Historical Truth through Derangement Strategies: Conspiratorial Narratives on the Aldo Moro Assassination</i> Simone Zoppellaro, University of Stuttgart
12:30-13:30	Lunch	
13:30-14:30	Concluding session	

Book of abstracts

Mathilda Åkerlund is a postdoctoral researcher in journalism, media, and communication at the University of Gothenburg, and senior editor for the Journal of Digital Social Research. Her research focuses on illiberal digital politics and the role that platforms play in enabling these phenomena. Her current projects include misogyny, incels, and male-separatist online communities, far-right discourse in Swedish and international digital settings, and conspiracy theories and digital disinformation.	Consensus and Conflict: A Great Replacement opinion piece and its aftermath(s) On June 3, 2024, the party leader of far-right Sweden Democrats, Sweden’s second largest parliamentary party, caused turmoil with the publication of the “One could argue that there is a Great Replacement [“folkutbyte”] happening” opinion piece in the mainstream Swedish newspaper Expressen. Although the conspiracy theory is well-established in far-right circles, it had never before taken such explicit and credible form in the Swedish public discourse. In this paper, I explore how the recognition of the Great Replacement conspiracy theory in the opinion piece impacted but the uses of the conspiracy theory among its supporters as well as by its opponents. To do this, I will trace the opinion piece URL and the use of ‘folkutbyte’ across the web following the publication and analyse how the conspiracy theory is understood in relation to the party leader’s public acknowledgement of it. In doing so, this paper will provide unique empirical insights based on a delineable case into how conspiracy theories and conflicts thereof unfold across diverse cultural and socio-political settings.
Anastasiya Astapova is an Associate Professor of Folkloristics at the University of Tartu. Her research focuses on conspiracy theories, misinformation, humor, and migration. She is currently a country partner at ERC <i>Conspirations - Conflicts over Conspiracy Theories</i>, Erasmus <i>Conspire: Conspiracy theories and radicalization risks in Europe</i>, Horizon Europe <i>DELIAH: Democratic Literacy and Humour</i>, Horizon-MSCA <i>HUMLIT Developing humour literacy projects</i> and a PI of Estonian Science Agency project <i>COVID-19 Conspiracy Theories: Contents, Channels, and Target Groups</i>. In 2024–25, she was a Stanford–Vamabu Fellow in security and international affairs. In addition to multiple papers, she completed a co-	Teenagers and Conspiracy Theories: An Ethnographic Case Study of Second-Hand Narratives in Estonia Teenagers are often portrayed as living in “another information world,” where TikTok, YouTube, and Snapchat circulate endless conspiratorial fragments. Yet studying what they actually believe is nearly impossible: direct research with minors faces ethical restrictions, and asking them about “belief” risks confusion or taboo. A flat-earth joke in class, for example, may function more as humor or peer bonding than as an expression of conviction. This paper therefore shifts the question from “what do teenagers believe?” to “how and why do they engage in conspiracy talk.” Building on interviews with Estonian school teachers, youth centers’ educators, and media literacy practitioners—professionals who encounter teenagers’ discussions daily—the study examines second-hand conspiracy theories: not firm convictions, but echoes, jokes, and anecdotes that teenagers repeat, test, and circulate. These may be sparked by Andrew Tate videos, fleeting COVID conspiracies, or viral content on TikTok, but they operate in a different genre, often closer to

edited collection of articles “Conspiracy Theories in Eastern Europe: Tropes and Trends” and a co-authored monograph “Conspiracy Theories and the Nordic Countries” (both with Routledge).	entertainment or identity play than radicalization. By attending to second-hand and playful dimensions, the study questions prevailing assumptions about teenage vulnerability and points toward more nuanced, dialogic approaches to media literacy.
Bojan Baća is a Research Fellow at the Institute for Advanced Studies at the University of Montenegro and a SAIA Visiting Researcher at the Institute for Sociology of the Slovak Academy of Sciences. His research has been published in a variety of scholarly outlets, including <i>Sociology</i>, <i>Antipode</i>, <i>International Political Sociology</i>, <i>Political Geography</i>, <i>Acta Sociologica</i>, and <i>Europe-Asia Studies</i>, among others. His most recent publication on the topic of conspiracy theories appeared in <i>Theory, Culture & Society</i>.	“This Is Not Conspiracy Theory but Conspiracy Analysis”: Rethinking Conspiracist Ideology from Southeast Europe Often positioned as a mere object of international relations rather than its subject, the post-Yugoslav region has a long-standing tradition of conspiracism as an ideological lens for interpreting (geo)political reality. During the COVID-19 pandemic – and facilitated by the platformization and gamification of conspiracy theorizing – this tradition evolved from conspiracist estrangement to conspiracist engagement. Many have now fully embraced the once-derogatory label of “conspiracy theorists”, even identifying themselves as “conspiracy analysts”. Their aim is not only to make sense of the inner workings of social reality by developing elaborate conspiracy theories, but also to propose alternative political frameworks and advocate for change – often based on rudimentary “conspiracy analyses” – without sense of shame in doing so. This paper focuses on the similarities and differences in conspiracist ideology across three countries that share a common historical legacy but have also experienced interethnic wars and continue to harbor deep ethno-political animosities. It examines three prominent conspiracist communities on Telegram: iSTiNa (predominantly representing Serbia), Slobodni zajedno (predominantly representing Croatia), and Bosna i Hercegovina za slobodu (predominantly representing Bosnia and Herzegovina). Drawing on a carefully selected sample of 2,391 posts from over 16,000, written by users who subscribe to popular conspiratorial interpretations of global events, the study employs qualitative content analysis to identify key ideologemes of conspiracism across four overarching domains – science, geopolitics, history, and ideology – during the period from 23 February 2022 (the day before the Russian invasion of Ukraine) to 21 January 2025 (the day after Donald Trump’s inauguration). By identifying these ideologemes, the paper also explores how they are used to articulate legitimate grievances and forms of social critique that generate common threads among these communities – despite their traditional antagonisms – and contribute to the formation of a shared conspiracist ideology in Southeast Europe.

Loïc Bawidamann studied Religious Studies and Contemporary History at the University of Zürich and the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales (EHESS) in Paris. Since 2023, he has served as an assistant at the Chair of Religious Studies with a systematic-theoretical focus, where he is also pursuing a PhD on religious conspiracy theory movements in Switzerland. He is a co-editor of the journal <i>Zeitschrift für junge Religionswissenschaft</i> and has published on various topics, including conspiracy theories.	From Cult to Conspiracy Theorists: Tracing the Shift of an Evangelical Movement The Swiss-based Organic Christ Generation (OCG) emerged in the 1990s as an evangelical community whose theology, deemed radical, faced persistent criticism from mainstream Christian groups. A scandal in the early 2000s involving the advocacy of corporal punishment for children intensified scrutiny, and the OCG was increasingly labelled a dangerous cult. Efforts to reshape this image failed, leading the OCG to create its own media platforms and forge alliances with others perceived as marginalised by mainstream institutions. Key platforms, such as the AZK (Anti-Censorship Coalition) conference series, the S&G (Voice and Counter-Voice) newspaper, and the online TV channel K1a.TV, have since become central hubs for German-speaking conspiracy theorists, particularly gaining traction during the COVID-19 pandemic. This paper explores the historical trajectory of the OCG, highlighting its confrontations with critics - including evangelical groups, cult-watching organisations, and journalists - and its partnerships with similarly stigmatised entities, such as Scientology, conspiracy theorists like David Icke, and alternative news producers. While significant ideological divides exist, these collaborations reflect a shared opposition to perceived mainstream adversaries. It argues that the OCG's pivot to conspiracy theorising was partly a reaction to persistent criticism, which the group interpreted as evidence of a conspiracy against them. By examining the relational dynamics underpinning the OCG's engagement with conspiracy theories, this paper situates the conflict within its religious origins and the broader context of contemporary media-driven debates about truth and disinformation. Drawing on fieldwork among OCG members and analyses of publications from both sides of the conspiratorial divide, this paper raises critical questions about how theological debates have become intertwined with epistemological battles over truth and societal structures.
Ann-Kathrin Benner is a political scientist and researcher working on the interlinkages between knowledge production, security orders and multiple crises. She has published on European peace and security under conditions of the Anthropocene, genealogies of Anthropocene thinking, climate interventionism and participatory research methods in peace and	Defending Truth: How Activists Make Sense of Combating Disinformation While the producers and consumers of conspiracy theories and disinformation have received considerable scholarly attention, far less is known about the individuals and organizations working to counter them. This paper addresses this gap by examining how civil society activists engage in anti-disinformation efforts conceptualize their work and position themselves in the wider landscape of truth conflicts. These actors — often operating through

security studies. Ann-Kathrin Benner is a project coordinator at the Jena Institute for Democracy and Civil Society (IDZ) and a member of the editorial team of the online magazine Machine Against the Rage. Wyn Brodersen is a sociologist and researcher at the Jena Institute for Democracy and Civil Society. His work examines the influence of digital interactions on radicalisation processes, focusing on digital subcultures, right-wing terrorism, and their intersections. He is part of the editorial team of the online magazine Machine Against the Rage. Maik Fielitz is a social scientist and conflict researcher. He is the head of the research unit on digital conflict studies at the Jena Institute for Democracy and Civil Society, as well as co-editor of the online magazine Machine Against the Rage (machine-vs-rage.net). His research examines the ways in which digital technologies and digital cultures influence the emergence and evolution of right-wing extremism and conspiracy theories.	NGOs, grassroots campaigns, fact-checking initiatives, or digital advocacy — engage in a range of practices including content moderation, public education, social work interventions, and strategic communication. Taking the case of German anti-disinformation and anti-conspiracism campaigns, this paper explores how these activists and civic educators understand the epistemic and political dimensions of their role as ‘truth defenders’. Based on interviews and document analysis it asks: What motivates their engagement? How do they define disinformation and its risks? How do they interpret the task of combatting desinformation? What tensions or dilemmas arise in their work? By focusing on meaning-making and institutional practices in Germany, the paper chooses a case where these practices are increasingly challenged in a changing political environment. By considering the social conditions of conflict around truth making, this paper contributes to a more relational understanding of the conflict over conspiracy theories — not just as a struggle between competing worldviews, but as a dynamic field shaped by efforts to uphold, negotiate, and sometimes reinvent the boundaries of truth.
Éiríkur Bergmann is a Professor of Politics at Bifröst University in Iceland. His research examines the international intersections of nationalism, populism, and conspiracy theories. He also writes on European integration, Icelandic politics, and forms of democratic participation. He has published twelve scholarly books and numerous peer-reviewed articles. Bergmann has contributed to public discourse through long-standing political analysis and commentary engagement. In addition to his academic writing, he is the author of four novels published in Icelandic.	Anti-Immigrant Conspiracy Theories and the Populist Politics of Fear In the shifting terrain of post-truth politics, conspiracy theories have become increasingly central to populist strategy. In <i>Weaponizing Conspiracy Theories</i> (Routledge, 2024), I argue that such narratives are not spontaneous outbreaks of paranoia but carefully cultivated instruments of political communication. Among the most potent are anti-immigrant conspiracy theories, which reframe migration as a deliberate assault on national identity, orchestrated by shadowy elites and foreign actors. This paper examines the strategic use of anti-immigrant conspiracism in populist discourse. Once a fringe idea promoted by counter-jihad circles, the notion of Eurabia posits that European elites are secretly enabling Muslim immigration to Islamize the continent. Over time, it has

	been absorbed into the mainstream rhetoric of populist leaders such as Geert Wilders, Marine Le Pen, and Viktor Orbán, who invoke its themes — demographic invasion, cultural erasure, elite betrayal — to frame immigration not as a policy challenge but as civilisational warfare. Building on my earlier work <i>Neo-Nationalism</i> (Palgrave, 2020), this paper argues that such conspiracy theories serve three strategic functions: they externalise threat by demonising migrants, delegitimise liberal institutions by accusing them of complicity, and elevate the populist as a fearless ‘truth defender.’ In doing so, they transform political debate into a moral struggle for survival, justifying exclusionary policies as acts of national self-preservation. These narratives also provoke resistance from ‘truth defenders’ — journalists, academics, and civic actors — who attempt to counter them with facts. Yet, such responses often reinforce the populist framing, confirming the conspiracist logic of elite suppression. The conflict, thus, transcends fact-checking and enters the symbolic realm, where truth itself is contested terrain. By focusing on anti-immigrant conspiracism, this paper contributes to understanding how these narratives reshape democratic discourse. Rather than being irrational outbursts, they represent tactical moves in a broader ideological struggle over identity, legitimacy, and belonging in a fragmented political landscape.
Clare Birchall is Professor of Contemporary Culture at Kings College London. She is the co-author of <i>Conspiracy Theories in the Time of Covid-19</i> and the author of <i>Radical Secrecy: The Ends of Transparency in Datafied America</i> and <i>Knowledge Goes Pop: From Conspiracy Theory to Gossip</i>. She leads REDACT, a European-wide research project exploring conspiracy theories and digitalisation. With Peter Knight, she is currently writing a book for MIT called <i>Everything is Connected: The Internet and Conspiracy Theories</i>.	Conspiracy Ambivalence In this keynote, Birchall will explore conspiracy theory as a contestation over knowledge through the idea of ambivalence: holding conflicting feelings or contradictory ideas about something. Self-reflexively, this involves a re-examination of her stance, outlined in <i>Knowledge Goes Pop</i>, that conspiracy theory is a necessary possibility of knowledge, one that shows us how <i>all</i> knowledge is only ever speculation/theory and how legitimacy is conferred by mystical foundations. What are the implications of this considering the monopolisation of conspiracism by the populist right? She will also look at the ambivalence displayed by some former conspiracy content producers towards contemporary conspiracism. Contestations over knowledge do not, therefore, only occur between obvious factions (the counter-disinfo sector vs conspiracy influencers or FIMI operatives; medical institutions vs conspiritualists; fact-checked legacy media vs free speech evangelist online platforms etc.) but also within one realm or subjectivity. We can refer to this as conspiracy

	ambivalence. What can this condition tell us about the politics of knowledge today?
Shafag Dadashova is Assistant Professor at ADA University, Baku. She is the author of <i>Azerbaijani Literature and the Gendered Narratives of Nationhood: Weaving Identities</i> (Routledge, 2025), and her research focuses on literature, gender studies, and cultural identity. She has published on topics such as women's voices in early twentieth-century Azerbaijani literature, post-Soviet autobiographical writings, and the intersections of nationhood and gender. She was previously a research fellow at the University of Oxford's Centre for International Gender Studies.	Gendered Narratives and National Identity in Post-Soviet Conspiratorial Discourses Conspiracy theories, as narratives that challenge dominant epistemologies, are deeply intertwined with national identity construction and gendered discourse, particularly in post-Soviet contexts. This paper explores how conspiracy theories in Azerbaijan and the broader post-Soviet space function as arenas where gendered narratives intersect with competing notions of truth and power. Drawing on my research on Azerbaijani literature and gendered nationhood, I argue that conspiratorial discourse is not only a battleground for political and ideological struggles but also a reflection of anxieties surrounding shifting gender roles and societal transformations. In particular, I examine how conspiracy theories surrounding women's roles—whether in the form of state-driven disinformation campaigns or grassroots counter-narratives—contribute to broader conflicts over truth in post-Soviet societies. By analyzing literary and media representations of gendered conspiratorial thinking, this paper interrogates the ways in which "truthers" and "truth defenders" negotiate power through gendered tropes, often reinforcing patriarchal structures while simultaneously exposing their fragility. Furthermore, I explore how feminist voices and women's agency are positioned within these discourses, highlighting the intersection of conspiracy theories with debates on modernization, Western influence, and postcolonial identity. This paper contributes to the conference's aim of understanding conflicts over conspiracy theories by offering an intersectional perspective that situates gender as a key variable in these struggles. By shifting the focus to the relational dynamics between state actors, intellectuals, and marginalized voices, I seek to illuminate how conspiratorial conflicts are not merely epistemological disputes but also deeply embedded in cultural and historical contexts that shape national and gender identities. This approach expands our understanding of disinformation studies and offers a novel lens through which to examine the post-Soviet experience.
Shaban Darakchi holds a Ph.D. degree in sociology from the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences. His main professional interests are gender, sexuality and anti-gender movements. Dr. Darakchi is a researcher at the Bulgarian	Motivation, positionality, and recommendations in the accounts of truth-defenders in Bulgaria In recent years conspiracy theories have gained unprecedented visibility and popularity on a global level circulating on social media platforms and eroding trust in public institutions, expertise and democracy. While there is

Academy of Sciences and the Slovak Academy of Sciences. Between 2019 and 2022, Shaban was a Marie Curie Postdoctoral Fellow at the University of Antwerp, Belgium. He has published one book and 24 articles exploring the intersections of gender and sexuality in Bulgaria. He is currently working on projects investigating anti-gender campaigns and non-heterosexual minorities in Bulgaria using narrative interviews, discourse analysis, and archives. His work in “Conspirations” project is focused on concurrent conspiracies related to “gender ideology”, child legislation and COVID-19 in Bulgaria.	a solid body of scholarship that has investigated the development and the role of conspiracy beliefs and narratives, less attention has been paid to those social actors that counteract such narratives – the so-called “truth defenders.” This paper aims to contribute to this expanding body of scholarship by investigating how Bulgarian truth defenders articulate their motivation to counteract conspiracy theories, position themselves in the contested field of information and conceptualize recommendations in response to conspiracy theories. Based on in-depth interviews the study identifies four main interrelated dimensions. First, the analysis pays attention to the socio-demographic profile of the truth defenders within the Bulgarian context. Second, it examines the motivations outlining personal, civic, and moral reasons that lead truth defenders to counteract conspiracy narratives. Third, it investigates how truth defenders negotiate their authority and credibility within a contested information environment. Fourth, it explores the recommendations truth defenders suggest to counteract conspiracy narratives ranging from educational reforms and public policies to media literacy and civic dialogue. By situating these perspectives within the global contestation over truth and authority the study illuminates the lived experiences and negotiations of truth defenders as crucial and yet underexplored aspects of the counteractions against conspiracy narratives and campaigns.
Lara De Poorter is a PhD Candidate in Cultural Sociology at the University of Amsterdam. Her PhD project examines the cultural dimensions of climate obstruction in the Netherlands and Indonesia through a multi-sited ethnographic approach. Specifically, she is interested in how people ascribe meaning to climate change, how competing meanings influence the reception of environmental knowledge and policies, and how these meanings co-evolve with politics and public debate.	Conspiratorial Climate Obstruction: What a Global North/South Comparison Can Teach Us Climate change misinformation and conspiracy beliefs have become more visible across democratic societies and their online media environments. Platform affordances help these narratives travel, and they gain traction as communities form around them: organised actors may seed these narratives, and some citizens adapt and circulate them. The question remains: what makes these narratives stick? The present study aims to advance insights into the cultural contestation around climate change by specifying the conditions under which these narratives come to seem reasonable, at times even necessary, among climate sceptic communities in the Netherlands. To answer these questions, I immerse myself in the public face of climate obstruction and draw on an ongoing ethnography that connects the online realm with the offline worlds of those who produce and consume these narratives. I begin with sustained observation across Dutch alternative online media to learn the forms, tones, and dynamics of these communities. That groundwork guides

	a thematic analysis of their content. Moving from classification to interpretation, I then conduct in-depth interviews with producers and audiences to trace how narratives move across platforms and gain meaning in everyday life. Ultimately, I aim to offer a cultural explanation for the persistence of climate obstruction in the Dutch context. This sub-study is part of my larger PhD project on climate obstruction, which contrasts public, media-facing obstruction in the Netherlands with politically centred obstruction within the Indonesian state.
Roman Derlich is currently preparing his first year thesis at Ecole Normale Supérieure de Lyon in political science. He is working on a network of conspiracy groups that emerged during the Covid crisis, using an ethnographic method. His focus is on beliefs and how they shape people's ordinary relationship with politics.	Becoming and Remaining a Conspiracy Theorist : Biographical and activist trajectories of the non-vaccinated caregivers of the réinfocovid collective On July 12, 2021, French President Emmanuel Macron announced an unprecedented measure: compulsory vaccination against COVID-19 for all healthcare staff, failing which, they would be suspended until a complete vaccination schedule was presented. In this context some caregivers refused to be vaccinated, agreed to their suspension and joined conspiracy groups to campaign during the crisis. How can we understand this choice and commitment to a conspiracy collective by healthcare professionals? My work offers a survey of 20 non-vaccinated caregivers who are members of the RéinfoCovid collective. Created in 2020, this collective, led by former intensive care anesthetist Louis Fouché, impulses several conspiracy theories about vaccines and organizes a solidarity network for suspended caregivers. My presentation focuses on the biographical and professional trajectories of these caregivers. The adopted approach questions the epistemological gain of thinking of conspiracist collectives as a social movement, in order to explore how life trajectories, social dynamics and interactions within this network shape the political radicalization of members. The aim is to understand how their beliefs are socially embedded, and to study how they may influence their professional practices, health choices, political attitudes and social environments. The study seeks to reinscribe conspiracist “beliefs” in the whole range of social practices, beyond a psychologizing explanation of why they subscribe to this movement. Thus, my presentation will articulate three aspects of conspiracy : The ideological aspect (the conspiratorial cause), organizational aspect (the network of collectives) and individual aspect (the trajectories of members). My hypothesis is that these three aspects are essential to understand how a part of the population ordinarily interacts with politics.

Elzbieta Drazkiewicz is a senior lecturer at Lund University and the leader of the CONSPIRATIONS project. Prior to coming to Lund University, she was a Senior Research Fellow at the Slovak Academy of Sciences, Institute for Sociology and an Associate Professor at Maynooth University in Ireland. Apart from Leading CONSPIRATIONS project she is also serving as a PI on the CHANSE project REDACT. She is also involved in the CONNOR network, bringing together researchers studying conspiracy theories in the Nordic countries. The core of her work constitutes political anthropology which allows her to explore such fields as international development, state-NGOs relations and most recently tensions over conspiracy theories and democracy in Europe.	Who, how and why counters disinformation? Civic responses to the problem of disinformation and conspiracy theories in Poland Increasingly scholars and policymakers identify disinformation and conspiracy theories as one of the major threats to social cohesion. Researchers are frequently voicing concern that phenomena linked to disinformation are putting at risk democratic order and peaceful coexistence of societies. These observations led to the proliferation of research on conspiracy theories and actors propagating them. As a result, at present, transnational, state and civic stakeholders in the partnerships with academics are designing solutions to address the problem to disinformation. Yet while the sector studying and countering disinformation is growing, we know little about actors that shape and populate the ‘Disinfo Industry’: fact-checkers, educators, security experts etc. Though there is a lot of research focusing on people who produce and endorse disinformation, we know very little about people and organizations who work against them. Who are the main stakeholders at the national, local and civic level who are involved in preventing and countering disinformation? What kind of interventions do they design and for whom, and why? This paper, by analysing civic responses to the crisis of disinformation in Poland aims to start a conversation about this understudied, yet growing sector. However, this paper is not simply asking <i>what works?</i> Instead, it aims to understand <i>why</i> and <i>how</i> certain strategies to address the problem of disinformation and conspiracy theories are selected. Building on the series of interviews with the representatives of the Disinfo Sector in Poland, and by applying anthropological perspective, this paper asks: who – in the social terms – are actors involved in the sector, and how do they position themselves within Polish society: among other civic organisations and vis-à-vis state elites? How is knowledge about threats (co)produced across the civil society in Poland? What do such choices reveal about the ways in which citizens and their organisations conceptualise the threat posed by disinformation? How do stakeholders responsible for creating the contemporary anti-disinformation initiatives use and reflect upon their own understandings of democracy and their own state. The choice of Poland as a case study is not accidental. Studies show that divided societies where there are intense power games at stake are more prone to conspiratorial thinking. Poland experiences particularly strong political polarisation. As such it can be an informative case study for societies experiencing similar divisions. Moreover, like in many countries of the Global East and South, also in
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	Poland the government is often responsible for spreading disinformation and fostering conspiracy cultures. For these reasons, in Poland the response to disinformation and conspiracy theories is mostly NGO-led with some support coming from academic circles. The active, diverse and innovative response of the Polish civil society to the problem of conspiracy theories counters analytical discourses about the weakness of the civil society sector in Eastern Europe. It also disturbs dominant discourses normalising conspiracy theories in the region. This paper shows that contrary to the dominant perception of the Central and Eastern Europe, conspiracy theories and disinformation are neither normalised nor accepted discourses in the public sphere, and are frequently problematised, questioned and resisted – yet unlike in the Western societies, this resistance is usually a bottom – up rather than top-down movement.
Asbjørn Dyrendal is Professor of Religious Studies at Norwegian University of Science and Technology. He is the co-author and editor of several books on conspiracy theories, including <i>Conspiracy Theories and the Nordic Countries</i> and <i>Brill Handbook of Conspiracy Theories and Religion</i>. He is on the advisory board of <i>Conspirations</i>.	Goats, sheeple, and other animals. Conspiracy theories in feuds over rationality and citizenship When conspiracy theories became a cultural "hot topic", it was partly due to the international skeptic's movement. They were not merely part of the science communicators and scientists on the scene; they were a central community of moral entrepreneurs keeping Hofstadter's frame of conspiracy theories and believers. Conspiracy theories have thereby long been part of the "pseudoscience wars", a fight between skeptics and believers engaging in oppositional identity construction. The pseudoscience wars are similar to other forms of culture wars, and seek to influence public opinion and policy. Both sets of actors serve as moral entrepreneurs seeking to present situations and processes as social problems; in this case the problem involves conspiracy or conspiracy theories. The problem constructions serve multiple purposes. They are attempts at influencing social development, but they also draw boundaries around and seek to mobilize people around social identities. This means the constructions reflect and construct values, identities, and worldviews. Calling attention to the problems is part of presenting themselves as good, rational citizens fighting for a better society. The problem constructions are antagonistic and need images of opposing outgroups, to constitute both the ingroup and the problem. This paper looks broadly at the way skeptics and "conspiratorial" segments have engaged in conflicts over conspiracy theories, but centers on the Norwegian campaign "Nobody likes to be fooled" that ranged over a 5-year period.

Lisa Engström is a senior lecturer at Lund University and leader of the project <i>War and crises preparedness for all? – Libraries as arenas for civic talks on preparedness</i>. She is also a member of <i>NORDREN: the Nordic Disinformation Resilience Network</i>, bringing together researchers studying how disinformation is fought in the Nordic countries. Her research interests include issues of democracy, inclusion and power in relation to the societal imperative of resisting disinformation in a context of conflict and war. Hanna Carlsson is an Associate Professor at Linnaeus University. She leads the project <i>Cultural Institution and Culture War: Online Movements and Local Expressions of Far-Right Hostility</i> and is a member of the project <i>War and Crises Preparedness for All? – Libraries as Arenas for Civic Dialogue on Preparedness</i>. She is also affiliated with the research node <i>Democracy in Question</i>. Her research focuses on democratic challenges, information literacy, inclusion, and power, particularly in the context of volatile information flows, political turmoil and crises. Lisa Olsson Dahlquist, PhD in library and information studies, is a research strategist at the Swedish agency for accessible media and a project member of the project <i>War and crises preparedness for all? – Libraries as arenas for civic talks on preparedness</i>. Her research interests include issues of democracy, media and information literacy and inclusive reading practices.	INFOCLUDE: Inclusive information resilience and civic engagement in times of crises Over the past decade, Media and Information Literacy (MIL) has been increasingly positioned as a central policy response to the so-called “information crisis,” marked by the rise of disinformation, propaganda, and other forms of malign information influence. In Sweden’s current context of heightened security awareness, MIL has gained renewed urgency, as the ability to critically assess and resist misinformation is now framed as essential to safeguarding democratic values and maintaining social cohesion. As a result, MIL is no longer presented merely as a set of individual competencies for navigating the digital information landscape, but as a civic responsibility—integral to fostering democratic resilience and national security. Our presentation is based on the new research project INFOCLUDE, which analyzes how MIL is shaped and legitimized in Sweden today when framed as a civic responsibility and a response to disinformation and information-related threats. We specifically explore the implications of these framings for vulnerable individuals and groups, such as immigrants, older adults, and people with intellectual disabilities, who may lack the necessary resources, skills, or abilities to fulfil these normative expectations. This situation transforms these groups into perceived security risks, as they become potential targets for malign information campaigns. At the same time, being excluded from information literacy hinders these individuals from exercising their civic rights and engaging in society. This illustrates the Janus-face of bildung and information literacy, being a means for both individual empowerment and societal control. In our presentation, we discuss how a theoretical synthesis of intersectionality, critical pedagogy, and resilience theory can be utilized to examine this duality and explore how notions of critical engagement, responsibility, and adaptation are constructed, negotiated, and enacted in MIL promotion for vulnerable groups.
Taras Fedirko is Lecturer (Assistant Professor) at the School of Social and Political Sciences at the University of Glasgow and Senior Research Fellow at the	Anxieties of influence: manipulated speech and oligarchic publicity in pre-invasion Ukraine Across many polities, liberal-democratic and otherwise, recent political conflicts and mobilisations have been

Institute for Human Sciences (IWM), Vienna. A political and economic anthropologist, he studies how social movements organise to reshape war economies, states, and capitalist labour and value regimes. He had done ethnographic research in Kyiv and London.	accompanied by emergent concerns about insincerity, inauthenticity, and manipulation of public speech and action. This paper turns to Ukraine, and discussions around freedom and authenticity in news journalism, to explore what happens to acts of free speech and ideas of freedom among professional cultural producers when their work is publicly dismissed as insincere, manipulating and manipulated. Following the 2013-14 revolution and the war in Donbas, concerns about illegitimate influence, as occurring specifically through speech, have become prominent across a variety of cultural domains: ads in large cities publicised courses of both persuasive speaking and ‘defence’ from such; media watchdogs set up projects to monitor paid-for and manipulated news content; and ‘you are a bot’ became a popular insult on social media. Building on field research with news journalists in Kyiv in the years preceding the Russian invasion of February 2022, I explore the ways in which journalists detected and explained manipulation; and analyse ideas of agency, intentionality, and individuality that inform their anxieties of illegitimate influence. I argue that while responding to real, documented practices of what Andrew Graan has called ‘discursive engineering’, concerns about influence and authenticity of speech thematise the particular post-revolutionary, war-time experience of journalists’ frustrated historical agency as middle-class knowledge producers in a society transformed by war and imperialist intervention.
Patrik Fridlund is spearheading the project <i>Beyond Truth and Lies: Conspiracy Theories, Post-truth, and the Conditions of Public Debate</i>. Fridlund is Associate Professor of Philosophy of Religion at Lund University. Informed by readings of contemporary philosophers such as Jacques Derrida, Luce Irigaray, Emmanuel Levinas and Paul Ricœur, Fridlund studies populism, post-truth and conspiracy theories from a philosophical perspective. Fridlund is also part of the research programme <i>At the End of the World</i> on apocalyptic imaginaries.	Conspiracy Theories, Truthers, Truth Defenders, and Paul Ricœur’s Hermeneutics Today, we are facing questions of war, abuse of power, and violence, as counterparts to the notion of peace in a very concrete way. Peaceful exchanges are seemingly becoming rare, and debates appear to be emphasising a perpetual conflict in which the parties have little or no common ground. In the present situation, phenomena such as conspiracy theories seem to break the peace and obstruct dialogue and understanding in their way of undermining the idea of a shared reality and rather cherish conflict and division, difference and opposition. In a way, this can be said to be a normal aspect of politics, as the political discourse can be analysed as an exchange of opinions not primarily contributing to a ‘true description of the world’ but rather being a struggle for power. Now, an interesting aspect of Ricœur’s hermeneutical philosophy is the claim that we should rather appreciate that there are different interpretations and that a conflict of interpretations is the condition for human knowledge. In this fashion, one would turn to Ricœur for insights and for guidance regarding action in the contemporary situation.

	The idea is that Ricœur's hermeneutics may both illuminate contemporary post-truth politics and contribute to the formulation of new theoretical tools for developing a ground for public debate and political critique. An exploration of Ricœur's hermeneutics in relation to 'truthers' and 'truth defenders' is called for. In this paper, an outline will be given regarding the question: Can Ricœur's philosophy around the conflict of interpretations be of help in this situation, and may his philosophy help us understand conflicts over conspiracy theories?
Denys Gorbach is a political ethnographer whose main interests are everyday politics, class formation, migration, social movements and ideologies constructed from below, trade unions, industrial labour, and survival strategies of the working class. In 2022, he was awarded a PhD degree by Sciences Po Paris. His first book, <i>The Making and Unmaking of the Ukrainian Working Class: Everyday Politics and Moral Economy in a Post-Soviet City</i>, is a pioneering study of politicisation of the Ukrainian working class. In 2023, he won a research grant from the French Red Cross Foundation to conduct field research on the survival strategies of Ukrainian war migrants in France. As part of the CONSPIRATIONS project, he conducts research on the role of suspicion in the politicisation and the formation of political cleavages in Francophone Belgium.	Cordoned off in a small country: The politics of doubt and civic education in Belgium The generic distinction between 'truthers' and 'truth defenders' works well in countries deeply polarised around conspiracy theories, but in other contexts it might not be easy to classify actors according to this binary scheme. Such is the case of (Francophone) Belgium, a country where conspiracy theories and disinformation are not perceived as a serious problem, and yet where there is a strong tradition of critique and suspicion towards all authoritative discourses. This tradition of methodological doubt took root in the Belgian progressive milieux in the Cold War context. At the end of last century, it found institutional expression in the industry of 'permanent education' - a network of publicly funded NGOs pursuing various activities in the sphere of culture, media, and education. All these activities aim to cultivate CRACS - 'responsible, active, critical, solidary citizens.' The commitment to the ideal of 'critical thinking,' shared across the civil society, marginalises stereotypical 'truth defenders' with liberal technocratic pedigree; at the same time, it blurs the frontier separating these activists from 'truthers,' making the distinction quantitative rather than qualitative. In my contribution, I will study actors engaged in the fight for 'critical thinking,' both within and outside of permanent education, and look at the factors that ensure their social reproduction: the institution of political and mediatic sanitary cordon as well as the self-perception as an insignificant, hence isolated from all geopolitical struggles, nation.
Masha Guzzo studied Philosophy, Theatre Studies, and Sociology at the University of Palermo (Italy), the Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich, and Trinity College Dublin. She is currently a PhD candidate at the Institute for Social Research in Frankfurt am Main, under the supervision of Stephan	Conspiracy and Spirituality: Authoritarian Coping in East German Protest Milieu In my contribution, I examine the connection between conspiratorial thinking and esoteric belief within authoritarian protest milieus in Saxony (Germany). Drawing on a psychoanalytic approach within social psychology and based on ethnographic fieldwork and semi-structured interviews with activists, I show that these

Lessenich. Her doctoral research, part of the PhD program “Dialectics of Participation,” funded by the Hans-Böckler Foundation, focuses on contemporary authoritarian protest mobilizations in Saxony. Her research interests include Critical Theory, Authoritarianism Studies, Movement Studies, Psychoanalytic Social Psychology, and Ethnographic Methods. Since 2024, she has been a visiting scholar at the Else-Frenkel-Brunswik Institute in Leipzig (Germany). In addition to her doctoral research, she serves as the Executive Director of the Institute for Protest and Movement Research in Berlin and is as researcher actively involved in its activities.	two forms of knowledge not only coexist but mutually reinforce one another. The blending of both is captured under the term “Conspiritoriality” (Ward & Voas 2011). My central argument is that these ideological fusions function as a response to an increasingly conflictual, crisis-ridden, and menacingly perceived world. At the heart of my deep-hermeneutic analysis of the interview material lies an affective dynamic of anxiety management: the adoption of conspiratorial thinking and spirituality can be understood as a defensive formation against a deeply rooted fear of social conflict and of internal ego disintegration. These modes of thought operate not merely as expressions of individual experiences of mistrust (Wirth 2022, pp. 100 ff.), but also as collective strategies for stabilizing a worldview perceived as increasingly threatened. From this perspective, conspiracy narratives emerge not primarily as political statements but as psychodynamic processes for coping with societal uncertainty, sustained by an affective orientation toward “hidden truths” and by the cementing and rationalizing of a “self victim position” as psychological relief (Engels & Salzmann 2022). A defining feature of the analysed interviews is a fantasy of fusion with the “loving community,” the “universe,” “nature,” or a higher order. This fusion fantasy serves as a counter-image to the conflictual plurality of democratic society: it eliminates ambiguity and difference through an illusory sense of wholeness and coherent meaning, which provides the actors with an inner sense of security (cf. Dilling et al. 2022). This contribution aims to discuss these dynamics as an authoritarian coping mechanism situated at the intersection of subjectivity crisis, social disruptions, and collective affective landscapes—and thereby contributes to the discussion of the emotional foundations of conspiratorial thinking in the context of far-right, authoritarian protest movements in Germany.
Anna Hadders is curator at the Regional Museum of Scania, (Regionmuseet Skåne) in Kristianstad, where she mainly works as an exhibition Producer and Project Manager. She is the local executive producer of the exhibition <i>Fake for Real</i>, opening in Kristianstad, on the 10th of December 2025. Helén Lilja is Museum Curator and Museum Educator at the same museum. She was closely involved in proofreading the texts in Swedish for "Fake for Real", and she will	Fake f(or) Real. A History of Forgery and Falsification The exhibition presents falsifications throughout history, describing the specific historical circumstances that explain how they were created, the interests and motivations behind them, their impact and how they were ultimately exposed. We show that fakes have a long tradition in history and do not only belong to our current era. We also reflect on how to build up resilience against the attempts to deceive and mislead us.

work with communicating the content of the exhibition to school groups and students.	
Katerina Hatzikidi (DPhil, Oxon) is a social anthropologist and senior postdoctoral researcher at the ERC PACT: Populism and Conspiracy Theory project at the University of Tübingen. Her work explores political and social transformations with a special country focus on Brazil. Katerina was the PI of an international project on anticommunism in Brazil (2023-2025), funded by the University of Tübingen's Excellence Strategy. In 2023, she was Visiting Professor at the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro (IFCS/UFRJ). Among other publications, Katerina has co-edited the volumes <i>The faces of authoritarianism and strategies of dissent in contemporary Brazil</i> (UCL Press, 2025), <i>Populism and conspiracy theory. Case studies and theoretical perspectives</i> (Routledge, 2024), and <i>A horizon of (im)possibilities: A chronicle of Brazil's conservative turn</i> (London University Press, 2021). Her monograph <i>Conservatism and Conspiracism in Brazil. A Time of Awakening</i> is forthcoming with Routledge.	‘Awakening to reality’. Sentinels, conspiracism, and the monopoly of truth among Brazilian conservatives Engaging with the conference’s premise that conspiracy theories are relational and emerge within a dialogical field, this paper proposes to carefully consider the experience of ‘awakening’, prevalent among conspiracy theorists, as a key viewpoint into the societal fault lines conspiracy theories reveal, respond to, and foment. Awakenings perform radical breaks with the past, setting or reconfiguring the boundaries of moral communities while initiating a process of staying connected to the revealed truth. They thus offer privileged vantage points for exploring not only personal or societal transformations but for exploring both—and issues considered conflictive among communities—at the same time. The discussion draws from extensive fieldwork with conservative voters in Brazil to show how experiences of awakening are fundamental to the study of conspiracy-driven political subjectivities. The paper proposes a nuanced approach to conspiracy theories as practice through an immersive analysis of the transformative experience of awakening in order to consider why some conspiracy theories are appealing to some people and not to others. The role of sentinels, or vigilant observers, will be discussed in relation to the post-awakening moment and to the consolidation of antagonistic frontiers. It will be showed that, as opposed to a recurrent argument in the relevant literature, when conspiracy theories interpellate it is meaning—an affinity with one’s reading grid—that takes precedence over the specific details. By highlighting the centrality of awakening, a defining yet largely overlooked element in the study of conspiracy theories, the paper contributes to the growing body of anthropological literature on conspiracy theories by proposing an analytical lens into their conditions of possibility, their practice, and their societal effects.
Leonie Heims is a research associate at modus zad, a Berlin based think tank conducting applied research in the field of P/CVE. The aim of modus zad is to bridge the gap between research and practice, translating empirical insights into practical approaches for prevention and intervention. Her work focuses on conspiracy ideology and	Building Resilience Through Laughter: Humor as a Tool to Address Conspiratorial Thinking Conspiracy theories not only propagate contested truths but also frequently generate relational conflicts between believers and their social environments. Traditional countermeasures focusing on fact-based correction often fail due to emotional resistance, cognitive dissonance, and entrenched social identities. In this contribution, we discuss both the potential and the risks of humor-based interventions in countering conspiracy beliefs. Drawing on

sovereignism/anti-authority extremism. Within the project “The Fabulist”, she creates educational content on social media about various conspiracy myths, (re-)emerging disinformation narratives and manipulation tactics. The project’s approach is to shed light on the issue in an entertaining yet fact-based way. Leonie specialised in ‘Cognitive Media Linguistics’ (M.A).	empirical research in persuasion, emotional regulation, and cognitive dissonance reduction, we argue that humor can serve as an entry point for critical reconsideration. It opens up a sphere transcends rigid notions of truth and falsehood that lowers psychological defenses. Thereby humor provides emotionally safe environments that allows individuals to critically engage with their belief systems and renegotiate their social identities without loss of face, which could potentially weaken emotional attachment to conspiratorial worldviews. Based on practical experiences from the German civic project The Fabulist (Der Fabulant), we illustrate how humor can address complex and emotionally charged topics such as climate change or the pandemic in a more accessible and relatable way, and also foster curiosity and intrinsic motivation to seek accurate information. Humorous interventions also offer support to the social networks of those at risk of conspiratorial thinking by providing comic relief, strengthening community bonds, and mitigating feelings of helplessness often experienced by relatives, friends, and colleagues. Importantly, we address ethical considerations: How can humor avoid reinforcing stigmatization, trivializing genuine fears, or ridiculing individuals who believe in conspiracy theories? By positioning humor as a communicative practice between “truthers” and “truth defenders,” we highlight humor as a powerful yet underutilized resource in the field of prevention – that can build bridges across the conspiratorial divide and strengthen collective resilience.
Ben Kasstan-Dabush (MSc, PhD) is Lecturer of Global Health Policy at the University of Edinburgh. Trained as a medical anthropologist, his research explores ideas of what health protection means and according to whom – and what is at stake when opposing ideas of protecting life intersect.	The Stakes that Spread: Polio outbreaks and Polyphonic Voices across Religious Worlds Signs that polio was spreading in London and New York sewers emerged in 2022, prompting international public health agencies to mobilise historical narratives and truths about the risk of returning to a time of paralysed children and iron lungs. Orthodox Jewish children were at increased risk of transmission, due to lower-level vaccination coverage but also because the only confirmed polio cases and cases of paralysis were reported in areas of New York and Safed that are home to large Jewish neighbourhoods. Jewish community activists mobilised to protect their communities by defending the reputations of polio vaccination (including its Jewish origins), and emphasise the risk of this spreading virus through community channels. However, polyphonic voices emerged that demonstrated a diverging spread of narratives between religious lifeworlds – advocacy against vaccination. This paper juxtaposes the polyphonic voices at play during the spread of poliovirus in New York, and the discursive shifts at play in their stakes. Orthodox

	Jewish activists against vaccination framed community health events as ‘atheist conventions’, and directly attacked me (the anthropologist) as an invited speaker and participant-observer in public health responses. The stakes of these stakeholders echoed the discourse of moral regulation found in the Evangelical Christian right, espousing positions on abortion that diverge radically from rabbinic positions. Moreover, their discourse revived demographic threats of annihilation, illustrating how the stakes were made relative to Jewish stakeholders. Hence, this paper contributes to the workshop by illustrating how the ‘truths’ at stake are made relative to different stakeholders, and how different ideas spread and interact with each other. Thinking critically about ‘spread’ raises insights into the conflicts that emerge over knowledge and what counts as a threat, according to whom – and why.
Ester Köverová is a researcher involved in the project <i>Linguistic and Communicative Aspects of Disinformation</i> in the Department of Social Linguistics at the Ľudovít Štúr Institute of Linguistics of the Slovak Academy of Sciences (SAS). She has focused on young people and risk behavior through her work with the organization <i>Mládež ulice</i> [Youth Street Work], which led her to the topics of radicalization and violent extremism. She has collaborated with the Research Institute of Child Psychology and Pathopsychology, mainly on topics related to radicalization and violent extremism. Currently, she is participating in the HoDeKoProM project at this institute, which explores how hoaxes, conspiracy narratives, and propaganda are perceived among young people. Her research focuses particularly on issues of inequality in the formal education system and the phenomenon of radicalization and violent extremism both online and offline. Jaroslava Rusinková is a researcher in the Department of Social Linguistics at the Ľudovít	The instrumentalization of language in the pursuit of truth, or How words do not lose their meanings Despite the declared positions of Slovak government (regarding the firm anchoring of the Slovak Republic in the European Union) their public discourse is marked by a practical deviation from its values, as well as by criticism of liberalism. Slovak politicians are strongly supported in this criticism by so-called alternative media, which propagate the narrative of the existence and harmfulness of what they call liberal fascism. These narratives are met with responses from many intellectuals who, in their effort to present a truthful interpretation of terms and their meanings, develop anti-conspiracy theories about the destruction, hijacking, or loss of linguistic meanings. The aim of this paper is to present the conspiratorial discourse on liberalism (using the example of fear-based emotional manipulation during the 2024 presidential campaign) and the subsequent anti-conspiratorial discourse, which instrumentalizes the topic of linguistic meaning in the interest of promoting truth. The result of this discourse is the repetition of stereotypical notions about language that are illogical, unhelpful in addressing the problem of linguistic manipulation, and are (paradoxically) further absorbed into conspiratorial discourses. Statements such as “Words are losing their meaning” help legitimize a worldview in which rules based on shared consensus no longer apply. The research material includes political and media texts. Methodologically, the paper is based on narrative content analysis, but it also emphasizes the need for deeper qualitative (discursive) analysis. The purpose of the paper is thus to highlight the relevance of linguistics as an interpretative science in addressing the current issue of disinformation (or conspiratorial) language communication. Key words: liberal fascism,

Štúr Institute of Linguistics of the Slovak Academy of Sciences (SAS). Her research focuses on topics in social linguistics (e.g., language discrimination, language attitudes, the instrumentalization of language in disinformation discourses, etc.). She also works in the field of standard language theory and language culture, and participates in the development of Slovak language norms. Additionally, she is actively involved in the topic of the Rusyn minority language in the context of Slovak language policy.	instrumentalisation of language, disinformation language communication, alternative media.
Lola Le Flanchec is a 3rd year PhD student at Sciences Po Bordeaux in France. She is currently working on the active role of women in conspiracist movements like QAnon with a comprehensive and qualitative approach.	“Everyone is conspiracist now !” : The use of “conspiracist” label by conspiracist movements as a stigma reversal attempt This presentation aims to highlight a new phenomenon within conspiracist movements. The “conspiracist” label used to qualify groups with alternative visions of the reality is exogenous to these movements. Conspiracist groups usually develop strategies to legitimize their position toward the public and it appears that recently a new rhetoric became important within the milieu. Indeed, this “conspiracist” label is now used by those it was supposed to describe in order to disqualify their opponent. In the same time, some people in those groups are calling themselves “conspiracy realists” and take pride for their difference with the rest of the population.
Danaé Leitenberg is a social anthropologist and postdoctoral researcher at the Institute for Sociology, University of Basel. Her research spans topics such as nativism, migration, tourism, and conspiracy beliefs. Currently, she contributes to the interdisciplinary project “Connecting the Dots: Reconstructing the Social Production of Suspicious Knowledge” as a scientific collaborator. Danaé has held positions at the University of Bern, the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology, and the Martin Luther Wittenberg University.	Stigma reappropriation and narratives of victimhood in the German-speaking conspiracy theory scene Since the Covid-19 pandemic, a wide variety of actors have increasingly described conspiracy theories as a threatening phenomenon in the Western world. In this context, labelling someone a ‘conspiracy theorist’ - and its colloquial equivalents such as the ‘tin foil hats’ - has served as a way to delegitimize, ridicule and dismiss the opinion of dissenting others. In this paper, we examine what happens when these slurs are recuperated by those they target, transforming them into symbols of identity, pride or resistance. Based on ethnographic fieldwork and biographical interviews conducted among people involved in the so-called ‘conspiracy scene’ in Germany, Austria and Switzerland in 2024-2025, this contribution explores in what context and how this form of stigma reappropriation happens, what characterizes it and what it achieves. In particular, we analyze how members of the

Florian Knasmüller is a social psychologist whose research centers on conspiracy beliefs and right-wing populism. He currently works as a scientific collaborator in the interdisciplinary project "Connecting the Dots: Reconstructing the Social Production of Suspicious Knowledge" and is pursuing a PhD at Sigmund Freud University.	conspiracy scene use self-labeling to navigate their conflicts with members and institutions of the ‘mainstream’, and what these strategies reveal of a broader malaise within modern democracies. While stigma reappropriation has historically described the process by which dominated groups (e.g. racial and gender minorities) reclaim the insults uttered by dominant groups as an act of empowerment within progressive movements, we seek to interrogate this phenomenon in a very different ideological context. In a German-speaking conspiracy scene that is increasingly moving towards the far-right, we situate stigma reappropriation within a culture where victimhood discourses are often used to advance an illiberal political agenda. Addressing our role as researchers moving across the conspiratorial divide, we finally also turn our attention to the interactions between conspiracy believers and researchers, examining the role of stigma reappropriation and narratives of victimhood in our encounters.
Agnieszka Lipińska is the head of the Centre of Disinformation Analysis at NASK (National Research Institute) in Poland. Her PhD dissertation was focused on the applications of OSINT in the context of growing threats to national security and of disinformation.	Proactive state policies against disinformation in Poland How can the state administration effectively participate in the process of combating conspiracy theories? Is it possible to create a common institutional front in the face of widespread disinformation campaigns, and what formula for action can be adopted? Research conducted by our centre shows that certain conspiracy theories resonate strongly in a certain section of society. Anti-vaccination and "alternative medicine" theories are particularly dangerous in such a context. At the NASK Disinformation Analysis Centre, we have started cooperating in this area with other institutions such as the Ministry of Health and the General Sanitary Inspectorate in an attempt to develop a model for ‘disarming’ the activity of these communities. To counteract the influence of other conspiracy theories or classic disinformation, we have undertaken information campaigns in the media, educational actions (lessons for students, training courses for teachers), but also regular meetings with non-governmental organisations to react on an ongoing basis to threats, but also to predict disinformation trends involving Polish recipients. Based on the assumption that the current model of informing and educating against disinformation is ineffective, an attempt was made to change the action paradigm to a proactive, not reactive one. My presentation will focus on preliminary conclusions from the ongoing research and decisions made by NASK, including the presentation of several case studies.

Andrey Makarychev is Professor of Regional Political Studies at the University of Tartu Johan Skytte Institute of Political Studies. He is the author of <i>Popular Biopolitics and Populism at Europe's Eastern Margins</i> (Brill, 2022), and co-authored five monographs: <i>Celebrating Borderlands in a Wider Europe: Nations and Identities in Ukraine, Georgia and Estonia</i> (Nomos, 2016), <i>Lotman's Cultural Semiotics and the Political</i> (Rowman and Littlefield, 2017), <i>Critical Biopolitics of the Post-Soviet: from Populations to Nations</i> (Lexington Books, 2020), <i>Practical Biopolitics of COVID-19: Comparing Russian and Indonesian Experiences</i> (Lexington Books, 2023) and <i>Biopower in Putin's Russia: From Taking Care to Taking Lives</i> (CEU Press, 2024). He co-edited several academic volumes: <i>Mega Events in post-Soviet Eurasia: Shifting Borderlines of Inclusion and Exclusion</i> (Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), <i>Vocabularies of International Relations after the Crisis in Ukraine</i> (Routledge, 2017); <i>Borders in the Baltic Sea Region: Suturing the Ruptures</i> (Palgrave Macmillan, 2017). His articles have been published in such academic journals as <i>Slavic Review</i>, <i>Journal of International Relations and Development</i>, <i>Political Geography</i>, <i>Slavic Military Review</i>, <i>Eurasian Geography and Economics</i>, <i>Alternatives</i>, <i>Nationalities Papers</i>, <i>Journal of Borderland Studies</i>, among others. He teaches courses on Foreign Policy Analysis, Political Systems in post-Soviet Space, Visual Politics, and Biopolitics.	Post-truth, conspiracies and biopolitical propaganda in Estonia: Visual analysis The phenomenon of Russian and pro-Russian propaganda is one of the most acute topics in such disciplines as media and communication, security studies, and political sociology. The number of academic publications in these research fields is growing, but there is (at least) one scholarly sphere where issues related to post-truth and conspiracy thinking remain only tangentially touched upon – namely, biopolitics. This analysis intends to partly fill this gap through conceptualization of the propaganda – biopolitics nexus and unpacking it on the empirical material of pro-Russian video bloggers operating in Estonia. The concept of biopolitical propaganda raises a question of how can human minds and bodies be objects of manipulative techniques? My analysis shows that biopolitical propaganda has two interconnected aspects: it can imply the semiotic interpretation of the content of pro-Russian messages from a biopolitical viewpoint, and it can be approached as a mechanism of biopolitical control and discipline. (Pro)Russian conspiratorial narratives is a discursive genre that opens an important channel for understanding the state of minds among local supporters of Russia who go public with their visualized stories with a combination of conspiracy theories, unknowledge or ignorance. The core characteristic of this narrative which adds a lot to the nexus between biopolitics and security is the manipulative exploitation of people's self-perception as bare lives and the ensuing biopolitical localism. Analysis of pro-Russian visuals produced by residents of Estonia exposes to the public gaze a previously unnoticed facet of biopolitics as a depoliticizing dispositif serving the purpose of distancing the population from engaging with the (geo)political reality on the ground and properly assessing it, which makes biopolitics an important policy tool legitimizing the ongoing war in Ukraine.
Joseph Patrick McAulay is a research fellow at Oxford University's Centre for Socio-Legal Studies where he was recently awarded a 3-year competitive	Chemtrails over Coventry: Examining the use of Chemtrail in Climate Change Debates within UK Based Online Conspiracist Communities

Leverhulme Early Career Fellowship. His current project “Dangerous Spectacles” utilises an innovate multi-methods strategy to investigate the relationship between conspiracy theories, social media, and crime in the United Kingdom. His research has been published in journals such as the International Review of Victimology, Deviant Behaviour, and the St Anthony’s International Review. Joseph holds a DPhil and MSc from the Centre for Criminology in Oxford, and an LLB from the University of Edinburgh where he received the McClintock Prize in Criminology.	As debates about the causes, impacts, and even the very existence of global warming continue an increasing part of public discourse includes conspiracy theory infused narratives which argue global warming is a hoax, and part of a plot to institute a totalitarian New World Order. Within these narratives the recurring image of the “chemtrail” has a growing importance as a means for conspiracists to explain extreme weather events and other environmental harms. Despite this, little research has examined how the idea of the chemtrail is utilised in conspiracist spaces which are in conflict with mainstream scientific explanations for climate change. In this paper I attempt to investigate this issue, utilising data gathered from a yearlong netnographic immersion into British Conspiracist communities across multiple social media platforms. Through thematic narrative analysis the paper reveals how conspiracist utilise the trope of chem trails to mediate conflict with scientific explanations for climate change. The image of the chemtrails can be used to provide an alternative thematic framework to understand environmental harms and rebuke the stigmatised nature of conspiracy theories. However, the data presented also demonstrates how the idea of the chemtrail allow conspiracists to engage with fears over the degradation of the environment and express a desire for a more natural less artificial social order which poses fewer risks for human health and wellbeing. In this way the paper demonstrates how conspiracists use narratives like chem-trails to construct alternative understandings of the “truth” and how the defence of these truth narratives gives an insight into the fears and desires of a growing movement which puts itself in opposition to any attempt to deal with the existential threat of climate change.
Jonathan Morgan (PhD in Ethics, 2024) is a researcher in ethics at Lund University. His work focuses on the relationship between migration and religion, postmigrancy, and institutional trust building. Aaron James Goldman (PhD in Religious Studies, 2021) is a research fellow in philosophy of religion at Lund University. Among other topics, he conducts research on conspiracy theories, apocalypticism, and the relationship between the two from a perspective empowered by classic theories of religion.	Beyond the facts of the matter: Addressing Socialstyrelsen’s efforts to counter the LVU-kampanjen conspiracy theory On the tail of the ‘LVU-kampanjen’ conspiracy theory (December 2021–), in which social media were flooded with reports of the children of Muslim families in Sweden being systematically removed by state social workers, the Swedish government characterised such reports as disinformation. The Swedish National Board of Health and Welfare (Socialstyrelsen) was tasked with countering this disinformation. Their methods for doing so included social media campaigns, an informational website, and in-person outreach in conjunction with local social work authorities (Socialtjänsten). This paper draws on interviews conducted during early 2025 to argue that Socialstyrelsen’s strategy of countering disinformation fails to adequately account for the most important

	conditions, among their target audience, for trusting state-run social services. Though interviews are ongoing, our research suggests that Socialstyrelsen's solution to the problem of distrust is characterised by attempts to re-clarify and re-communicate facts about their purposes and operations. Put differently, they (circularly) attempt to combat disinformation and distrust by presenting information they deem true and trustworthy to a population that distrusts them, while overlooking the dynamics of what causes distrust in the first place. We hypothesise that this case highlights a challenge for democracy building more generally, including the need to address distrust of institutions by appealing to more than the epistemic authority of those very institutions. We suggest that long-term work toward constructing frameworks for social solidarity generates conditions for trust in democratic institutions. On the contrary, atomised attempts to combat disinformation about specific topics and distrust in particular institutions may either make no progress or even reaffirm the relationship of distrust.
Răzvan Nicolescu is a digital anthropologist with research interest in the impact of new technologies on inequality, political economy, and governance. He holds a BSc and MSc in telecommunications from University Polytechnics of Bucharest and a PhD in digital anthropology from University College London. He is the author of Social media in southeast Italy: crafting ideals (2016) and co-author of How the world changed social media (2016). Razvan is currently a Research Fellow at the New Europe College in Bucharest, Romania.	Loneliness and marginality: an avenue to systemic skepticism Many people would agree that our media ecosystem is saturated with fake news, mis- & disinformation, and hoaxes. Academic literature connects these phenomena to the traditions of propaganda, technological affordances and information abundance, the presumed post-truth era, the proliferation of digital technologies and platform economies, and the emergence of new forms of capitalism. My recent research on the consumption of fake news and misinformation in Romania shows how and why most people judge news in relation to their own experiences and expectations – a process that can lead to contradictory, paradoxical, or seemingly irrational attitudes. A key element of this experience is how much people feel socially connected and involved. In particular, those who feel lonely, marginalized, or unheard tend to be skeptical of and reluctant to trust mainstream news and politics. The paper explores loneliness as a key factor in understanding why people feel drawn to non-mainstream explanations and theories. Many of my research participants point to a difficult transition from socialism to a free market in Romania and an inability to relate to dominant discourses and lifestyles. They feel they have fallen through the cracks of this transition and now feel in different ways lonely and excluded. Consequently, people tend to blame those they see as having promoted—many would say imposed—such changes they associate with mainstream discourses and globalist tactics. They often suspect the worst and believe that much of the mainstream media

	disguises some sort of global conspiracy. The paper provides evidence that, in their relentless quest to expose fake or inaccurate news, democratic institutions often overlook essential social factors that make people reluctant and distrustful in the first place. The paper argues for the need to look carefully beyond “truth wars” in order to address loneliness and other forms of marginalization.
Andrzej W. Nowak is a scholar active on the intersection of social philosophy and philosophy of science and technology. Interested in the social and political dimensions of materiality. An important part of his interests is the study of scientific and social controversies and processes of producing fears, doubts and ignorance. Attempts to combine the ontological sensibility of posthumanism with the Promethean promise of modernity and the Enlightenment A populariser of Immanuel Wallerstein's modern system-world theory in Poland, with a particular interest in the study of semi-periphery. Author of the books (in polish): <i>Wyobrażenia ontologiczne</i>. 2016, <i>Podmiot, system, nowoczesność</i> 2011; co-author of books <i>Czyje lęki? Czyja nauka? Struktury wiedzy wobec kontrowersji naukowo - społecznych</i> 2016 (together with Abriszewski and Wróblewski) and (english) <i>Polish Science and Technology Studies in the New Millennium</i> 2022 (with Abriszewski and Derra). Author of several dozen scientific articles, an active participant in scientific and public life, occasionally a publicist, also present in the blogosphere.	‘False class consciousness’ and Political Ontology of Conspiracy Theories (CT) In the presentation, the implications of the post-truth discussion within STS for conspiracy theories will be analysed, as will the shift from an epistemological to an ontological (or ontoepistemological) account of them. As printing press created nationalism and „imagined communities” (Anderson), social network algorithms (and corporate powers behind them) are main communities creating forces, including those like QAnon that form around the sharing of conspiracy theories. In the following, the hypothesis is put forward that, when faced with the preeminence of ontological (i.e. algorithmic) rationales associated with the formation of communities engaged in the exchange of CTs, the utilisation of an ontological analysis be a more effective <i>modus operandi</i> in comparison to an epistemological approach. Therefore, contemporary CTs are not primarily counterpower movements; rather, they are the unmediated instruments of technofeudal power structures. It is argued here that there is a necessity for a shift from a purely anthropological approach (a standpoint shared by STS) which reconstructs the "natives" point of view to "Political Ontology of CT" (Nowak). The latter approach is congruent with the field of agnotology (Proctor, Schiebinger, Oreskes). This is in line with the proposition of Johan Söderberg, to revive forgotten Marxian concept of "false class consciousness. It is therefore evident that in order for a critique of real power structures to be realised, it is necessary to move beyond the postulate of an anthropological, post-structuralist perspective and return to the origins of STS, when they were still intertwined strongly with a Marxist critique. Consequently, the issue of the "false class consciousness" and the role of researchers in the context of CT revisits the modernist question of being a "vanguard" and the associated responsibility. Otherwise, to remain in a naïve attitude of symmetry is to abdicate to seriously take CT as a tool of power and dominance.
Giovanna Parmigiani is a Lecturer on Religion and Cultural Anthropology at Harvard Divinity School and a Research Associate at	Beyond Truthers and Truth-Defenders: Ethnographic Reflections on Conspiratoriality

the Center for the Study of World Religions. Her research focuses on contemporary spiritualities, magic, and the politics of knowledge. She is the author of <i>The Spider Dance</i> (Equinox, 2024) and the forthcoming <i>Lived Conspiritoriality: Researching Conspiracy Theories and Alternative Spiritualities</i> (Routledge). She has published widely on conspiritoriality, sensory epistemologies, and the anthropology of magic and alternative spiritualities.	This paper explores conspiracy-believing (Parmigiani 2021) as it emerges in the everyday lives of alternative spiritual practitioners in Southern Italy. Based on over a decade of ethnographic fieldwork, it approaches conspiracy theories through the lens of lived conspiritoriality—the entanglement of spiritual and conspiritorial discourses—not as fixed ideologies, but as fluid, relational practices grounded in lived experience. In dialogue with the study of lived religion, I examine how conspiracy-believing manifests in ordinary moments, entangled with intuition, participatory epistemologies, care, and moral aspiration. Rather than treating conspiracy theories as discrete objects of belief or misinformation, I approach them “beyond truth” (Parmigiani 2021): as magical practices (Greenwood 2010), and as part of people’s broader efforts to sense and make sense of the world (Rancière 2010). These efforts are often marked by contradiction, ambiguity, and transformation. What people say, do, and experience rarely align neatly. Such tensions—revealed only through long-term ethnographic engagement—demonstrate that conspiracy-believing is not irrationality, but a relational and affective mode of navigating uncertainty, marginalization, and hope. Crucially, contestations over conspiritorial thinking also occur within these spiritual communities. Practitioners who challenge conspiracy theories often do so by drawing on shared values, spiritual epistemologies, and experiences of harm. These internal dynamics complicate too neat oppositions between “truthers” and “truth defenders,” revealing the plural, evolving, and reflexive nature of conspiritorial worlds. Aligning with the conference’s focus on relational dynamics, I draw from my article “Separation, but Not Division” (2023) and my forthcoming book <i>Lived Conspiritoriality</i> (Routledge) to focus on the relational, mutational, and affective dimensions of conspiracy-believing as they emerge from its lived, embodied, and everyday forms in alternative spiritualities settings.
Marsanna Petersen is a PhD student in ethnology at Lund University. She is a part of the ERC-project CONSPIRATIONS which investigates conspiracy theories and cultural conflicts over truth in six European countries (Sweden, Germany, Poland, Bulgaria, Belgium and Estonia). Petersen is responsible for the research of conspiracy theories and conflicts over truths in Sweden and investigates the relationship	Contested Views of Democracy in Swedish Society In research as well as in society in general, conspiracy theories are often talked about as a threat to democracy and open societies. This perception gave foundation to global and national initiatives launched to counteract disinformation. In Sweden these include agencies, non-governmental organizations and civil society. In my research I study everyday working experiences and meaning making practices of scholars, journalists and representatives of non-governmental organizations in Sweden who work in various ways with issues relating to disinformation and conspiracy theories, as well as

between conspiracy theories and politics.	preventive activities. I also study everyday experience and meaning making practices of people who engage with conspiracy theories, the activists involved in the grassroots political parties founded during the Covid-19 pandemic. In this paper, I present preliminary empirical findings from interviews with these two groups, showing how they talk about and refer to democracy. The aim is to analyze and show the clash between their views. Whereas, both groups view democracy as a crucial pillar of society, the assumption, that we live in a democracy in Sweden, is present in the interviews with scholars, journalists and non-governmental organizations but contested by those who engage in conspiracy theories. The latter believe strongly that we have no democracy. The paper problematizes the meaning of these different standpoints in relation to the ‘taken for granted’ attitude, that conspiracy theories constitute a threat against democracy in society. Whereas this makes sense for broader society and guides initiatives designed to combat conspiracy theories, I argue that it is not a convincing argument for those who endorse conspiracy theories.
Emma Rimpiläinen is a postdoctoral researcher at the Institute for Russian and Eurasian Studies, Uppsala University. As a social anthropologist, she specialises in mobility and displacement in the Ukrainian context, with interests in knowledge production, housing, and subjectivity.	“It’s very hard to convey any arguments or facts to them:” Claims of zombification in the Donbas war Invoking the concept of “zombification” has become a common way of articulating distrust in other people’s ideas in post-Soviet Ukraine and Russia. The usage of zombification as a metaphor exploded in 2014 at the beginning of the Donbas war, which made families living in the embattled region or straddling the Russo-Ukrainian border suddenly aware that they fundamentally disagreed about the facts on the ground. Some hypothesised that perhaps it had always been this way: “we lived among them and never knew that they thought this way.” Others posited that media and propaganda had gradually “zombified” their family members, neighbours, and friends due to their lastingly “Soviet mentality”. Still, one thing was clear: it was impossible to talk about the things that matter anymore. Many people cut ties with their erstwhile loved ones and yet others refrained from talking about politics with their “zombified” family members and stuck to uncontroversial topics like the weather. External influence that turns people into the living dead expresses an emic understanding of the uncanny functioning of geopolitical power. The image of the zombie represents fears of the breaching of bodily and epistemic integrity and loss of agency. What is worst, the zombified subject may look and act like their former self while being infected, which underlines the need for strict hygiene measures. Because it can happen to anyone, the zombified subject is not to blame for their condition but should be

	avoided. This paper argues that the concern with zombification can be used to unpack more recent global concerns with conspiracy theories, in yet another example of Eastern Europe leading the way in global developments rather than lagging behind.
Bente Schøning is a PhD candidate in health communication at UiT – The Arctic University of Norway. With a multidisciplinary background in the social sciences and a Master’s degree in Peace and Conflict Transformation, her research focuses on improving the quality of science communication. Her first article was published in <i>Frontiers in Communication</i>, and her second, on the visual framing of vaping on Instagram, has recently been accepted in <i>Frontiers in Communication – Visual Communication</i>. She is currently conducting a study on the creative processes involved in collaboration between health researchers and professional communicators. In addition, her team is preparing a randomized controlled trial to evaluate the effectiveness of an anti-vaping campaign targeting adolescents.	Health Researchers' Voluntary Science-Communication with Non-Academics: Motivations, Barriers, and Practices Introduction This study finds that health researchers in Norway are strongly motivated to communicate their work with non-academic audiences by a sense of public duty, career visibility, and personal satisfaction. They frequently employ user-involvement strategies during the research process, but dissemination of results often reverts to one-way communication. Significant barriers include negative media experiences, lack of institutional support, and limited incentives, with current systems rewarding traditional academic publishing over public engagement. The findings highlight that effective science communication requires stronger institutional backing in the form of resources, incentives, and recognition of non-academic communication as valuable scholarly work. A shift toward participatory, user-involved models is needed to enhance the accessibility, quality, and societal impact of health research. The study employed semi-structured interviews with 14 active health researchers at UiT Arctic University of Norway, analyzed through a realist thematic approach. Results underscore that although researchers are intrinsically motivated and committed to engaging with society, institutional shortcomings hinder broader impact. By addressing barriers and supporting active communicators, universities can better fulfill legal and ethical obligations for public engagement and ensure that research outcomes benefit the wider community.
Mariam Shalvashvili is currently pursuing a PhD in Social and Cultural Anthropology at Ilia State University in Tbilisi. She has been the recipient of the Heinrich Böll Foundation scholarship and was a Visiting Fellow at the Center for Eastern European Studies of the University of Zurich. Mariam has previously worked as a lecturer at the Free University of Tbilisi and as a researcher at the Georgian NGO Social Justice Center.	Doubting (the) State(s): The Political and Affective Role of Mistrust and Conspiracy Theories in Georgia This paper engages with fully formed narratives and meta-conspiracy theories, fragmented and half-formed conspiracy thoughts, suspicions and doubts in contemporary Georgia. On the one hand, the article does not let go of an important thought in anthropology that among marginalized groups conspiracies and doubts can potentially have subversive and analytical potential for critique. They can help individuals and groups to make sense of the political processes, understand their own subjectivity or articulate silenced and hidden power dynamics as it will be demonstrated in the case of Kists in

	Pankisi, North-East Georgia. However, by also exploring the political discourse of Georgian state officials who have brought conspiracy theories in the center of their political rhetoric, the article shows how conspiracy theories and doubts have become useful discursive tools for the powerful to represent themselves as the ones lacking power and portraying dissent as part of the global conspiracy. In light of recent mass protests in Georgia, conspiracy theories have played an important role in creating suspicions about protestors and their ‘actual’ motivation. Furthermore, I demonstrate that instead of producing a single, straightforward and coherent narrative or propaganda, the state officials and pro-governmental media deliberately promote fuzzy, obscure, competing or ever-changing theories, hints, images and narratives in order to encourage creation of more conspiracy theories and further suspicions around political processes. The nature of myriad fragmented conspiracy theories attach to existent traumas, doubts, suspicions and can generate affective resonance with the public. As a result, this political strategy can lead to producing constant state of doubt where “political becomes personal” and can affect or transform close relationships; suspicion and conspiracy theories permeate every corner of life and infiltrate even the most intimate relationships, where everyone watches everybody else with caution.
James Slotta is Associate Professor of Anthropology at the University of Texas at Austin. His research centers on practices of political listening in both the Pacific island nation of Papua New Guinea and North America. He is currently working on a project that traces the circulation of so-called health misinformation in and between these two regions. His first book, <i>Anarchy and the Art of Listening: The Politics and Pragmatics of Listening in Papua New Guinea</i>, was published in 2023 by Cornell University Press.	Anti-vaccine Experts and their Conspiratorial Meta-Expertise The death of expertise has been much lamented in recent years (e.g., Nichols 2017), identified as both cause and consequence of the seemingly explosive growth of post-truth politics, conspiracy theories, and online misinformation. QAnon, the alt-right, and anti-vaxers among other populist movements of the moment all in their own way oppose the authority of experts, whether medical, scientific, academic, administrative, or journalistic. In this presentation, I raise some doubts about the demise of expertise, arguing that this familiar view misses something very important about these apparently anti-expert movements: namely, the central role that experts and the circulation of expertise play in them. In particular, I focus on the role that conspiracy theories play as a form of “meta-expertise” in the anti-vaccine movement. As scholars have argued (Goldman 2001; Collins and Evans 2008; Anderson 2011; Pasquale 2023), laypeople—by definition, people who do not have the specialist knowledge to distinguish true experts from charlatans—must rely on “meta-experts” to do so. These meta-experts are, essentially, experts about experts, who have specialist knowledge about who has specialist

	knowledge (i.e., meta-expertise). Public health officials, doctors, and science journalists play the role of meta-experts for mainstream pro-vaccine science, pointing to biomedical science and peer reviewed research as the true source of knowledge. Here, I show how anti-vaccine activists play a similar role in the anti-vaccine movement, offering up conspiracy theories as a particularly potent form of meta-expertise that points audiences away from pro-vaccine science and toward alternative forms of expertise found in the anti-vaccine movement. Far from marking the death of expertise, anti-vaccine activism is rife with experts disseminating a particularly effective form of meta-expertise: conspiracy theories.
Domenico Maria Sparaco is a PhD candidate in Social Sciences and Humanities at the University of Siena. His research focuses on the social and political dynamics catalysed by the COVID-19 pandemic, starting with his initial fieldwork in Codogno. This research culminated in his Master's thesis, which examined the impact of the COVID-19 lockdown on Codogno, the first area in Europe to be subjected to such restrictions. His current doctoral research is an ethnographic study of the "free-vax" movements that emerged after the COVID-19 vaccination campaign. Sparaco's research focuses on the political and cultural links between these movements and Italian sovereignist and political currents, as well as counter-cultural milieus.	The Order of Dissent: Narratives and Counter-Narratives during the Covid-19 Vaccination Campaign in Italy This paper is based on ethnographic fieldwork conducted between 2021 and 2024 among vaccine freedom groups in Tuscany, Italy. Through participation in protests, public assemblies, and online forums, I explore how individuals and communities navigated the polarized landscape shaped by the Covid-19 vaccination campaign. Many participants in the vaccine freedom movement recounted long-standing mistrust toward political and health authorities, rooted in personal experiences of marginalization, medical harm, or political disenchantment. For them, the pandemic and the vaccine mandates crystallized a broader crisis of legitimacy, marking a definitive rupture with official narratives. Within these spaces of dissent, alternative accounts of the pandemic circulated—stories of hidden truths and suppressed knowledge—which from the perspective of institutional actors were dismissed as conspiracy theories. However, my research shows that this was not merely a clash between "truth" and "falsehood," but a conflict over who has the right to define reality. Both "truthers" and "truth defenders" often engaged in mirror-like strategies of absolutization and exclusion, leaving little room for ambiguity or dialogue. By tracing the lived experiences, emotions, and political imaginaries of my interlocutors, this paper argues that conflicts over conspiracy theories are best understood as relational processes, deeply embedded in broader transformations of trust, authority, and democratic participation in contemporary Italy.
Zea Szebeni is a social psychologist and a postdoctoral researcher at the University of Helsinki. Her doctoral research examined psychological and societal mechanisms of	The Conspiracies of Anti-Conspiracy: Critical Discourse Analysis of Boundary Work in U.S. Mainstream Media

disinformation susceptibility in Hungary. Currently, as part of 'The Democratic Epistemic Capacities in the Age of Algorithms' (DECA) project, she studies how online communities create and claim ownership over knowledge. Additionally she researches conspiracy theories, visual politics, and social media dynamics across online spaces.	This paper examines how mainstream U.S. media discourse about conspiracy theories employs discursive structures that parallel those found in the conspiracy theories they critique, while simultaneously engaging in "boundary work" (Gieryn, 1983). Through critical discourse analysis of high-profile articles from major American publications (The Atlantic, New York Times, Washington Post), I identify shared discursive elements—including narrative framing techniques, binary constructions, pattern identification, and claims to privileged insight—that appear in both mainstream anti-conspiracy discourse and conspiracy discourse itself. Through critical discourse analysis of high-profile articles from major American publications (The Atlantic, New York Times, Washington Post), I analyze how mainstream discourse positions conspiracy thinking as a pathologized "Other" while simultaneously using similar meaning-making structures. The analysis reveals how boundary-work operates to establish epistemic authority, how binary oppositions between "rational" and "conspiratorial" thinking are constructed, and how this discursive process obscures rather than clarifies the complex and often ambivalent critiques found in conspiracy discourse. Rather than evaluating which side holds the "correct" view, this analysis questions why mainstream framing of the conspiracy/anti-conspiracy divide has been so readily accepted. The conspicuous absence of critique toward how mainstream media performs its own version of "connecting the dots" reveals a significant blind spot in how we understand conflicts over contested knowledge. By analyzing how anti-conspiracy initiatives reproduce the very discursive structures they aim to combat, this research suggests that what we witness is not simply a battle between reason and unreason, but a complex struggle over epistemic authority where similar rhetorical techniques serve opposing claims. Such an approach unsettles comfortable assumptions about who exactly engages in "conspiracy thinking" and whether such categorization serves analytical clarity or merely reinforces existing power relations in knowledge production.
Campbell Thomson is a completing PhD student in anthropology at University College London (UCL). His thesis explores the emergence and sustaining of the conspiracy attuned Freedom Movement in the UK since March 2020. He is particularly interested in meetings of populist political narratives with “conspiracy theory”	‘How do you wake someone up?’ Outreach and awakened / normie dialogue via The Light newspaper, in the UK Freedom Movement Addressing a hundreds-strong audience from the steps of the Bank of England on London’s Threadneedle Street in September 2022, the Canadian anti-lockdown and anti-COVID-19 vaccine activist Chris Sky posed a ‘billion-dollar question’: ‘How do you wake someone up?’ Referencing fieldwork conducted with ‘conspiracy

(however defined), social movements, digital and media anthropology, and the anthropology of Britain and Europe.	attuned’ (Davis 2025) – or “awakened” – UK Freedom Movement activists, this paper describes how members seek to spark this process in their “unawakened” audience, and to persuade them to begin their own individualised practices of “truth-seeking.” In doing so, I argue that both the content and the grassroots networks of distribution which surround The Light newspaper resonate with a distinctive form of “non-denominational evangelism” encountered in “awakened” movements. I suggest that this melds Christian evangelist vocabulary and outreach practices, millenarian anxiety and deliberate spiritual and religious non-specificity. As encountered during my fieldwork, I present how activist groups understood widening distribution of The Light to be an effective method by which to accelerate a societal-wide “Great Awakening.” This is pursued via a cascading – or “pass the parcel” model – of spreading the news. I suggest that this activist sentiment echoes directly the illuminatory metaphor found on the bottom of every edition of The Light: ‘Please pass The Light on when you’ve read it.’ Drawing on conversations with its activists, I argue that The Light also serves as an unofficial though widely recognised “party organ” for the Freedom Movement. In the manner by which it addresses its readership, I posit that The Light allows Movement activists to recognise themselves as a distinctive (counter)public (Warner 2002), even as the covid-times which sparked many “awakenings” becomes temporally distant. In doing so, I describe my experience as a one-time contributor to The Light, and how this shaped resultant dialogue; between the conflicting viewpoints of awakened activists and unawakened researcher.
Salla Tuomola is an affiliated postdoctoral researcher at Roskilde University. In her research project ALTEA, she conducts an in-depth inquiry into the role and substance of contemporary alternative news providers and their audiences, which are playing an increasingly significant role in Finland and other Nordic countries. Her research interests include alternative news environments, epistemology, affect, and journalism. Before earning PhD in Journalism, she had a long career as a news journalist in Finland.	The Disinformation Discourse in Public Debate: A Critical Review on the Experience of Declining Trust This study examines disinformation as a discourse from the perspective of Finnish citizens whose trust in traditional journalism and mainstream media has eroded for various reasons. Disinformation discourse refers to politicized speech about the correctness of information amid information disorders, shaped by political, ideological, or value-based factors rather than accuracy or truthfulness. As a result, the concept of disinformation can also function discursively as a tool for stigmatization. Through 25 interviews, this study explores how Finnish citizens, positioned as alternative epistemic authorities, perceive their experiences of being labelled within disinformation discourse. It also examines their language when discussing their relationship with traditional news media and dominant public narratives. This research aligns with previous studies, indicating that disinformation

	discourse aims to delegitimize the credibility of opposing viewpoints. Disinformation discourse is characterized by labelling and delegitimizing the opposing side, regardless of who employs it or whose credibility it seeks to undermine. Thus, disinformation discourse can be identified both within dominant narratives and in the narratives that critique them.
Angelina Uhl is a doctoral student at the Department of Arts and Cultural Sciences at Lund University. As part of the CONSPIRATIONS project, she is responsible for the research of conspiracy theories and conflicts over truths in Germany. Her ethnographic fieldwork focuses on socio-cultural practices of either endorsing or countering conspiracy theories. Uhl holds a MA degree in Cultural Theory and History from Humboldt University of Berlin (2023). Her MA-thesis thematized affective and emotional relations within right-wing alliances and the question of how emotions and feelings can lead to normalization and legitimization processes of right-wing politics. Her research interests include everyday politics, right-wing extremism and populism, emotion and affect research as well as gender and diversity.	The Socio-Cultural Life of Truth: Countering Conspiracy Theories in Germany Conspiracy theories have become a highly polarized topic in Germany. They are to a certain extent “hypervisible” in the digital age and are normalized and politicized by various actors. But conspiracy theories are also perceived as a threat to democracy and social cohesion, which is why they are increasingly the subject of political efforts, civil society work and civic education, especially since the Covid-19 pandemic. This paper opens the perspective from the well-represented exclusive focus on conspiracy theorists, also to people, institutions and organizations that are countering them and are developing initiatives to defend themselves against the “post-truth” era. Paradoxically both, conspiracy theorists as well as those who counter them are often firmly convinced that they are “on the right side” with their views and actions in defense of democracy. The paper examines socio-cultural aspects of countering conspiracy theories in Germany and aims to better understand how this is practiced by respective organizations and people, mostly involved in civil society work. It entails an introduction to the discussion of the term of conspiracy theories circulating within that work and the understanding and application of the phenomenon in practice. By focusing on cultural practices including emotional patterns, the paper also elaborates on the personal relations involved in conflicts over truth and the much-cited “crisis of democracy”. This sub-project (2024-2028), conducted as a doctoral thesis, is part of a larger ERC-project, which includes case-studies in six European countries (Sweden, Estonia, Belgium, Bulgaria, Poland, Germany).
Roman Urbanowicz is a doctoral student of Social and Cultural Anthropology at the University of Helsinki (Finland) whose research concerns Polish ethnic minority in Belarus and its political and ethical experiences of authoritarian everyday life and revolutionary events, analysed through the lens of	Sensing the State: Surveillance Narratives and Epistemic Uncertainty in the Belarusian Borderlands In my presentation, I aim to analyse local stories of highly irregular state surveillance encountered during my ethnographic fieldwork in Ostoja, a small Polish-populated town located next to Belarusian-Polish border. Focusing on accounts of suspected eavesdropping and other forms of monitoring, attributed to the state security services and border guards, I examine how these narratives function

moral economy, anthropology of ethics, care, and statehood.	within a distinctive epistemic landscape marked by pervasive suspicion, calculated trust, and purposefully cultivated opacity of the state power. Rather than evaluating the veracity of those stories, I argue that the circulation of surveillance narratives presents a crucial tool for local navigation of relations with often obfuscated and inscrutable state apparatus, genealogically situated in histories of ethnic minority discrimination and the area's securitised borderland geography. Specifically, in my presentation, I will explore the tensions between official silence of the state and those vernacular interpretations of its power, highlighting the relational dynamics of sharing, interpreting, and acting upon the factual and moral content of those narratives, thus shaping local social fabric. Drawing on recent anthropological work on conspiracy theories (Saglam 2024), I frame those accounts of surveillance not as mere expressions of distrust, but as productive social practices, that generate situated knowledge and collective agency through articulation of shared anxieties and construction of interpretative frameworks for opaque events and practices. Ultimately, I aim to demonstrate how engagement with such narratives can offer heuristic insights into local epistemologies of power and negotiations of truth in the context of chronic uncertainty.
Emma Van Der Tak studied Social Anthropology at VU Amsterdam (MSc) and the University of Cambridge (MPhil). Her research interests are conspiracy theories, sovereign citizens, disinformation interventions and fact-checking practices. As a researcher at the University of Amsterdam she is currently working on a project that explores the consequences of disinformation interventions. She has published on Dutch conspiracy movements and sovereign citizens.	Drawing a line: a case study of disinformation, controversy and legal intervention surrounding relationship and sexuality education in Dutch primary schools In 2023, public controversy arose surrounding the annual 'Spring Fever Week': a theme week in Dutch primary schools of lessons about relationships and sexuality. Politicians, talkshow guests and social media users discussed at length the contents and aims of these lessons: four-year-olds, some claimed, were learning about oral sex and encouraged to masturbate in groups – all to serve the pedophilic agenda of Rutgers, the expertise centre which organises this theme week. These rumours, while false, continued to circulate in the following years. In 2025, Rutgers sued Civitas Christiana, a conservative catholic foundation and a prominent driver of the anti-Spring Fever Week campaign, for defamation. Rutgers won the case, and Civitas was prohibited from spreading the 'black book' it had produced about Rutgers and its lesson plans, and from stating that Rutgers was sexualising children. Based on ongoing qualitative research, this paper explores the intended and unintended consequences of this legal intervention. Did the court's decision have the desired effect of putting a stop to disinformation surrounding the Spring Fever Week, or do interventions such as these only

	further fuel the anti-institutional sentiments of the theme week's most fervent critics? This case study, moreover, draws our attention to the practice of delineating disinformation from conservative values, or facts from opinions. In balancing Civitas' freedom of speech and religion on the one hand and Rutgers' right to be free from slander on the other, the judge draws such a line when distinguishing between lawful and unlawful statements about the Spring Fever Week. But would everyone involved agree on where to draw this line? Through this case study, this paper explores the dynamics of contested information as well as the discursive production of disinformation in contemporary societies.
Cecilia Vergnano is a distinguished researcher at the Department of Anthropology of the University of Barcelona and principal investigator of the ERC StG project De-CRIPT (<i>An anthropological study of truth wars from marginalised standpoints</i>). Her research focuses on ethnic and socioeconomic inequalities, as well as social conflicts in the contexts of mobility, labour, and truth claims.	The two faces of solidarity. Border truth conflicts in a neighbourhood of relegation facing the EU reception crisis A broad body of scholarship has highlighted the “battlefield” dimension of the border in terms of a conflict between state control and migrants’ agency. Less researched is another dimension of the conflict, which opposes two sides within the same receiving society in the form of “pro-migrants” and “anti-migrants” mobilisations. This paper adopts a relational, pragmatic and non-normative stance to analyse the conflict between two regimes of truth concerning migration in the Italian town of Ventimiglia, an emblematic space of the so-called EU “refugee crisis” at the border with France. Based on long-term ethnographic fieldwork in a (mostly white) working-class neighbourhood of Ventimiglia where most reception activities (as well as “anti-migrant” mobilisations) have been taking place in the last years, the paper analyses narratives about migration voiced by a part of the residents of the neighbourhood, on the one side, and local solidarity actors, on the other. While the former’s narratives – often verging on conspiracy narratives – tend to identify economic interests behind migratory phenomena, the latter tend to consider such narratives as mere expressions of racism and selfishness. By focusing on the context where these narratives emerge, their pragmatic uses, the deeper concerns and the communicative intentions behind them, this paper unpacks truth politics about migration in Ventimiglia. By doing so, it responds to both scientific and political purposes. Scientifically, it develops the idea that truth claims – including conspiracy claims – should be studied as social practices and, in particular, as speech acts (Fassin 2021, 2022), thus focusing on their performative rather than descriptive dimension. Politically, it contributes to moving beyond the “progressive dilemma”: the fear that there is a trade-off between being pro-migrant and being pro-welfare state (Kymlicka 2015), between

	recognition (of minorities' rights) and redistribution (of wealth) (Fraser and Honneth 2003) – overall, between different aspects of social justice as a whole.
Ehler Voss is an anthropologist working at the intersections of medical anthropology, media anthropology, political anthropology, and the anthropology of religion. She has been researching the transatlantic entanglements of orthodox and heterodox knowledge cultures from the nineteenth century to the present, including the interferences of occultism and media history and their relations to medical, scientific and technological innovations as well as the controversy over the measures to contain the spread of SARS-CoV-2 (cp. amongst others Harambam/Voss 2023). She is working as the Managing Director of the collaborative research platform Worlds of Contradiction (WOC) and as a Private Lecturer at the Department of Anthropology and Cultural Research both at the University of Bremen, Germany; she is chair of the Association for Anthropology and Medicine (AGEM); editor-in-chief of the medical anthropological journal Curare; and co-founder and co-editor of boasblogs.org.	Fascists are always the others: the fight against misinformation and the confusion of political categories in the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic Building on anthropological fieldwork on the controversy surrounding measures to contain the spread of SARS-CoV-2 in Germany, in which I emphasized the widely disputed common ground between supporters and opponents of the measures, this presentation traces the further development of the controversy and its actors, some of whom only became politicized through the coronavirus protests and have now turned their attention to new crises. In the new crises, such as the war in Ukraine or the situation in Palestine, the polarization of the debates resembles that during the coronavirus period, in which mutual accusations of misinformation, conspiracy theories, and right-wing extremism were exchanged. And in their assessment of new crises and conflicts, the actors from both sides still repeatedly refer to the coronavirus controversy. It is not uncommon in the current protests against orthodox opinion, for example with regard to Ukraine, to find former opponents during the coronavirus pandemic on the same side, with new alliances being formed and old divisions along accusations of following conspiracy theories being reinforced at the same time. The presentation traces the resulting contradictions and political confusion and their negotiations and analyzes how “progressive” and “regressive” attitudes and behaviors tend to overlap on different sides, and proposes a symmetrical perspective that aims „to untangle the mess without adding one more accusation to those that the actors have already made“ (Madelaine Akrich), and that is necessary to reach an analysis capable of producing new understandings, rather than merely deepening the rift between opposing groups by choosing a side.
Simone Zoppellaro is a lecturer at the University of Stuttgart, as well as a researcher and journalist. He regularly collaborates with the cultural magazine MicroMega, and he serves as an ambassador for the Foundation GARIWO. He is the author of two books: <i>Armenia oggi</i> and <i>Il genocidio degli yazidi</i> (published in 2016 and 2017 by <i>Guerini e Associati</i>). He earned his degree in Comparative Literature	Contesting Historical Truth through Derangement Strategies: Conspiratorial Narratives on the Aldo Moro Assassination The 1978 kidnapping and assassination of Aldo Moro, former Prime Minister and then President of the National Council of the Democrazia Cristiana, shocked Italian public opinion and remains one of the most extensively studied events in Italian history. Despite a vast corpus of historical essays, trials, and parliamentary inquiries, conspiracy theories persist that downplay – or even deny – the responsibility of the Brigade Rosse, which has been

from the University of Bologna and serves as the didactic coordinator at the Italian Cultural Institute in Stuttgart.	firmly established both historically and legally. Alternative narratives, occasionally revived even by mainstream media, attribute to the United States a role as instigators of Moro's assassination, sometimes in collusion with the 'Ndrangheta. This has transformed the case into a contest over historical truth, with even founding members of the militant group, such as Alberto Franceschini, supporting a theory of international infiltration and externally directed management of the action. One compelling version contends that Washington ordered Moro's assassination – Moro being a proponent of a 'historical compromise' between the right and the left – to prevent the Italian Communist Party from coming to power, thus reconfiguring the communists' group image from executioners to victims. In my paper, I will employ a multi-method analytical approach—including archival research, discourse analysis, and media studies—to examine how these conspiracy narratives are constructed and contested. I will contextualize this case within a broader framework of conflicting narratives over historical truth, exploring how conspiratorial thinking emerges and reflects deep-seated societal divisions. Through this analysis, I aim to demonstrate the underlying strategies of derangement that sustain such narratives and shed light on how conflicts over memory shape collective understanding.
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