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**CABAL ANTHROPOLOGY: CAN THE ANTHROPOLOGY OF BELIEF HELP US UNDERSTAND CONSPIRACISM?**

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QAnon, Deep State, pedophile plots, George Soros, stolen elections, 9/11 truthers, Obama birthers, 5G penetration, the anti-maskers, the anti-vaxxers… We slow-working, ever so reflective anthropologists are being inundated with one conspiracy theory after another. A May 2021 survey reveals that 15% of Americans and 23% of those who call themselves Republicans believe that ‘the government, media, and financial worlds in the U.S. are controlled by a group of Satan-worshipping pedophiles who run a global child sex trafficking operation’ (PRRI 2021). The evil conspirators are often termed a ‘cabal’ (a word derived from the Hebrew ‘*kabbalah*’/esoteric teachings). This subversive cabal is viewed as embedded in our governments, collaborating with the global financial elite and the Davos crowd, within the US and European Left, the Hollywood elite, the mainstream media, and with transgender activists and Critical Race Theory proponents, even with the West European welfare states with their Covid-19 lockdown/vaccine policies. Cabals are the secret agents of conspiratorial plots. To study conspiracy theory is to do cabal anthropology.

Conspiracy theories are stigmatized knowledge. This has led some anthropologists to view conspiracy theorists as ‘contesting’ power. Conspiracism becomes a form of resistance by the powerless against the arrogant elites and elite institutions (Pelkmanns and Machold 2011, Dean 2000, Fassin 2021). So what do we anthropologists do about the kind of stigmatized knowledge promoted by the QAnon believers, who assert that America is threatened by a Satanic, pedophile cult from which only Donald Trump can save us? What do we do about the 9/11 ‘truthers’ who say that the World Trade Center buildings were destroyed by the U.S. government, or the ‘birthers’ who assert that Obama (whose mother was an anthropologist!) was born a Muslim in Kenya? Should we view Holocaust deniers, the Stolen Election crowd and the racist Great Replacement adherents as ‘contestation’? We all like ‘speaking truth to power’, but what about those who speak untruth to power? Are there good and bad forms of contestation? Are we anthropologists in danger of becoming what the philosopher Cassam called ‘conspiracy apologists’? What, in fact, can we anthropologists add to the now frantic discussion of conspiracy theories?

**Theories of conspiracy versus conspiracy theory**

In the ordinary forensic sense, a conspiracy is simply a secret plot to do something bad, such as robbing a bank or political subversion. Conspiracies require secret plans, malevolent motives and a group of conspirators. Forensic conspiracies are commonplace. Some succeed, others are discovered and in most cases the plotters exposed, caught and punished. The bombing of the World Trade Center garage *in 1993*, and the suicide plane hijackings of September 11, 2001 were both forensic conspiracies.

What we call ‘conspiracy theories’ are also secret plots, to be sure, but the plotters tend to be all-powerful, sophisticated, and diabolical. Their project is more than robbing a bank, tapping phones or a terrorist attack. It is nothing short of total control and world domination. Conspiratorial plots of this kind do not occur alone. They are connected to other plots over space and time (Illuminati, Freemasons, Jews, Communists, Trilateral Commission, Icke’s ‘lizard people’, alien abduction, ‘New World Order’, the Neocons, the Deep State, etc.). Because the conspirators are considered to be so deeply embedded among us, the work of a conspiracy theorist is to expose their deception. The 9/11 truthers, for example, believe that the Bin Laden-based, ‘Official Conspiracy Theory’ is one such deception, what they call a ‘false flag operation’. They believe that the World Trade Centers collapsed because U.S. military/intelligence organs, perhaps helped by the Mossad, planted explosives in the buildings. Somehow, these explosives detonated precisely when the planes flew into the buildings, and it is assumed that a third building close by, Building no. 7, also collapsed not due to fire but due to explosives. How and why this was done remains unexplained. Of course, no conspirator has ever been found. The truthers believe that the U.S. government decided to murder thousands of its own citizens in order to achieve some nefarious end, presumably connected to domination of the Middle East and its oil and to create a military/security state in the U.S. The QAnon conspiracy theory is even more elaborate, with narratives of child kidnapping and blood libel in a plot that has long anti-Semitic roots, but which now brings together the Clintons, the Democratic party left, and their Hollywood friends. Whether 9/11 truth or QAnon, conspiracy theorists see themselves as ‘truth tellers’ or ‘truth-seekers’ (Toseland 2018). They are not just propounding theories; they are on a mission.

**Researching conspiracy theory**

Conspiracy theory research has focused on the logical structure of conspiratorial explanations and why these are so attractive to so many. For the cultural theorist Michael Barkun (2014), all conspiracy theories revolve around three premises: *Nothing happens by accident, Nothing is at seems,* and  *Everything is connected.* Conspiracy is thus the reverse side of transparency. Anything on the surface is false or misleading. Hence the need to look deeper in search of the real, more significant truth. According to the philosopher Karl Popper, who was the first to coin the idea of a ‘conspiracy theory of society’, conspiracy theory begins with the death of God. When God was around, all disasters and misfortunes could be attributed to this higher power. With the Enlightenment, however, disasters and misfortunes are now blamed on human actors (secret cabals in the King’s court), newly powerful social groups such as the Freemasons, or outsider groups such as Jews or Roma. During the Enlightenment, conspiratorial thinking becomes a theory of total agency (Wood 1982). Bad things happen because secret sinister groups of people intend them to happen.

Social psychologists have speculated on the attraction of conspiracy theory, based on the premise that conspiratorial beliefs are a danger to society. Clearly, conspiracy theories give believers a simple, all-encompassing explanation for adverse developments or disasters. We obtain a ‘who’ behind a complex or chance event. For ardent conspiracy believers, this also gives them a mission, and the chance to enter a community of fellow believers seeking to expose the sinister cabal. The Trump ‘stolen election’ conspiracy – whose culprits are corrupt inner city Black voting officials, Democratic Party swindlers and evil voting machine companies with ties to Venezuela – has now become the latest ‘cabal’. In this narrative, political power was stolen from the American people, and Mr. Trump will help them get it back.

Part of the conspiracists’ mission is to connect the dots. For conspiracies do not occur alone. The death of JFK junior, Covid-19, faked moon landings, the ‘stolen election’ plot, transgender activism, Black Lives Matter and Critical Race Theory can now be related to a secret elite and their lackeys in government, in Silicon Valley, in the media, etc. This is the QAnon project. Outside observers have described this mission as falling down the ‘rabbit hole’. Hence, a recent book on QAnon adherents invokes the ‘rabbit hole’ imagery no less than 22 times (Bloom and Moskalenko 2021).

The work of the conspiracy theorists is to uncover and interpret ‘evidence’, to discover the truth. They are truth-seekers who do research (googling) by ‘connecting the dots’, interpreting the evidence and communicating their interpretations to others in meetings, forums and chat rooms. Like others involved in political advocacy projects, conspiracy theorists – be they truthers, birthers, QAnon followers, anti-Covid activists -- are emotionally engaged and articulate. They are ready, willing and able to promote their views and defend the most minute points, armed with ever more evidence along. This is because conspiracy theorists are not simply propagating ‘theories’. Their explanatory theories are ‘unlikely’, their premises are ideological, and their mission is political, as the philosopher Quassim Cassam has argued (2019).

The QAnon community, heavily overlapping with ardent Trump supporters and right-wing extremist, is typical. QAnon revolves around the cryptic tweets, called ‘drops’ issued every few weeks by ‘Q’, someone supposedly deep inside the U.S. government (for a discussion of who Q might really be see Bloom and Moskalenko, ch. 1). These texts are then interpreted, and often associated with tweets by Trump or his followers, and connected to signs of an impending ‘storm’ or ‘awakening’ that will come but never does (that Hillary Clinton would be arrested, that Trump would assume power in March, now in August). (On QAnon see Bloom and Moskalenko 2021, CBS news, PRRI, Quandt, and further references below). The QAnon narrative is continually expanding, with any attempts at refutation viewed as part of the plot to destroy its followers.

**Populist expertise**

The 9/11 truthers and QAnon are forms of ‘populist expertise’. Imitating experts, they assemble facts, assess evidence, pass on newly found explanations for enigmatic or troubling events (Marwick and Partin 2020). If Latour and STS described the ‘social construction of scientific facts’, we now have a populist construction of ‘alternative facts’. Latour’s ‘matters of concern’ have outrun us (Latour 2004). QAnon, the 9/11 truthers, the birthers, the 5G telephone protesters, the antivaxxers who believe a chip is being implanted in their bodies, they are Foucault run wild. To the extent that QAnon followers and other conspiracists question established knowledge regimes and authorities, they are certainly ‘critical’. This generates some sympathy among those who see conspiracists as performing a valuable function for society, what Cassam calls ‘conspiracy apologists’. But the conspiracists’ critique is based upon a profound distrust of established institutions, a resistance to any kind of falsification or contradictory data, and a vicious anti-Semitism and racism that the apologists tend to overlook (Byford 2015). Conspiracy theorists may be naïve or sympatico, but conspiracism is ideology masquerading as science, and pernicious ideology at that.

With the rise of QAnon pedophile blood libel conspiracy, the Trumpian ‘Big Lie’ and anti-Covid protests, we now face a presumed ‘rise of conspiracism’. The fear of conspiracism, a veritable ‘conspiracy panic’ is nothing new (Bratich 2008, Thalmann 2016). One overarching question remains, a question posed by the media and addressed by various experts who view conspiratorial thinking as dangerous: *Why do people believe this stuff?* The search for an answer forms the basis for the entire conspiracy research industry, from ERC research projects to panels among our own tribe of anthropologists (including a panel that I co-organized at EASA in 2018), to EU policy papers and government reports proposing various counter-conspiracy measures (Institute for Public Affairs 2013, European Commission 2021; Önnerfors 2021). My own fascination with conspiracism began with my research in Romania, long before 1989, where I noticed how people believed in all kinds of outlandish rumors and conspiracies about domestic and foreign enemies (including me as spy; Sampson 1984). I then followed conspiracies about the EU, the Soros Mafia and the Western NGO industry, which led me to years of following the 9/11 truthers, many of whom are older male, end-of-career academics like myself. The 9/11 truther activists, like many of us in anthropology, are people who search for ‘evidence’, many are familiar with the protocols of the peer reviewed journal article. See for example the pretentious *Journal of 9/11 Studies* and its truther editorial board (Sampson 2010). Indeed, conspiracy producers, consumers and conspiracy entrepreneurs are not just lonely ‘losers’ sitting in a basement staring at a screen all day. They are active members of a community who ‘produce content’, and keep abreast of events, even in mainstream media. So why indeed do people believe this stuff?

Early theorizing on the ‘why’ question begins with Hofstadter (1964), who depicted conspiracy believers as acting out a ‘paranoid style’, perhaps socially disoriented, isolated and even cognitively disabled. Recent surveys of those arrested in the January 6th riots finds a large percentage having had a variety of mental illnesses such as anxiety, depression and PTSD, especially the women, and estrangement from their children (Bloom and Moskalenko 2021). Along with the mental instability argument, Sunstein and Vermeule (2009) argue that conspiracism is based on a ‘crippled epistemology’. This individualized understanding, based on the psychological or cognitive characteristics of ‘the conspiracy believer’, or the conspiratorial mind-set, focuses on conspiracists as somehow irrational, as overly fearful as frantically searching for someone to blame for their personal troubles or social deroute. This anxiety both reflects and results in an intense distrust of institutions, authorities, or established science and thus a susceptibility to conspiratorial explanations of suspicious events, disasters or other misfortunes, ranging from 9/11 to Covid-19 to Trump’s election loss. Moreover, since they trust no institution, imploring them to ‘believe the science’ is useless. Scientific experts and institutions are themselves suspect. Conspiracists must do the research themselves, on the internet, encouraged by like-minded conspiracy theorists and amateur experts who can parlay their academic expertise in one field into another: the leading 9/11 truther, David Ray Griffin, is a professors of religion. This distrust of authorities has a derivative effect: conspiracists can be easily to manipulated by populist politicians (Bergmann 2018).

The conspiratorial mindset was also depicted in a famous study by Leon Festinger and his colleagues (1956) when they described how a UFO cult that predicted the end of the world was only more reinforced in their belief when the disaster did not happen. Festinger’s cognitive dissonance approach seems to be supported by the hardcore support for Trump and his ‘stolen election’ theory, culminating in Trump supporters’ invasion of the U.S. Congress on January 6th and the election of QAnon supporters to political office. The consensus among conspiracy theory researchers is that conspiracy theorists cannot be combatted by any kind of fact-checking enterprise. People do not get converted, nor do they see the light, simply because they are confronted with contradictory evidence, new facts or sophisticated counter-arguments. The conspiracy mindset is not about facts and evidence. It is about social engagement, political projects, and belief.

The problem with explanations of conspiracy followers as people who are somehow socially, emotionally or cognitively disabled is that these explanations are far too general. After all, who among us does not at times feel disempowered, confused, uncertain, insecure or distrustful of institutions and science, most especially in this Covid-19 era? How much should we ‘trust science’ when scientific explanations are contested or change? If we all suffer from ‘confirmation bias’ or other such psychological syndromes, then why aren’t we all conspiracy theorists? A healthy scepticism about the scientific enterprise is a core theme in the work of STS and anthropologists of policy? Are the conspiracy theorists just another form of institutional critique? Do we regard Holocaust deniers, Great Replacement adherents or QAnon activists as fellow compatriots ‘contesting authority’? What indeed is the difference between an outrageous conspiracy theory and hard-hitting institutional critique of subtle powers and hidden agendas?

**What is belief?**

Let me come back to the question of Why people believe this stuff?

Anyone who has argued with a conspiracy theorist, a religious zealot or political true believer of any kind knows that refutation of their evidence is fruitless. You point out contrary facts or illogical arguments and your remarks are simply cast aside as irrelevant or confirmation of the conspiracy. This is because the conspiratorial narrative is in fact an expression of belief. The problem, then, is not about the facts but about belief. Conspiracy theorists do not assert claims. They express beliefs. What does it mean to believe, for example, that Trump won the election with 70% of the vote or that the US military blew up the World Trade Center? *What is belief all about?*

I decided to re-read a bunch of anthropological analyses of belief. Virtually all of these were written to explain *religious* beliefs, as when Evans-Pritchard wrote that the Nuer ‘believe’ that twins are birds. I think that we can fruitfully apply the discussion of religious belief to secular, conspiratorial beliefs as well. There are obvious overlaps between religious and conspiracy belief systems: grand forces of good and evil; an apocalyptic reckoning some time in an imminent future; scriptures and texts that provide clues; esoteric interpretations and discussions of what the clues mean; struggles over orthodox and deviant interpretations; and an institutional practice in which communities of believers seek out converts, debate skeptics, and ex-communicate apostates and perceived heretics. The conspiratorial universe thus contains conspiracy producers, conspiracy consumers, and even conspiracy entrepreneurs (David Icke, Alex Jones, etc.). It includes not only true believers and former believers (read QAnon causalities on Reddit), but also anti-conspiracists, the debunkers.

Being in a conspiracist community involves work, or ‘research’. The 9/11 truthers, for example, include many students and retired academics who do internet googling, organize evidence and hold conferences, even selling truther merchandise. The QAnon community has gatekeepers who run the web portals, moderate chatrooms, assemble narratives, sell merchandise, and retweet the preferred interpretations. Like any religious community, conspiracy communities have their rites and rituals. Long before January 6th, QAnon followers were appearing at demonstrations, recruiting followers and arguing with skeptics and debunkers. We need to recall the very banal, anthropological insight that conspiracy theory is not just about a bunch of random facts and a set of outlandish, unfalsifiable beliefs. It is also a set of practices. Conspiracists do not just stare at a screen. They do things with the screen and in real life. They search for confirming evidence, they connect the dots, they discuss their findings with like-minded others, they try to unmask provocateurs, etc. It’s the doing that creates that passion and the commitment behind conspiracism. The conspiracist ‘rabbit hole’ is not a place of isolation, it is a community. This passionate community explain the sense of exhilaration common to many true believers. It’s so wonderful to know the truth and to share it with others, especially after having experienced an adverse life event or a traumatic experience (as so many QAnon followers have, according to surveys; see Jensen and Kane 2021).

So perhaps the anthropological discussion of beliefs can help us understand the power of beliefs in the conspiratorial universe of truthers, birthers, QAnon followers, flat-earthers, anti-vaxxers, New World Order proponents, Holocaust deniers, alien abductionists and similar groups.

**Back to Needham**

In 1972, Rodney Needham published *Belief, Language and Experience*, a long philosophical treatise on belief, much of it inspired by Wittgenstein. What do we mean, asked Needham, when we say that members of tribe X ‘believe’ something? Needham stressed that ‘statements about belief’ made by our informants should be distinguished from belief itself. Ethnographers love eliciting such statements, but for Needham these are the result of informants’ effort at introspection. For Needham, statements about belief are not belief. Belief is an inner state. This inner state may be articulated as an accepted doctrine (‘I believe that…’), as knowledge (‘I know the truth about…’) or as an emotional conviction (‘I believe in …’). Needham concludes that we just cannot know what is inside people’s heads. We can elicit statements, listen to what they say, we can observe what they do, and at best try to infer some kind of inner state that we call ‘belief’. Yet Needham is skeptical: the concept of belief is so vague that it should be thrown out. Needham does not believe in belief.

Pouillon (1982), in a much cited essay, reminds us that we must distinguish between *believing in* something versus *believing that* something. Expressions of *belief in* reveal whom we trust, who has legitimate authority, in whom we have faith. In contrast to ‘believe in…’ *believing that* is about a coherent doctrine of propositions. If belief is ultimately about faith, the project of debunking beliefs, e.g., showing conspiracy theories to be based on incorrect facts or illogical arguments, is beside the point. Conspiracies are not about facts or evidence. They are about ‘beliefs in’. And we cannot disprove beliefs. People can articulate, adjust or renounce beliefs. As such, beliefs are tied more to emotional commitment rather than facts. Conspiracy theories, despite the quasi-scientific label of ‘theory’, are clearly of this kind. They are beliefs, not theories in the scientific sense.

We often assume that conspiracy theorists articulate a coherent, fundamental set of propositions. Yet anthropologists have shown us that people can operate with overlapping, fragmented, alternative and contradictory belief systems, what we now euphemize as ‘syncretism’. Hence, J. Mair reminds us that ‘[not] every believer […] is a fundamentalist or a systematic theologian’ (2012, p. 45). Our analysis should therefore focus not so much on what people believe but rather *how they believe*. We should focus on what Mair calls ‘cultures of belief’. Studies of religious groups reveal how people can comfortably maintain two or more sets of beliefs that are complementary or even logically contradictory. Numerous studies of the anthropology of Christianity describe people who are sincerely converted Christians, but who also interact with spirits, react to witchcraft accusations or believe in reincarnation (Stringer 1996, Robbins 2007). While these studies have been applied largely to religious believers and converts, they are equally valid to those who have fallen down the ‘rabbit hole’ of QAnon, 9/11 truther, Holocaust denial, Great Replacement, alien abduction or other conspiratorial narratives. Like religious groups, conspiratorial communities are also full of dual, overlapping, contrasting and conflicting belief systems. An ethnographic approach to conspiracy theories might therefore profit from a ‘situational belief’ approach (Stringer 1996). The focus here should be less on who assents to certain propositions (‘I believe that…’;) and more on what kinds of truths and authorities people commit themselves to (‘I believe in….’ ‘I have faith in…’).

**Practicing conspiracism**

The QAnon belief system has its logical fallacies. Some may fully believe in the pedophile plot, while others focus only on the Deep State. However, they are united in their sources of authority (Q ‘drops’ and Trump statements, supplemented by various authoritative interpretations that are then retweeted and discussed). Exposing the cabal is both ‘research’ and an act of faith.

Anthropological approaches to religious belief have always included descriptions of religious practices, rites and rituals. Conspiracy adherents are no different. They also have their rites and rituals. They meet on line, in hundreds of web communities. They recruit followers and argue with debunkers. And they meet in real life at demonstrations, political meetings, in anti-vaccine gatherings, and of course, on January 6th. Conspiracists have been busy trying to expose the Covid vaccine chip insertion plot (led by Bill Gates). They have been digesting the shock of Trump’s defeat; promoting the narrative of the Stolen Election and his imminent return; reading and interpreting the QAnon clues; and fighting the regulations to wear masks. They do the work of textual interpretation. They re-tweet and add comments. They discuss these messages with family members, argue with skeptics, and end up in echo chambers of like- minded conspiracists who can confirm and reinforce their ideas.

What all this means is that we need to show how conspiratorial belief and conspiracist practice interact, as we have done with the study of religious beliefs and practices. Regrettably, conspiracy theory research has tended to focus on the psycho-social vulnerabilities of the most radical believers. Certainly these committed conspiracists have from emotional ‘baggage’, social isolation or violent tendencies (as the recent QAnon studies show). But most conspiracy adherents are only partially or borderline committed; many view conspiracy theory adherence as more of a social activity than an all-out ideological commitment, much like church attendance can be more a social obligation than a religious act. Second, the focus on individual vulnerability assumes some kind of coherent ideology among conspiracists. It ignores the way people use religious belief in creative ways, amalgamating, adapting and converting it to strategic ends. Conspiratorial ideas have a political message: the evil plot by the sinister outsiders, but it is also a personal project, a voyage of discovery that gives people new meaning in their lives as they become part of history. Both religious and conspiratorial practice are more than acting out an ostensibly coherent set of beliefs. Our understanding of conspiracists is best served by observing what they do: how they are recruited, how they participate, how they recruit others, and even how they often exit or even express regret (see again the Reddit thread for ‘QAnon Casualties’; or the testimonies of ex-Truthers).

**From how to why**

Let me close with the question of why does one become a believer? Robbins (2007) described how some converts to Christianity are truly sincerely converted, but we also have examples of conversion for purely strategic reasons. This distinction between sincere and instrumental conversion may be simplistic, but it is worth recalling when observing why people might join the QAnon, truther, anti-vaxx or alien obduction community. We join groups for many reasons: to resolve existential problems, to gain some control over the world, to obtain social contacts or to re-affirm our political beliefs. Conspiracy groups seem to solve all these tasks at the same time. Moreover, joining one conspiratorial community seems to lead to others: QAnon people form the core of Covid denial and anti-vaccination resistance, as well as 5G-telephone skepticism and of course, they are enthusiastic supporters of the stolen election theory. Since belief is an inner state that we can never really know, the best we can do as ethnographers is to listen to statements and observe behaviors.

What then, is a believer? Believers here don’t just read tweets. They save them, comment on them, retweet them, discuss them, embellish them, delete them, switch platforms, go to meetings, participate in demonstrations, buy merchandise, and spend hours of their day looking for further clues and reinterpret these. Their closed groups can decide to ban or unfriend others. They may have fallen down a rabbit hole but they are also actively exploring new paths, routes, tunnels and dead ends. Conspiracy is not just about belief, it is also about community.

If we are to understand conspiratorial movements like QAnon or those following the Deep State conspiracy, we anthropologists need to promote our own insights about what belief is all about. While Needham argued that the concept of belief was useless for anthropology, we still need to explain what it means to be a *believer.* We need to go beyond the conventional wisdom that every conspiracy theorist suffers from some kind of cognitive deficiency, emotional damage or social isolation. The leaders and mobilizers may be emotional, committed, even fanatic (as so many leaders of social movements are), but the followers and adherents are much more like us than we’d like to admit. Resorting to a psychological explanation is not sufficient. Who among us has not suffered from anxiety, depression, loneliness or a traumatic event that might lead us to fall down the proverbial rabbit hole. Who among us has not spent hours on line immersed in some incessant search to solve a puzzle? The conspiracy followers are hardly exotic. Take away their beliefs, and they suddenly become just like us, ordinary men and women with family obligations, precarious jobs, worried about their future and their place in it. They are both strange and familiar at the same time. And it is this contrast that makes them the perfect object of anthropological scrutiny. The task of anthropology, after all, is to show that the strange is actually familiar, and that the familiar has its exotic elements. We need more cabal anthropology.

Cabal anthropology might therefore provide a corrective to the journalists, psychologists and political commentators who so often classify conspiracy theorists as lonely, alienated souls. The narratives being promoted by conspiracists (QAnon anti-pedophiles, Deep State, Obama birther, 9/11 truth, stolen election, New World Order, Covid anti-vaxxers) are clearly false and pernicious. But the issue not just about the kind of evidence they use or the doctrines they promote. They reflect new forms of commitment. We need to understand how ‘believe that…’ interacts with ‘belief in …’ In this sense, QAnon and other conspiracy theories are secular forms of religious revival. The search for Satanic forces, and the premonitions of a great reckoning led by Trump are obvious parallels with religion. Alongside this are the conspiracy theorists’ profound mistrust in our financial institutions, elite universities, government institutions and in scientific expertise. Lack of trust in these institutions is why the ‘stolen election’ discourse has stayed with us. No amount of fact checking or debunking will solve the conspiracist wave. This is because conspiratorial thinking is not about incorrect facts or crippled epistemologies. It’s about the power of belief and the communities of believers. What beliefs did QAnon replace? What bonds of trust have been dismantled in order for QAnon to move in? How could these bonds be reconstructed? How are conspiracy communities being manipulated by unscrupulous conspiratorial entrepreneurs and political actors? Here is an agenda for cabal anthropology. The rabbit hole awaits.

**Bibliographic note.** Interdisciplinary research on conspiracy theory has expanded especially due to several research initiatives by Peter Knight at Manchester and Michael Butter at Tübingen. The following list contains additional references on ‘belief’, a beginners list of recent work on conspiracy theory and references about QAnon. Three useful collections on conspiracy theory are Butter and Knight, Dyrendal et al. and the articles in the Finnish journal *Argumenta* 2018. A Norwegian-language collection *Konspiranoia* ed. by Dyrendal was also fascinating, as are recent surveys by the historian Byford and the philosopher Cassam. Area-based collections on the U.S., Middle East, Europe and Nordic countries are listed below (e.g. Butter, Önnerfors and Krewel, Astapova, et al. ) Explicitly anthropological studies I found useful are those of Marcus, Pelkmanns and Machold, Drazkiewicz, Drazkiewciz and Rabo, Rabo in Butter and Knight, Saglam, Toseman’s dissertation and a recent article by Fassin. Finally, for recent descriptions of QAnon, see the references below, especially the recent volume by Bloom and Moskalenko focusing on women in the QAnon movement, and the emotionally moving Reddit thread R/QAnon Casualties. For a longer version of this article and a more extensive bibliography on conspiracy theory see my working paper at <https://www.soc.lu.se/en/steven-sampson/publication/3ec05ab0-528f-40bb-92bd-7e7c3e47a8f2>

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