

The AKP's Rhetoric of Rule in Turkey: Political Melodramas of Conspiracy from "Ergenekon" to "Mastermind" 

Erdağ Göknaç

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Abstract and Keywords

In 2008 the Turkish Constitutional Court was one vote shy of banning the ruling AKP for "anti-secular activity." In response, the AKP began articulating a series of political conspiracy narratives, amplified through the media. Blurring the line between representation and reality, these political melodramas set the stage for the exercise of state power through the weaponization of investigations and judicial retaliation against the military and the opposition. From 2008 to 2013, the "Ergenekon" conspiracy depicted an anti-Islamist deep state organization and its involvement in illegal activities including military coups and assassinations—as if it actually existed. The Ergenekon conspiracy (and attendant trials) initiated a profound change in Turkish politics by breaking the power of the traditional secular-military alliance. In 2014, Ergenekon led to a spin-off called "Mastermind", which targeted the AKP's erstwhile ally and political rival the Gülen Hizmet (or "Service") Movement, a transnational Islamic educational and media network led by imam Fetullah Gülen. Gülenists, with their strong presence in the police and judiciary, had been instrumental in the Ergenekon prosecutions. Mastermind was later credited with the anti-AKP Gezi protests and a corruption investigation into then Prime Minister Erdoğan in 2013 as well as for the 2016 failed coup. Relying on a literary-cultural analysis of the political field, this chapter argues that conspiracism in Turkey has functioned to prefigure and legitimate authoritarian governance, whether secular or Islamist. I redefine conspiracy theories as popular fictions indexed to political movements that can instrumentalize legal and electoral processes for the accumulation of state power and the undermining of democratic pluralism.

Keywords: conspiracism, melodrama, deep state, coup, Ergenekon, Mastermind, AKP, Gülen Movement

"They're in the service of Mastermind, but not the Mastermind in Pennsylvania. This Mastermind is different."

—President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan (2016)¹

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The Ergenekon trials, a judicial process predicated on a conspiracy theory, began in October 2008 to attack opposition to the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP, *Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*) and Islamism in Turkey. The conspiracy trial convictions began to be overturned in 2014 based on procedural irregularities and were fully dismissed in July 2019 when a Turkish court again ruled that there was insufficient evidence to indicate that Ergenekon, a purported ultra-secular, ultra-nationalist clandestine organization, ever existed.² But the arrests and investigations by police, the indictments by prosecutors, and the sentences by judges had long remapped the Turkish political landscape, and the conspiracy theory had served its purpose of censuring the military and political opposition and ensuring the continued rule of the AKP, which had grown increasingly authoritarian in the meantime. Ergenekon, which devolved into a dragnet against all political opposition, ranks as Turkey's second most comprehensive legal case involving coup plans.³ The first, which is ongoing, is the Gülen mass trials in the wake of the 2016 failed coup attempt (associated with the Mastermind conspiracy).⁴ Ironically, the Gülenists were the driving force behind the Ergenekon trials.

The rise of conspiratorial discourse as an intentionally deployed weapon of politics, disseminated through social media, is a phenomenon that demands renewed academic critique. Our current conceptual vocabulary, however, is insufficient to analyze the sustained political effects of these new processes. This chapter maps aspects of the politics of conspiracism in Turkey with the intent of opening a broader field of analysis. Rather than pathologizing conspiracy theories, which many accounts do, my approach begins with a revaluation that considers them to be ideologically informed products of political popular culture. We can start with a basic premise: Conspiracism, rather than being an anomaly to be dismissed out of hand, is embedded in political power relations. Its indeterminate truth-value nevertheless conveys an ideological grammar.

Our received understanding of conspiratorial thought is that it can be debunked and dismissed by applying the principles of reason, logic, and scientific inquiry to identify fallacies and inconsistencies. It is believed to be a priori opposed to "the real." Nevertheless, conspiracy narratives as explanatory beliefs and discourses with hegemonic power have assumed a political life beyond the matter of truth or lies. Easily debunked conspiracies supported by actual or alternative facts and backed by state power have real-world outcomes that include the influencing of referendums and elections, the targeting of opposition figures, the legitimating of authoritarianism, and the instigation of political violence. The conceptualization of "fake news" or "post-truth" politics is insufficient to understand the causal links between conspiracy theories and authoritarianism. While conspiracy theories are nothing new to popular culture and politics, government-backed conspiracism has become an affective and discursive means to mobilize the population (or an institution of state) to act on behalf of a political party. In this sense, conspiracism has assumed the status of *method* in populist authoritarian knowledge formation in regions as diverse as China, Hungary, Poland, Russia, Turkey, Venezuela, and the United States.

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Melodramatic conspiratorial accounts, easily dismissed as unserious, nevertheless script actors and events into powerful moral narratives that are consumed by the voting public. State-sponsored conspiratorial scenarios such as Ergenekon and Mastermind identify protagonists and antagonists and create a web of relations that provide interpretive meaning to current events. By establishing relational hierarchies among characters, staging scenes of collusion, and mapping developments into predetermined schemata, conspiracy narratives provide citizens with easily legible interpretive frameworks to make sense of otherwise complex political developments. They instruct the public in terms of emotion, morals, and ideology. In this way, conspiracism can be weaponized against dissent and opposition. For example, in 1990's Turkey, the *irtica* (Islamist revivalism) conspiracy was mobilized to stop the rise of "political Islam" from a Kemalist secular-military perspective, justifying military and legal intervention. In the 2000s, the Ergenekon conspiracy attacked the secular-military alliance from an Islamist AKP-Gülen joint perspective through judicial means including the abuse of terrorism laws. Subsequently, after 2014, the Mastermind conspiracy has involved the AKP first targeting and then outlawing the rival Islamist Gülen movement as a terrorist group and enacting purges and court cases. The local common denominators for these conspiratorial discourses are, in one form or another, Turkish military coups—whether hard (as in 1960, 1971, and 1980), soft (as in 1997), impending (as in the 2007 e-memorandum), or failed (as in 2016). That is, the conspiracy narratives are predicated on the threat of a coup, coup plans, coup attempts, or an actual coup. In reading the discourses around these coups through conspiratorial tropes, one of my overarching questions is, since the 1997 coup, how have conspiracy theories guided Turkey's uneven transition from an electoral democracy under military tutelage to an authoritarian regime with Islamist overtones?⁵

In this chapter I will be arguing for a paradox: Through a judicial process, the AKP inaugurated a post-coup era in Turkish politics where traditional military coups were no longer legitimate or feasible; however, the apparatus of conspiracism, which is the prequel for coups, persisted and was used to attack political opponents of the AKP (after the 2013 Gezi protests, particularly leftists, liberals, and Kurds). On the one hand, the Gülen movement—its smokescreen of strategic ambiguity notwithstanding—attempted to harness this apparatus to goad a faction in the military against the AKP in an anachronistic coup attempt (Yavuz and Balcı 2018). On the other hand, the AKP responded by declaring a two-year state of emergency and purging the Gülen movement from all institutions of state and public life, and stifling dissident voices in general. In short, whether the coup failed or succeeded was a moot point, as the outcome was the same in terms of the repression of civil society and the rise of authoritarianism—the AKP narrative of a July 15, 2016, "epic victory of democracy" notwithstanding (Altınordu 2017, 152-154).

Political Melodramas of Conspiracy

While the influence of Hofstadter (1965) in conspiracy studies extends to the present, his claim that the "paranoid style" emerged from "status anxiety" and "agency panic" due to a threat to social or political power has been criticized for a pathologizing approach.

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From a Marxist political and cultural perspective, Frederic Jameson (1988) has analyzed conspiracism as a symptom of late capitalism, suggesting that conspiracy theories are crude attempts to produce a cognitive map that situates the subject in relation to the alienating political and economic forces of neoliberalism. For Jameson, geopolitical narratives produce a comprehensible world from the incomprehensible fragments of the post-modern condition. Authors like Daniel Pipes (1998), in a high orientalist framing, see the propensity for conspiratorial thought in the Middle East and among Muslims, as a symptomatic essentialism.⁶ Nevertheless, conspiracism has played a significant if understudied role in geopolitics and the rise of anti-colonial and anti-imperial Middle Eastern nationalisms (Aistrope and Bleiker 2018; Gray 2008, 2010). In Turkey, for example, state conspiracism, which typically blames sinister external forces (*dış mihraklar*) and their internal allies for the country's troubles, has been a fundamental force since the founding of the republic in 1923, and conveys secularist and Islamist ideological engagements (Gürpınar 2020). However, the function of intentional, government-articulated conspiracism at the intersection of popular culture and populist authoritarianism demands further critical analysis.

Timothy Melley (2012) describes how the fictions of "geopolitical melodrama" can negotiate foreign and domestic threats to a nation (the United States in this case) as a form of ersatz politics. Whereas Melley analyzes the usurpation of rational politics by genre fictions, my argument in this chapter traces the corollary function of government conspiracism as discursive power and practice. When misinformation masquerades as news, reality and representation blur, as do politics and popular melodrama. Melodrama deals with sensational and romantic topics that appeal to the emotions of the populace. Political melodramas of conspiracy can dramatize ideological, party, or national self-determination while concealing the actual relations of power among the government, the private sector, and the national security state. Reading Turkish conspiracies such as Ergenekon and Mastermind as serial political melodramas reveals that conspiracy works to adjudicate internal and external threats that in turn orient vindictive judicial practices. In authoritarian contexts, party conspiracism manifests as a Janus of literature and law, establishing what might be termed a "discursive-legal infrastructure". For example, *irtica*, as a perceived conspiratorial threat centered on Islamist politics, justified the February 28, 1997 soft coup that removed the Islamist Welfare Party (RP, *Refah Partisi*) from power, led to the party being banned by the Constitutional Court, and initiated a period of secularist neo-nationalism known as the "February 28 process" (Cizre-Sakallıoğlu and Çınar 2003). Ergenekon, as a conspiratorial legal process, helped remove Turkish military tutelage from civilian politics through a series of trials. The Mastermind conspiracy frame continues to denigrate an AKP political rival, setting the stage for arrests, detentions, torture, purges, and legal cases with the corollary effect of consolidating authoritarian power with executive aggrandizement.

Recent books on conspiracism, such as De Medeiros (2018) and Gürpınar (2020) on Turkey—and Rosenblum and Muirhead on Trump (2019) —have done the important work of historicizing conspiracy and moving it from the fringe into the political mainstream. Whereas they establish that conspiracy thrives in populist and authoritarian contexts,

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they tend toward disciplinary approaches that overlook the correlation between conspiracism and political and legal outcomes. By tracing current events through a literary-cultural approach, my research uncovers recurring narrative structures of conspiracy that connect serialized party conspiracism to the maintenance and monopolization of power. My approach redefines conspiracy as a literary-political mode of knowledge production with material consequences that manipulates the populace, skews electoral outcomes, and guides legal retribution.

Political melodramas of conspiracy simplify complex, confusing, rapidly changing and threatening events and make them legible. They are based on the binary logic of good and evil, with those identified as the (duplicitous) agents of conspiracy as evil. As such, conspiracists weave parable-like accounts of defeat or victimhood and redemption. These theories script the conspiracy theorist or party leader as a figure of insight and knowledge who sees through deceptions—casting him or her as a kind of popular visionary or protagonist. The theories, which make the distinction between facts and claims porous, cannot be proved or disproved. Conspiratorial thought also functions to enfranchise the disenfranchised through historiographic reframings that re-sequence and reinterpret facts. Though conspiracy theories can reveal truths, they are not truths per se but more often surrogates for the truth. That is, conspiracism exercises the function of "truth" in knowledge formation.⁷ Despite its often false premises, conspiracism, mixing belief and suspicion, can accumulate followers and amass political intent. It creates communities of belief and devotees who often come together against a common object of resentment and hatred. Belief in conspiracy can be an article of political faith. But what's observable now is that conspiracism has become an enabling force of legal intervention and a method for aligning party ideology and everyday social practices.

Ergenekon and Mastermind, as political melodramas of conspiracy, bridge the realms of literature and the law, of the symbolic and the material, and hermeneutically, of the epistemic and the ontological. They articulate dominant ideologies, whether Kemalist secularism or authoritarian Islamism. Along with other processes, among the long-term consequences of conspiracism as witnessed in Turkey are the collapse of the balance of powers, the attack against pluralism, the co-opting of the media, the rise of a single party dominating the state, and the creation of a democratic façade for an increasingly authoritarian government (Temelkuran 2019).⁸

During the AKP era, melodramas, which have a strong tradition in popular culture (literature, film, and TV), have become overtly politicized in the Turkish cultural sphere (Emre Çetin 2014). During the Cold War, the Yeşilçam film industry established a dominant mode of popular melodrama that focused on oppositions of rich/poor, tradition/modernity, city/country, Islamic/secular, and in the case of female protagonists, angel/whore. One of the dominant conflicts was the social anxiety of conservative classes faced with modernization. Characters were simply drawn, one-dimensional, or stereotyped as heroes, heroines, and villains. These dramas focused on sensational plots that revolved around good and evil, injustice, tragedy, redemption, unrequited love, or heightened emotion. They featured long-suffering protagonists, in this case allegorically the "nation," attempting to

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overcome impossible odds. Whereas these films were not political per se, since the 1990s, they have been supplemented by an explosion in Turkish political miniseries that are broadcast globally (Bhutto 2019). More recent film and television melodramas, for example the *Valley of the Wolves (Kurtlar Vadisi)* franchise, feature local and foreign adversaries intent on occupation and/or division of Turkey, and plots that are often in direct dialogue with contemporary Turkish politics (Carney 2018).

The highly legible culture of melodrama lends itself as a genre to political mobilization. What I have been calling political melodramas of conspiracy have plotlines that present the AKP as an earnest, honest, and marginalized conservative group opposed by an oppressive secular elite establishment, the military, or more recently, a rival and imposter, a doppelgänger attempting to overtake the state and usurp the nation's sovereignty. As such, conspiracism is one of the dominant idioms through which President Erdoğan communicates with and mobilizes his base. He typically gives several speeches a day that situate domestic and foreign events into imaginative narratives that help maintain his power. Though he has been implicated in various levels of corruption and quasi-legal practices, he has molded the system in his image, in a way that practically ensures his leadership for many years to come.⁹ The unsuspecting populace, supposedly "woke" by the conspiracy narrative, must enter into the drama as it were (by casting a vote or pouring into the streets) to support the leader/protagonist and all he represents from ruin. As the distinction between reality and representation fades, the illusion of citizens' agency rises. Meanwhile a select elite are able to maintain and consolidate power in the name of a sacred homeland (*vatan*). In the era of post-truth, political melodramas of conspiracy such as *Ergenekon* and *Mastermind* function both as entertainment and knowledge-formation that manufactures consent, creates publics (or counter-publics), and legitimizes authoritarianism. Working from an understanding of loyalty, patronage, and capitalist growth, the AKP has appropriated the media (see the chapter by Uzunoğlu in this volume) and privatized, purged, and dismantled the institutions of state that opposed it, often based on a rationale embedded in conspiracism.

Political melodramas of conspiracy focusing on the deep state, impending coups, terrorism, and the enemy within, enable contexts of coercion, including judicial prosecution and electoral manipulation, subverting democratic infrastructures for political gain. While in the American Republic this phenomenon has been recently dubbed "new conspiracism" (Rosenblum and Muirhead 2019), it has long functioned in the Republic of Turkey through the "episodes" of an ongoing political melodrama. Politicians keep the story going as long as it successfully skews the political landscape in their favor, often during referendums, elections, judicial investigations, or for the sake of diplomatic influence. In sum, conspiracy isn't just a symptom of authoritarian politics, as I argue, it imagines and prefigures that authoritarianism.

From Deep State (Ergenekon) to Parallel State (Mastermind)

My focus is on a twenty-year period that witnessed the fraught political enfranchisement and empowerment of Islamism in Turkey, between the February 28, 1997, soft coup and the July 15, 2016, failed coup. The so-called 1997 soft coup removed from power the RP and Turkey's first Islamist prime minister, Necmettin Erbakan, for anti-secular activities, leading to the party being outlawed in 1998 and temporarily re-establishing the secularist state dominance established in the early decades of the republic. The 2016 coup was a failed attempt led by the conservative Gülen movement to remove its onetime ally, and subsequent rival, the AKP from power.

Founded in 2001 just weeks before the attacks of 9/11, the AKP came to power in 2002, at a time when the international community sought to identify a viable model of moderate Islamic government. While no stranger to Islamist politics, Turkey's traditional secularist establishment never expected a political party that advocated Muslim social justice and pro-Western capitalist development to come to power. This represented a new political imaginary, one that had broad geopolitical and growing domestic appeal. Since social justice and human rights were also traditional concerns of the Turkish left, Erdoğan felt he had a chance to consolidate a broad constituency. The AKP styled itself as an Islamic Democratic party along the model of the Christian Democrats in Europe. Erdoğan became Prime Minister in 2003, and negotiations for Turkey's full membership in the EU began in 2005, which increased the AKP's political and cultural capital. The AKP won repeated general and parliamentary elections as well as referendums. GDP increased annually, and by 2012, Turkey was the world's sixteenth biggest economy. The party solidified a "50% + 1" ballot box strategy to leverage a bare majority and claim the "democratic will of the people." Meanwhile, society grew increasingly polarized into camps of religious, conservative loyalists and the liberal, leftist opposition. Consolidating and concentrating its power along the way, Erdoğan became president in 2014 and moved the country from a parliamentary to a presidential system in a 2017 referendum. The AKP platform has been so successful that its formula of conservative Muslim capitalism has become a model of governance throughout North Africa and the Middle East, from Morocco to Afghanistan. The only party that has ruled longer than the AKP is the secularist Republican People's Party (CHP, *Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi*) founded by Mustafa Kemal, which ruled for twenty-seven years from 1923 to 1950, mostly in an authoritarian one-party state, the basic outlines of which have now been replicated by the AKP (see the chapter by Aslan in this volume). The CHP has been the main opposition party in parliament in the AKP era. The only other parties with a sizeable representation in parliament are the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP, *Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi*) and the Kurdish-leftist People's Democratic Party (HDP, *Halkın Demokrat Partisi*). Since 2015, the MHP has aligned closely with the AKP, the former advocating Turkish nationalism and the latter Sunni nationalism, which overlap in some respects. While the 1997 coup pitted secularists against the rise of "political Islam"; the 2016 coup pitted two Islamist political movements against each other for control of

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the state. Reading the cultural constructions of both coups reveals insights into the narrative, symbolic, and performative practices of party conspiricism.

Coups: Hard, Soft, Impending, and Failed

Anyone mildly familiar with Turkish history is aware that conspiracy is directly linked to a coercive method of transfer of power prevalent in the Middle East: the military coup. Whereas the Turkish military was instrumental in establishing the Republic of Turkey in 1923, the Cold War coups of 1960, 1971, and 1980 were contestations over the founding Kemalist legacy along left-right ideological axes. After the end of the Cold War, Islamism became a rising political force in Turkey and the Middle East (called the "Islamic awakening" in Arab countries), and a protracted conflict between secularist militarism and Islamism has defined the post-Cold War Turkish political field.

The 1997 soft coup was prefigured by a vast secular conspiracy under the trope of *irtica*, or religious (Islamist) revival, articulated by the secularist top brass and politicians and trumpeted in the mainstream media.¹⁰ In contrast, a counter-conspiracy began to gradually emerge that identified a hitherto unknown political actor, the "deep state" (*derin devlet*), a non-elected national security apparatus restricting or controlling the civilian government.¹¹ In Turkey, the military, in particular, had been identified as the core part of the deep state in the 1990s, especially around the Susurluk incident of 1996—a car accident that revealed illegal contacts between the mafia, government officials, and (para)military. That a sustained conspiratorial narrative built around the deep state coup significantly affected the trajectory of Turkish politics is a minutely observable phenomenon.¹² As stated, with the help of the Gülen movement, the AKP targeted the deep state in a series of trials held in Specially Authorized Courts (*Özel Yetkili Mahkemeler*) under the Ergenekon conspiracy.¹³ The trials were based on supposed coup plans with codenames like "Sledgehammer," "Blonde Girl," "Sea Sparkle," "Moonlight," and "Glove" backed by the Ergenekon organization, which was apparently also responsible for the 1997 soft coup that removed Necmettin Erbakan of the RP from power. The AKP successfully used the narrative of the "impending military coup" between 2008 and 2013 to remove Turkish military interference from civilian politics, procedural irregularities and tainted evidence notwithstanding (Bardakçı 2013; Jenkins 2011; Rodrik 2011).

The conspiracy posited the existence of the Ergenekon Terror Organization (labeled with the acronym ETÖ in Turkish), and aiding or abetting Ergenekon (with or without knowledge) became a crime punishable by lengthy jail terms. Indictments accused people of crimes such as "membership of an armed terrorist organization," "encouraging the military to insubordination," and "attempting to overthrow the government of the Turkish Republic by using violence and coercion." (Open Source Center Report 2010). The process married discursive representation and legal action to bring the military under civilian influence. This followed the earlier appropriation of the judiciary, which had been filled through appointment with members sympathetic to the Gülen movement (Hendrick 2016). It is important to note that the Ergenekon narrative appealed to groups beyond the AKP including liberals, some leftists, and Kurds who were supportive of the process

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given their own bitter experiences with the Turkish military.¹⁴ Ergenekon provided them with an opportunity to right past injustices, and even the European Union (EU), early on, felt that the process might allow for something like truth and reconciliation (for truth and justice initiatives in Turkey, see the chapter by Bakiner this volume).¹⁵ The AKP's image as a model of moderate Islamist politics also appealed to the global liberal order seeking alternatives to radical Islamism.¹⁶ After the 2013 Gezi protests, the AKP's liberal promise of the 2000s, Turkey's moribund EU-accession process, and the highly touted "Turkish model" for the post-Arab Spring Middle East evaporated in the face of the party's increasing authoritarianism.

While the Ergenekon legal process removed the military from civilian politics, it set a pernicious precedent: Conspiracism, with the coordination of a pliant judiciary and co-opted media, could be articulated to frame and destroy political or cultural opposition to the AKP.¹⁷ The discursive-legal infrastructure had been set for a return to the contexts of a Turkish monoparty state.

Üst akıl (*Mastermind*)

Fettullah Gülen, the leader of the transnational Gülen movement, is a seventy-eight-year-old Muslim preacher who lives in Pennsylvania (with permanent residency status) and who was a close ally of Erdoğan until 2012. Gülen controls a network of schools and other businesses around the world and has a sizeable following of supporters, many of whom were educated in Gülen schools. While the movement started to accumulate significant power as early as the 1980s, it was during the alliance with the AKP government that many Gülen supporters advanced to positions of significance in all state institutions. In December 2013, however, the alliance between Gülen and Erdoğan was publicly shattered when a pro-Gülen faction within the judiciary brought corruption charges against several of Erdoğan's ministers and close allies, though the reasons for the fallout predate these developments. This was the first indication that the legal apparatus of Ergenekon that had been used to sideline the military could be trained on other groups, including the ruling party. Erdoğan was able to contain the damage from the graft probe and began to purge his party and various state institutions, especially the judiciary and the police, of supporters of the Gülen movement, which he identified as a "parallel state" and branded with the acronym PDY (*Paralel Devlet Yapılanması*, or "Parallel State Organization" —subsequently identified as a terrorist group).

By 2013 the era of impending "deep state" coups had come to an end, but an unlikely possibility still remained: a "parallel state" coup. The AKP needed another cultural construction of political events that could influence public sentiment and initiate new legal processes against new enemies to justify and obscure the state's increasing authoritarianism. The AKP, for its part, claimed the process supported the rule of law in the service of democracy. In a conspiratorial revision, events from 2013 to 2016 that were a threat to AKP rule have been described as originating from another shadowy source, simply identified as Mastermind (*Üst akıl*). This included the Gezi protests in the summer of 2013 (see the chapter by Kaya in this volume), the December 17–25, 2013, AKP corruption scandal

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(referred to by Erdoğan as a "judicial coup" attempt),¹⁸ and the July 2016 coup attempt (Nefes 2017). First articulated in 2014 by then AKP Deputy Prime Minister Bülent Arınç, Mastermind is a supposed clandestine network that links the Gülen movement, whose leader has been based in Pennsylvania for more than two decades, and the CIA, along with militant Kurdish groups in Turkey, Syria, and Iraq (the PKK and its affiliates, the PYD and YPG) as well as ISIS in a vast conspiracy intent on toppling the AKP government and dividing Turkey.¹⁹ While the previous conspiracy theory cast leftist and secularist-leaning domestic opposition as being accomplices of Ergenekon, this one recasts the Gülen movement as a terrorist organization (labeled with the acronym FETÖ in Turkish) directly associated with the PDY (often referred to together as "FETÖ/PDY"). Those who have aided or abetted this network, wittingly or unwittingly, are targets of legal action and harsh punishments. The judicial process unfolded under a state of emergency from 2016 to 2018 and continues in the present, aspiring to dismantle all aspects of the Gülen movement—the one-time ally and current archenemy of the AKP. Pro-government media fabulists have even claimed that the two terrorist organizations, ETÖ (Ergenekon) and FETÖ (Mastermind), work in close coordination.

In attacking the transnational Gülen network, AKP conspiracism has also made a scalar shift, gone global, and adopted anti-Semitic tropes. The 2015 "documentary" *Mastermind*, made by the pro-AKP A Haber channel, melds a global anti-Semitic conspiracy with the recent history of upheavals during AKP rule that implicate Gülen (Akyol 2017; Bora 2016). Jews, the CIA, the PKK, ISIS, and Gülen are all pawns of Mastermind, bent on destroying Turkey by any means necessary through coups, protests, economic fluctuations of interest rates, terrorism, political violence, and war. Such extreme party conspiracism is effective in turning recent history into a political melodrama that cleverly obfuscates the role of the AKP in these events as anything but a redeeming force, arguing for party loyalty and the Sunni nationalism that it represents.

In Turkey there hasn't been a successful coup-like putsch since the soft coup of February 28, 1997, which removed the RP from power.²⁰ During the subsequent purges of Islamists as part of this coup, Gülen fled Turkey for the United States, and he has not returned since. He would have returned as leader of the faithful, some claim, had the unexpected and surprising coup attempt of July 15, 2016 succeeded.

From the very early hours of the 2016 coup attempt, pro-government media started reporting that Gülenists were responsible. Gülenist businesses, including major banks and media organizations, were confiscated and brought under government control. The Turkish government has demanded that the United States repatriate Gülen to Turkey to face charges and continues to lobby the Trump administration for his extradition. At the same time, the massive purges and repression affected individuals and groups with no links to the Gülen movement, as hundreds of thousands of people were dismissed from the state bureaucracy and tens of thousands were arrested.

The United States, for its part, has also been implicated in this version of the Mastermind conspiracy. After all, who was harboring Gülen but the United States? Who had given him

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residency? Who refused to extradite him? Though a longtime political ally of Turkey, the United States is also a convenient "other" whose denigration as a divisive and imperial force in the Turkey and the Middle East mobilizes large segments of the Turkish population including the AKP base. Anti-Americanism, which gradually became mainstream in the country after the United States invasion of Iraq in 2003, has been at an all-time high in Turkey since July 2016.²¹ The exceptionally high levels of anti-Americanism in Turkey, can be tied to serial party conspiracies like Mastermind that link the United States to the failed coup attempt, imperialist designs in the Middle East, or support for Israel. As a global power, the United States is denigrated as the common nemesis of almost all anti-imperial nationalists, leftists, and Islamists in the developing world. Such discourses about internal and external enemies deflect attention from the government's incompetence and parochial interests.

The coup attempt appears to have been an ironic and incomplete manifestation of one of the trumped-up coup conspiracies from the Ergenekon era. By 2016 the Gülenists had harnessed a disgruntled faction in the military, which it had begun to infiltrate years earlier. While the Gülen infiltration has a long history, the Ergenekon anti-coup trials and purges opened up significant and critical positions for Gülenists. With the Gülenist influence in the military, the plan was to undertake an anti-AKP, pro-Gülen coup in the guise of a Kemalist secular military intervention. Whereas Gülenist power had previously manifested in the judiciary and targeted the military, it now manifested in the military and targeted Erdoğan and the AKP government.

The coup was partial in its planning and execution. This was reflected in the scenario that underpinned the attempt, which was, however, in keeping with the Gülen movement's "strategic ambiguity" (Hendrik 2016): The conspiratorial premise was a Kemalist Cold War era coup against the "violation of the constitution and laws" by the AKP (Altınordu 2017, 146). As such, a junta declaration by the outdated Kemalist-sounding "Peace at Home Council" was read over the Turkish Radio and Television broadcast. This may have worked in 1980 or 1997, but it was painfully anachronistic in 2016 for a society that could no longer be neatly divided into secularist and Islamist camps. In fact, what had come to a head in the coup attempt was competition between two powerful Islamist movements for control of state institutions (Yavuz and Balcı 2018).

Though the coup failed, it resulted in Erdoğan's consolidation of power and a return to the kind of authoritarian rule that an actual coup would have brought (structurally, along the lines of what we've witnessed in Egypt, which experienced an anti-Islamist coup in 2013). There are still unanswered questions about the events of July 2016. Yet the great Mastermind conspiracy is now broadcast regularly such that it has become a kind of unofficial state history, and President Erdoğan's melodramatic scripting of the coup as the work of the nefarious Mastermind, against which he has again led the people in victory, continues to sustain his populist rule in Turkey.

Figuring Authoritarianism: Conspiracism as Method and Politics as Popular Fiction

In rethinking conspiracism, I focus on its instrumental uses as a political phenomenon at the intersection of literature and law. What I call conspiracism as method is a political process of knowledge production by which state power and human and economic capital is accumulated, maintained, and monopolized. Whereas conspiracy theories are a type of interpretive or explanatory political discourse, which may be legitimate revelation or deluded mystification, conspiracy, in the legal sense, is an actual network of people working together by agreement to commit an illegal act or acts for political purposes. They're obviously related, but I'll make a pragmatic distinction, by identifying the first as "*knowledge of reality*" and the second, as "*experience of reality*." Scholars use the terms epistemology and ontology to make this distinction and the categories of knowledge and being work to establish relations, in this case, between conspiratorial discourse and its political/legal outcomes. AKP party conspiracism like Ergenekon and Mastermind is based on such a discursive-legal infrastructure. We can furthermore define this intersection of epistemology and ontology through the concept of "discursive practices" that have an ideological and material component (Bacchi and Bonham 2014). The idea of discursive practice allows us to trace how knowledge and power work to produce representations and experiences that stand in for actual political realities. Intersections of language and legal processes are discursive practices in which, for example, the Ergenekon conspiracy (as discourse) and the Ergenekon judicial process (as material practice) become mutually constitutive, in turn reinforcing the power of the AKP at the expense of democratic transition. Party conspiracism as popular fiction functions as a vehicle of political ideology through the law and as a discursive practice within a "regime of truth"—the political discourse which society makes function as true (Foucault 1980). The Ergenekon and Mastermind conspiracies, thus, becomes a means of disseminating AKP Islamism as well as manufacturing electoral practices that ensure AKP rule.

Conspiracism as method figures authoritarianism by creating communities of ideological belief and belonging (rather than uncovering the truth based in material facts per se) and by enabling discursive practices that function beyond any assessment of truth value. Effectively, the result is coercion by government and state power.

A Literary Mode of Knowledge Production

In my previous work, which addresses intersections of modern Turkish culture and politics, I've analyzed conspiracy both as a trope in and a form of popular literature, including the at times violent political effects of cultural production in Turkey (Gökner 2013). This has included historiography that challenges the official state narrative; literature that breaks with accepted form and content; media that serves the interests of political power; and forms of popular culture that elicit outrage and protest.

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Turkish literature also engages conspiracy as cultural construction and a political melodrama. A genealogy of canonized novels from A.H. Tanpınar's *The Time-Regulation Institute* to Adalet Ağaoğlu's *Lying Down to Die* and Oğuz Atay's *The Disconnected* represent conspiracy as a central issue of knowledge-formation in Turkish modernity. The Turkish Nobel Laureate in Literature Orhan Pamuk, in whose work conspiracy is a recurring trope, describes the troubling indeterminacy of conspiracy and its non-correlation to reality as follows:

There is a literature of paranoia [or conspiracy] in our day that takes Dostoyevsky and Borges as its source and that writers like Thomas Pynchon and Umberto Eco savor with a high sense of wit; one that I, too, see myself a part of ... But I'm different from them and more privileged as the citizen of a country that has appropriated paranoia/conspiracy as a form of existence. I'm able to create this literature using my own [personal experience] as a starting point ... In the past, I'd mention these [conspiracies] in my novels for the sake of satire, but now our newspaper editorials talk about this stuff in all seriousness

(Pamuk 1999, 79–81)

While Pamuk acknowledges and parodies the counterfactual aspects of conspiracy, he nevertheless recognizes its potential to be misapprehended as real, and perhaps to create and convey what we could call a "political imaginary"²² or the conceptualization of a plausible political order reinforced by myths, images, symbols, and metaphors.

Pamuk identifies the representational and misrepresentational effects of the intersection of conspiracism and politics, particularly in the novel *Snow* (Pamuk 2004), set in the 1990s era of the soft coup and the rise of Islamist politics. In a novel plot where ideology determines reality, it becomes harder and harder for characters to distinguish fact from fiction. For example, the newspaper prints events that *will* happen rather than those that have happened—a clever way to indicate that the "news" media determines "the real" rather than vice versa. A military coup erupts from the theatrical performance of a didactic, nationalist play.²³ This theatrical coup is an indictment of the performative abuses of state power. The mere hint of a political Islamic electoral victory provokes the (then) secular-military order to acts of violence against civil society. Women who want to veil are prevented from doing so and are driven to suicide because of the state's conspiratorial Islamophobia, which is triggered by veiling practices. Former leftists find "God" and become advocates of Islamist politics, nevertheless continuing a pattern of dissidence against the state. *Snow*, perhaps more insightfully than any political history, is a text that reveals the conspiratorial logic of the 1997 soft coup, Ergenekon, Mastermind, and the failed coup of 2016. In these cases, in a frenzy of what Hofstadter would call "agency panic," a secularist or Islamist group symbolically reenacts the script of a military, judicial, or civilian coup. Among other things, *Snow* demonstrates how ideologically informed conspiracism is interpolated in the worldviews of characters, to the degree that they live "political" lives with no index to the real. This is the tragic condition at the center of today's political melodramas of conspiracy, whether in Turkey or the United States. Alien-

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ated, the characters are vulnerable to multiple levels of manipulation and exploitation and are not immune from acting against their own social interests.

In Turkey's AKP era, we have witnessed the emergence of something beyond the fictions of political representation; namely, the rise of conspiracism as a political melodrama, which *Snow* dramatizes as an object lesson. In the early 2000s the AKP presented itself as the moral, ethical, and honest alternative in Turkish politics. By the 2010s, it was up to its ears in tender rigging, bribery, cronyism, nepotism, obstruction of justice, and influence peddling. In 2014 alone, then Prime Minister Erdoğan's repertoire of conspiracies included reference to various colluding anti-Turkey groups such as the "interest-rate lobby" (economic forces jealous of Turkey's financial success); the "preacher's lobby" (the influence of Islamic scholar Gülen and his followers); the "porn lobby" (those opposed to a recently signed internet censorship bill); the "robot lobby" (a misnomer that refers to social media from Tweets to YouTube); and the well-worn USA-Israeli axis (which was expanded to include Gülen). Since 2016, the AKP has become the model, not of moderate Islam or Turkish democratic transition, but of a one-party state in which strains of Gulf monarchies, Russian oligarchy, and Islamist republicanism coexist uneasily.

But it's not just fiction that reflects the cultural logic of conspiracism. In Turkey, ostensibly nonfiction "investigative" or "scholarly" books identifying, explaining, and describing Turkish history and current events through conspiracies are always on the best-seller lists. It's a genre of its own for blockbuster leftist conspiracy theorists from Yalçın Küçük and Erol Mütercimler (who first claimed knowledge of Ergenekon) to Soner Yalçın and Ergün Poyraz. Küçük, perhaps, is the best representative of the Kemalist "nationalist left" (*ulusal sol*) that sees the AKP, the Gülen movement, liberals, and militant Kurdish groups as enemies of the people and the state. A writer for the extreme nationalist Workers' Party magazine *Aydınlık* and the website *OdaTV*, he was arrested and sentenced as part of the Ergenekon prosecutions along with other journalists. In this genre, conspiracy theories become a notional method of historical analysis or even scholarship, often with anti-Semitic flourishes. In the Mastermind conspiracy, ironically, the nationalist left's crude anti-Semitism has merged with AKP conspiracism against Gülen and his purported allies. The political influence of the conspiracy genre is immense in its capacity for persuasion and influence; and generally, for ideological manipulation. In sum, conspiratorial genres are legible as knowledge formation across literary, academic, popular, and political spheres, and repeating conspiratorial tropes that figure authoritarianism include the deep state, the (impeding) coup, the parallel state, the enemy of the state, the enemy within, the enemy of the people, and the traitor to the nation or *vatan haini* (for the notion of internal enemies in Turkish politics, see the chapter by Öktem in this volume).

Conclusion: Political Mainstreaming of Conspiracism

In the AKP era, a process has unfolded of the party extracting loyalty from (appropriating) the judiciary, the police, the military, and the media. This process occurred along with and through a litany of conspiracy theories. A type of melodramatic miniseries was being written by politicians that mapped and identified villains and traitors who needed to be punished by being fired, reappointed, arrested, jailed, and tried. At the same time, President Erdoğan and his followers continued to depict themselves as victims, targets, and survivors of other domestic and foreign conspiracies (always accompanied by an exonerating judicial process) never more evident than during elections and referendums. Conspiratorial logic opened up spaces of political and legal opportunity. Through the Ergenekon legal process, the AKP could simultaneously be the victims of state power and the perpetrators of state violence. Such contradictions are the hallmark of an illiberalism that instrumentalizes legal and democratic processes and whose goal is to accumulate and monopolize power. In Turkey, the discursive-legal infrastructure of conspiracism succeeded in bringing the institutions of state under the authority of the ruling party, a process that could be described as the AKP's occupation of the state and its dismantling of the rule of the law (Tahiroğlu 2020).

Like Gülen to his followers, Erdoğan's followers consider him to be holy, divine, and even in some circles, the Mahdi (Islamic redeemer), a candidate for Caliph of Islam and leader of a new political imaginary: Apparently, the AKP has entertained fantastic plans for a union of Muslim states called "Asrica" (from a combination of Asia and Africa) comprised of the sixty-one Islamic states in the world, with Istanbul as its capital and perhaps Erdoğan as its leader (Kenez 2019).

In Ergenekon, Erdoğan was the David fighting against the Goliath of the military-secular apparatus in the form of the deep state. In Mastermind he is the chosen, good twin fighting an evil doppelgänger and usurper, Fetullah Gülen. Whereas Erdoğan and the AKP are homegrown heroes, Ergenekon and Gülen are depicted as being backed by foreign forces that threaten Turkish sovereignty, such as NATO, the EU, the CIA, and Israel. In a typical populist AKP slogan, all that is good in Turkey must be "local and national" (*yerli ve milli*), that is to say, Sunni, Turkish, and Muslim (Mutluer 2018). Conspiracy theories map the relation between the local and the global while offering a fantasy about Turkish national self-determination and AKP party leadership. In this way, the AKP rhetorically confronts the "deep state" and the "parallel state" as it unleashes the overwhelming force of institutions like the police, the media and the judiciary to annihilate any opposition. In the process, conspiracism conceals the actual mechanisms of authoritarianism and crony capitalism (nepotism) that enable each other as an engine of AKP rule.

In a sense, party conspiracism subverts the rule of law itself, and this phenomenon has become a permanent, self-negating feature of Turkish democracy. As a result, domestic policy is only understood, debated, and produced vis-à-vis political melodramas of con-

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spiracy. It is the opioid of the masses; in fact, for many Turkish policymakers, pundits, and voters, these conspiracies have ceased to be fictional, but guide the social practices of everyday life.

Undergirded by neoliberal political economy, party conspiracy has gone mainstream in various disparate global contexts in a direct attack on a Habermasian type of deliberative democracy based on rational discussion (see Habermas 1996). Further, what we see in Turkey is not exceptional or an inevitable reflection of the Middle East. Recent research in social psychology establishes the dynamics of conspiracy as being consequential, universal, emotional, and social (Prooijen and Douglas 2018), alluding to not just its ubiquity but its influence as an everyday discourse and political force. The hybrid phenomenon that Ömer Taşpınar (2017) among others has termed "Green Kemalism" to describe the AKP echoes not just the history of the nation, but the conspiracy narratives of the early republic, in which a predominantly Muslim population struggled against forms of European colonialism and imperialism intent on the occupation and division of the *vatan* as embodied in the Treaty of Sèvres. The centrality of conspiratorial thought in national identity formation in Turkey—whether it be the Sèvres Syndrome, *irtica*, Ergenekon, or Mastermind—invests it with ongoing currency and legitimacy.

This chapter has revealed insights into the discursive practices and real-world functions of conspiracism as a means of instrumentalizing institutions of state and society. It's no coincidence that in their espousal of a populist and nationalist agenda, first President Erdoğan and now President Trump have structurally identified and targeted some of the same sites of opposition in their respective countries: The deep state, the impending coup, the enemy within, and the fake news media/journalists. In a true irony, they have both identified the United States security apparatus as an adversary. Presidents Erdoğan and Trump, relying on a conspiratorial mix of fact and fiction, continue to mastermind their own civilian coups, remaking the political landscape in the process.

As a final point, the present moment is characterized by the proliferation of information sources and open social media that sustain ideological echo chambers and an absolute polarization that creates mutually exclusive rather than participatory or coalition democracy (Tüfekçi 2017). On the one hand, such an environment facilitates conspiracism because the cacophony of voices relativizes representations of reality in a way that valorizes alternative facts and enables post-truth politics. On the other hand, it limits conspiracism because the appeal of conspiracy cannot go beyond the scope of partisan groups and cannot shift public opinion more broadly. This is the discursive impasse that has strained and polarized the political process in various countries across the globe.²⁴ The predictable consequences of today's political melodramas of conspiracy include the figuring of populist authoritarianism, new strains of which are certain to arise in the 2020 and 2023 general elections in the United States and Turkey, respectively.

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Notes:

(1.) This comment was made by President Erdoğan on August 4, 2016, shortly after the failed coup attempt. <https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x4n69oy>

(2.) In 1997, the same year as the "soft coup," former naval officer turned TV presenter Erol Mütercimler announced that he had been informed by a retired general of the existence of Ergenekon, an organization allegedly created by the CIA in the wake of the 1960

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coup. Mütercimler, a secular conspiracy theorist, said the organization involved a network of right-wing journalists, academics, police, and military figures and was behind unexplained murders in the country's Kurdish region. He called on the government to investigate and expose the "deep state" and its activities. Mütercimler would himself later be arrested in 2008 over his alleged connections to Ergenekon.

(3.) Ergenekon is the name of a mythic valley in Turkish nationalist ethnogenesis where ancient Turks of Central Asia took refuge before emerging to conquer the surrounding region by following the gray wolf Asena. The gray wolf is the symbol of ultranationalism in Turkey.

(4.) As of April 2020 over 3,800 convictions have been handed down, including over 2,300 sentences to life in prison.

(5.) For more on Turkey as a military democracy, see Altınay 2006.

(6.) Herzog (2014) makes a scalar critique of conspiracy theories in the Turkish context focusing on Erol Mütercimler. Small (local) and large (global) conspiracy theories are predicated on different interpretive and epistemological bases, with the implication being that large-scale conspiracy narratives (like Ergenekon and Mastermind) are more plausible when perceived from the specifics of small-scale incidents.

(7.) There is a polemical critique of postmodernism as what Ernest Gellner once referred to as "Relativismus über Alles," which is later blamed for the rising legitimacy of conspiracy as a symptom of multiperspectivalism. See Gellner 1992.

(8.) During the initial euphoria characterizing the Arab uprisings, between 2010–2012, Turkey was described as a model for much of the Middle East and a bridge between Europe and the Muslim world. Additionally, Turkey was the country of honor at the Frankfurt Book Fair (2008) and Istanbul had been named the Cultural Capital of Europe (2010).

(9.) He has been successful in mobilizing populism (see chapter by Taşkın in this volume). From a populist perspective, society is divided between "true citizens" and "enemies within," who are sinisterly threatening the national ethos. The true citizens look to a powerful leader, who will crush these enemies and defy the dark forces supporting them and deliver the people. This strain of populism leads to authoritarian and polarizing politics based on an "us" versus "them" mentality (rule by the 51%). Those in power delegitimize their political opponents as agents of imperialism and thereby erode democracy from within. Meanwhile, corruption, nepotism, civil unrest and conspiracy usurp the place of liberal democracy.

(10.) On April 29, 1997, the Turkish General Staff announced that priority would be given to combating internal threats from, primarily, Islamist revivalism (*irtica*) and, secondarily, Kurdish separatism. *İrtica* replaced Kurdish insurgency as the primary security threat to the state. Ironically, the AKP has continued state violence against Kurds as well as against

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a narrowed Islamist activism in the form of the Gülen movement. This alludes to what Ömer Taşpınar (2017) calls "Green Kemalism."

(11.) A few years ago, viral discussions around the deep state began in earnest in the US media and have continued into the present (with President Trump now referring to the US State Department as the "Deep State Department"). Most early commentaries were focused first on identifying the origin of the concept, which was traced to Turkey.

(12.) One of the cases brought against the secular-military alliance was based on unsubstantiated evidence in a 2009 document titled an "Action Plan to Counter *İrtica*" that supposedly openly targeted the AKP and the Gülen movement. See <https://jamestown.org/program/turkish-general-staff-accused-of-seeking-to-undermine-the-government/>.

(13.) Public prosecutor Zekeriya Öz, a well-known Gülenist, became the public face of the investigation and prosecution of Ergenekon suspects. A warrant for his arrest was issued in 2015, at which point he fled the country.

(14.) In the broad interests of democracy, preventing future military coups is necessary. Pushing its grievances against the *irtica* conspiracy, the AKP government went as far as trying and charging in 2012 and 2013 the military perpetrators of the 1980 and 1997 Turkish military coups, respectively. In 2014, General Kenan Evren, leader of the 1980 coup and later president, was sentenced to life imprisonment. He died as the case was under appeal. In 2018, twenty-one perpetrators were handed down life sentences for their involvement in the 1997 soft coup. Whereas the Ergenekon trials failed juridically, cases based on actual military interventions have succeeded despite procedural irregularities.

(15.) The plausible acceptance of the Ergenekon process by these groups contains an indictment of liberal humanism, which in retrospect appears inattentive to the rise of populist authoritarianism.

(16.) In parallel, the AKP's embrace of the racialized articulation of Turks into secular elite "white Turks" and Muslim "black Turks" (the term is *zenci* in Turkish, which is derogatory) recast the *irtica* narrative as a struggle for civil and human rights that also mobilized support from liberal circles in Turkey and the West. At first, the AKP used the racialized narrative for demands for inclusion, but as it increased its grip on power, it began to articulate nativist populist claims that justified its authoritarianism, and in turn, delegitimized the belonging of other groups (Arat-Koç 2018). This remapped the political topography of secularism and Islamism, strategically evoking social justice and even apartheid discourses. Through this social justice narrative, citizens who internalized these accounts transformed from being subjects of marginalization or discrimination to political agents, primarily by voting for the AKP directly or through its referendums.

(17.) In contrast, conspiracy theories by writers of the national leftist opposition (Yalçın Küçük, Ergün Poyraz, and Soner Yalçın), though they were popular and made for best-

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selling books, played on anti-Semitic tropes but had no recourse to legal retribution (see Baer 2013).

(18.) The discourse of conspiracy was so powerful that incriminating evidence of corruption against the AKP in 2013, which first led to the resignation of four ministers, did little to dampen Prime Minister Erdoğan's political power before local (March 2014), presidential (August 2014), and general elections (November 2015). The conspiracy theory serves as an alternative history to explain away an inconvenient truth.

(19.) This is also the logic of the Sèvres Syndrome, the belief that the master plan for Turkey by Western powers is set forth in the unratified Treaty of Sèvres of 1920 that divides Turkish territory and restricts its sovereignty.

(20.) The military's e-memorandum of 2007 aimed to prevent Abdullah Gül, an AKP candidate, from becoming president, leading to a long procedural delay, though he was ultimately elected.

(21.) Such anti-Americanism immediately found reflection in cultural productions commenting on recent geopolitics from popular fiction like *Metal Fırtına* (*Metal Storm*) that dramatized a US invasion of Turkey codenamed "Operation Sèvres" to films like *Kurtlar Vadisi: Irak* (*Valley of the Wolves: Iraq*) that critiqued the Iraq invasion and the Abu Ghraib torture scandal (see Schleifer 2009).

(22.) More could be said here about the intersection of high literature and conspiracy, including its Kafkaesque and Borgesian aspects: Kafka, in the sense of characters who are subject to the rules, laws, and effects of a system (the state, the law, religion, etc.) about which they only have partial understanding; Borges, in the sense of language inflecting, influencing, and finally establishing reality. In both cases, a system of belief (epistemology) conveyed through text and discourse functions to alter everyday being and life (ontology).

(23.) The play alludes to the Sincan affair of 1997. Several hundred people in Sincan celebrated "Jerusalem Day," a holiday proclaimed by Ayatollah Khomeini of Iran. Their host was the local Mayor of the Refah Party, and the evening's guest of honor was the Iranian Ambassador, Muhammed Reza Bagheri. A pro-Palestinian play was staged and an Israeli flag burned. Senior military officers, who view themselves as defenders of secularism, responded by ordering tanks to roll through Sincan's streets, a clear warning that an intervention was on the horizon.

(24.) In 2016 alone, outcomes included Brexit, the failed Turkish coup attempt, and the election of Donald Trump, all three fueled by discourses of serial conspiracy, which proliferate through popular literature, TV, film, journalism, academia, social media, court cases, and political speeches.

Erdağ Gökna

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Duke University