**Conspiracy Myths. The world of universal explanations.**

**Module structure**

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| **TEACHING HOURS**  **(45 min each)** | **TIME NEEDED** | **CONTENT & TEACHER ACTIVITY** | **STUDENT ACTIVITY** | **RESOURCE / METHOD** |
| 1 teaching hour  **Introduction** | 15 min | **Activity: Brainstorming**  Introducing the module starting with an initial brainstorming about “conspiracy myths” using PPT slide 4.  Open a digital whiteboard to collect all ideas and make them visible.  Leading questions (if needed) are:   * *What comes to your mind? What is a conspiracy myth?* * *What topics of conspiracy myths, legends, narratives do you know?* * *Where did you hear about them?* * Against whom are the conspiratorial accusations directed? Who is blamed? But also: Who is spreading the myths, which type of audience might be targeted/believes in them?   Optional: If time allows, students can be grouped in pairs and discuss the questions in a breakout session prior to the exchange in plenum. | Students state and/or write down comments about what comes to their mind on whiteboard.  If an impulse is needed, they can be guided by the outlined questions.  Optional: students are sent into breakouts (f.e. grouped in pairs) to brainstorm the questions and write down their findings in a shared doc/padlet/etc. | PPT and (in distance learning): digital whiteboard/padlet/ jamboard |
| 20 min | **Activity: Case reports** **activity**  Introduce the activity, read the questions on PPT slide 5 and give an example (provided in the table). Transfer the table on slide 5 to an online pad to give students the chance to fill it out.  Share filled out table with plenum, let students present their experiences briefly and save for later. | Activity in pairs: Students should think of 1-2 situations they experienced personally and answer the questions in the table.  Presentation of the cases by each team. | PPT and (in distance learning): breakout rooms in pairs + table/padlet/jamboard |
| 10 min | **Activity: Introductory Quiz**  About “conspiracy myths – a marginal or a major phenomenon?”  Using the H5P quiz  (the lecturer could also adapt the quiz with data from the own country, many European countries have been analysed in the YouGov-Cambridge research, or see Harambam (2020), pp.1-2.)  Share results of the quiz, use them as a source to reflect about expectations and reality in connection to the spread of conspiracy beliefs in Europe and worldwide.  The goal is to reflect on how widely spread conspiratorial beliefs are. | Students quickly guess the answers by themselves using H5P (or in class by handsign), creating a visible final result to present after each question. | H5P quiz prepared on eLearning platform |
| 1 teaching hour  **Definition** | 45 min | **Definition of conspiracy myths**  Introduction in terms and definition using PPT slides 6-19. (See description above for more information on the content.)  Slides 6-10 giving an overview about terms and standard definitions, whereas from slide 11 on will be more opportunities to interact: Leading questions are What, Who, Where – which can be answered with students interaction (having brief discussions on each question); questions Why, How, When are more complex and should be presented by the teacher.  Last question ‘When’ will be the bridge to the next chapter (history). | Option a) Activity in plenary: Students provide answers and general ideas and statements about the open questions, brief discussions are possible, but don’t take too much time here.  Option b) Question answered in a group activity: Therefor students should form a group for each question and then rotate between the groups/questions (“World café” method). | PPT  (in distance learning): breakout rooms/group work  Additional:  - Slides 11-23 “summary” as homework |
| 10 min | **Activity: drag’n’drop “Characteristics of Conspiracy Myths”** (optional)  to consolidate the new knowledge, students can be asked to conduct this drag’n’drop activity either in class or as a follow up at home. |  | H5P drag’n’drop activity prepared on elearning platform |
| Self-study material and accompanying literature for chapter 1 – Definition:   * Harambam, J. (2020). Contemporary Conspiracy Culture: Truth and Knowledge in an Era of Epistemic Instability (1st ed.). Routledge. * *Butter, M. and Knight, P. (2020), General Introduction, in M. Butter and P. Knight (eds). Routledge Handbook of Conspiracy Theories (1st ed.). London/New York: Routledge, pp. 1-8.* * *COMPACT Education group (Comparative Analysis of Conspiracy Theories) (2020) Guide to Conspiracy Theories, March 2020,* [*https://conspiracytheories.eu/\_wpx/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/COMPACT\_Guide-2.pdf*](https://conspiracytheories.eu/_wpx/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/COMPACT_Guide-2.pdf)*, accessed 20 May 2021.* * European Commission (n.y.) Identifying Conspiracy Theories, [*https://ec.europa.eu/info/live-work-travel-eu/coronavirus-response/fighting-disinformation/identifying-conspiracy-theories\_en*](https://ec.europa.eu/info/live-work-travel-eu/coronavirus-response/fighting-disinformation/identifying-conspiracy-theories_en)*, accessed 20 May 2021.* * *YouGov-Cambridge research (2018),* [*https://yougov.co.uk/topics/international/articles-reports/2018/12/14/brexit-and-trump-voters-are-more-likely-believe-co*](https://yougov.co.uk/topics/international/articles-reports/2018/12/14/brexit-and-trump-voters-are-more-likely-believe-co)*, accessed 20 June 2021.* | | | |
| 1-2 teaching hours  **Optional activity** | 60 min or more  (Depending on quantity of participants) | **Activity: Self-made conspiracy myth**  Introduce the interactive role play, reading the instructions. (PPT slide 24)  Collect statements during reflection on whiteboard to make them visible.  Some suggestions for the conclusion of the reflection (*How did you feel during the discussion?*):  • Group processes: mutually strengthen each other's own narrative  • there might be an imbalance in power: powerful position as a conspiracy believer makes you feel like "the others are actually nothing to us/they know nothing"  • Asking questions (as debunker) requires taking the narrative seriously and accepting premises, that is difficult: do we want that? | Role Play:  Activity in groups (2-3 groups in total)  1. Following the instructions and imagining a conspiracy myth. They should not reproduce problematic structures like racism, antisemitism, etc.  2. Groups of students act out in plenum as if they believed in their imagined myth! They should be convincing – other groups are allowed to ask critical questions and express doubts, leading into a discussion which cannot be won by any part. After all groups have finished their presentation and discission:  3. reflect on how they felt during each role of the role play.  **As conspiracy believers**:  • can be fun to approach the matter with a good sense of humour  • Spinning ideas that are then linked further and further  • Iron out possible logical gaps in advance  • Googling always gives you arguments  • Cross-references to other stories and myths are always possible and can be easily integrated  • creative, imaginary answers are always possible  **And in the role of the debunking / critical inquirer:**  • Maybe difficulties at starting critical discussion and finding a point  • The stories might have been abstract and absurd: makes logical inquiries / questions difficult  • Maybe special topics are brought up, which unsettle you, because you don’t have the expert knowledge | PPT and (in distance learning): white board |
| 1 teaching hour  **History of conspiracy myths** | 20 min | **Historical input**  Follow the PPT slides 2-15, present the content and knowledge provided on the slides and in the explanations above. |  | PPT |
| 25 min | **Activity: Historical myth revived**  PPT slide 16  This activity needs a little additional planning by providing a topic or certain theme of a conspiracy myth that is spread in contemporary time and possibly fits the subject matter of the class/field of study.  The activity should include some basic information about the chosen topic, like an online article or image as a starting point.  Example: Covid-19 “plandemic”  topic: health in conspiracy myths – finding a responsible person or group for an illness  then: alleged well-poisoning accusations against Jews  today: alleged compulsory vaccinations accusations against Bill Gates  history of myths around pandemics: the plague | Activity in small groups  Students work in small groups of 3-4 and follow the instructions (research and reflect) given a contemporary example by teacher or choosing one themselves. | PPT and (in distance learning):  Breakout rooms and padlet (or similar) |
| 15 min | **Activity: Drag the words “History of Conspiracy Myths” (optional)**  to consolidate the new knowledge, students can be asked to conduct this drag the words activity. |  | H5P drag the words activity prepared on elearning platform |
| Self-study material and accompanying literature for chapter 2 – History:   * McKenzie-McHarg, A. (2020), Conceptual history and conspiracy theory, *in M. Butter and P. Knight (eds). Routledge Handbook of Conspiracy Theories (1st ed.). London/New York: Routledge,* pp. 16-27. * *Nocun, K. (2020) "It must be a plot!" – Coronavirus conspiracy theorists take to streets in Germany, Heinrich Böll Stiftung, 20 September 2020,* [*https://eu.boell.org/en/2020/09/10/it-must-be-plot-coronavirus-conspiracy-theorists-take-streets-germany*](https://eu.boell.org/en/2020/09/10/it-must-be-plot-coronavirus-conspiracy-theorists-take-streets-germany)*, accessed 20 May 2021.* * Wippermann, W. (2007) Agenten des Bösen. Berlin: be.bra. * *Wikipedia (n.y.), List of conspiracy theories.* [*https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\_of\_conspiracy\_theories*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_conspiracy_theories)*, accessed 20 May 2021.* | | | |
| 2 teaching hours  **Ideology of conspiracy myths** | 20 min | **Input**  **Characteristics and functions of conspiracy ideology**  PPT slides 4-9 |  | PPT |
| 25 min | **Activity: Group discussion** on functions of conspiracy myths  PPT slide 10  Teacher should explain the instructions and let students start a discussion about the questions in small groups.  Take notes on students’ statements. | Discussion can initially be started in pairs or small groups.  After 10: presentation and discussion in plenum | PPT and (in distance learning):  Breakout rooms, online whiteboard/jamboard/padlet  (maybe world café method) |
| 20 min | **Inputs**  **correlation with other ideologies**  PPT slide 11  **link to antisemitism**  PPT slides 12-15  **danger of conspiracy ideology**  PPT slide 16  Address upcoming questions directly! | Students can interact and involve during the inputs (see open questions on slides). | PPT |
| 25 min | **Activity: Group discussion** on ideological meta narrative (slide 17)  The activity is a combination of a research task and group discussion. The teacher reads the instruction and provides ideas about the examples.  The exercise can also be carried out with the same historical example (here “plandemic”) or replaced by a new example that matches the subject. | Activity in pairs or small groups.  At first following the research task and instructions, then discussion in plenum. | PPT and (in distance learning):  Breakout rooms, online whiteboard/jamboard/padlet Online search tool/ Google |
| Self-study material and accompanying literature for chapter 3 – Ideology   * *ADL Global 100: An Index of Anti-Semitism (2019),* [*https://global100.adl.org/map*](https://global100.adl.org/map)*, accessed 20 May 2021.* * *Barkun, Michael (2003) Culture of Conspiracy: Apocalyptic Visions in Contemporary America. Berkeley. University of California Press, 2003.* * *Cubitt, Geoffrey (1989) ‘Conspiracy Myths and Conspiracy Theories’, Journal of the Anthropological Society of Oxford, 20(1): 12–26.* * *Butter, M. and Knight, P. (2020), General Introduction, in M. Butter and P. Knight (eds). Routledge Handbook of Conspiracy Theories (1st ed.). London/New York: Routledge, pp. 1-8.* * *Farinelli, F. and Radicalisation Awareness Network and European Commission (2021) Conspiracy theories and right-wing extremism – Insights and recommendations for P/CVE,* [*https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/default/files/what-we-do/networks/radicalisation\_awareness\_network/ran-papers/docs/ran\_conspiracy\_theories\_and\_right-wing\_2021\_en.pdf*](https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/default/files/what-we-do/networks/radicalisation_awareness_network/ran-papers/docs/ran_conspiracy_theories_and_right-wing_2021_en.pdf), accessed 20 May 2021. * European Commission (n.y.) Identifying Conspiracy Theories, [*https://ec.europa.eu/info/live-work-travel-eu/coronavirus-response/fighting-disinformation/identifying-conspiracy-theories\_en*](https://ec.europa.eu/info/live-work-travel-eu/coronavirus-response/fighting-disinformation/identifying-conspiracy-theories_en)*, accessed 20 May 2021.* * *Simonson, K. B. (2020), Antisemitism and Conspiracism, in M. Butter and P. Knight (eds). Routledge Handbook of Conspiracy Theories (1st ed.). London/New York: Routledge, pp. 357-370.* | | | |
| 1 teaching hour  **Forms of practise and expression** | 20 min | **Input:**  **Forms of practise and expression**  PPT slide 3-6 | Students’ interaction: debate the symbols – which ones did you know and from which context?  PPT slide 6 | PPT |
| 25 min | **Activity: Image/text analysis**  PPT slide 7  Show the images provided in the “antisemitic imagery” booklet by Antisemitism Policy Trust (2020), pp. 5 and 14 (don’t show the whole booklet as the other picture on p.14 should be saved for later use), accompanied by the questions on the slide as a starting point.  Both images are featured in the “antisemitic imagery” booklet and described in their meaning and significance – read the part of the booklet as quoted in the PPT notes of the slides (or module structure information) to start the discussion.  Teacher should note the students’ statements. | Discuss the symbols on PPT slide 7  Students discuss either in small groups, having a picture for each group to describe and analyse with the questions on the slide, then having them present their outcome in plenum.  Or together in plenum with all students, collecting the answers on board or discussing them altogether. | PPT |
| Self-study material and accompanying literature for chapter 4 – Forms   * *Antisemitism Policy Trust (2020) Antisemitic Imagery,* [*https://antisemitism.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Antisemitic-imagery-May-2020.pdf*](https://antisemitism.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Antisemitic-imagery-May-2020.pdf)*, accessed 20 May 2021.* * *Aupers, S. (2020) Decoding mass media/ encoding conspiracy theory,* *in M. Butter and P. Knight (eds). Routledge Handbook of Conspiracy Theories (1st ed.). London/New York: Routledge, pp. 469-482.* | | | |
| 2 teaching hours  **Strategies: Identifying and dealing with conspiracy myths** | 10 min | **Input: Identifying conspiracy myths**  Present the following input slides, PPT slide 5-7:  1) checklist  2) Source criticism |  | PPT |
| 25 min | **Activity: Source criticism exercise**  After presenting the instructions on PPT slide 8 and showing the linked picture, students work on their own for about 20 min minimum.  During the work-time the PPT slides about source criticism should be visible (slide 6), as well as the instructions (slide 8) and the picture itself (slide 9).  The teacher should be prepared and have read the module specification carefully: This activity is supposed to be a bit of a mystery hunt! | Activity in small groups.  starting point is a picture - a "meme": a combination of a quote and a picture. The students should work in small groups in two steps:  1) As previously learned in the input on source criticism, they should first describe and then conduct research.  2) After this analysis, the small groups come back to the plenary discussion and report on their source-critical findings – the evaluation. | PPT, online research tools/ Google  and (in distance learning):  Breakout rooms |
| 10 min | **Input: dealing with conspiracy myths**  Triangle of coping (PPT slide 11)  Discuss the Factual and personal level (PPT slide 12)  Students should be made aware of their future role as teachers; they should consider finding themselves in the position of a teacher talking with their students. | Students can give input on what they believe might be a good dealing strategy and can position themselves on the scale of the triangle, between factual, personal and other strategies. | PPT |
| 45 min | **Activity: Debunking magnifier**  (PPT slide 13)  Working with the cases of personal experience with conspiracy belief we collected in the first chaper (or repeat the activity “case reports”):  Teacher selects one reported case for each 4-5 students. The student who reported the case in the first place must be in the respective group.  Talk through the instructions and let students work in groups for 25 minutes.  In plenum take visible notes about the strategies mentioned in point III. | Activity in groups of 4-5.  Students follow the instructions on PPT slide 14 and discuss and take notes.  Presentation in plenum after 25 min. | PPT |
| 15 min | **Activity:** **Drag’n’drop “Conspiracy Myth or Criticism?” (optional)**  to reflect upon the fine lines between a conspiratorial and critical world view, students can be asked to conduct this drag’n’drop activity. |  | H5P drag’n’drop activity prepared on eLearning platform |
| Self-study material and accompanying literature for chapter 5 – Strategies:   * *Antisemitism Policy Trust (2020) Antisemitic Imagery,* [*https://antisemitism.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Antisemitic-imagery-May-2020.pdf*](https://antisemitism.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Antisemitic-imagery-May-2020.pdf)*, accessed 20 May 2021.* * *Antonio Amadeu Stiftung (2020) Wissen was wirklich gespielt wird. Projekt No World Order. Handeln gegen Verschwörungsideologien,* [*https://www.amadeu-antonio-stiftung.de/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/wissen\_was\_wirklich\_2.Auflage.pdf*](https://www.amadeu-antonio-stiftung.de/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/wissen_was_wirklich_2.Auflage.pdf)*, accessed 20 May 2021.* * European Commission (n.y.) Identifying Conspiracy Theories, [*https://ec.europa.eu/info/live-work-travel-eu/coronavirus-response/fighting-disinformation/identifying-conspiracy-theories\_en*](https://ec.europa.eu/info/live-work-travel-eu/coronavirus-response/fighting-disinformation/identifying-conspiracy-theories_en)*, accessed 20 May 2021.* * *Hunt, E. (2015) Cory Bernardi mistakenly 'quotes' Voltaire on Twitter with neo-Nazi's line, the guardian, 27 November 2015,* [*https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2015/nov/27/cory-bernardi-mistakenly-quotes-voltaire-on-twitter-with-supposed-neo-nazis-line*](https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2015/nov/27/cory-bernardi-mistakenly-quotes-voltaire-on-twitter-with-supposed-neo-nazis-line)*, accessed 20 May 2021.* * *Pitt, B. (2020) Antisemitism and a ‘Voltaire’ quote, medium.com, 20 September 2020,* [*https://medium.com/@pitt\_bob/antisemitism-and-a-voltaire-quote-9d06172c944f*](https://medium.com/@pitt_bob/antisemitism-and-a-voltaire-quote-9d06172c944f)*, accessed 20 May 2021.* | | | |
| **Summary and reflection (optional)** | 20 min | **Reflection and concluding remarks on the module**  Reflect on the lessons – what have we learned considering research and critical thinking? | Let students summarise and reflect on what they’ve taken from the lessons, what they will keep in mind, what they liked and disliked following the questions on the slide. |  |