

# Tackling “conspiracy” theories after the January 2015 terrorist attacks in Paris

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**Emmanuel Kreis**

Groupe sociétés, religions, laïcités (UMR 8582 CNRS-EPHE), Paris, France

## Abstract

The terrorist attack against the satirical weekly newspaper *Charlie Hebdo* and the subsequent hostage-taking in the kosher supermarket in Paris on the 7th and 9th January 2015 profoundly shocked the French public. The term ‘conspiracy theory’ very rapidly came to be used in the media to account for accusations of a ‘false flag operation’ and for the circulation of doubts concerning certain details relating to these events. The use of the term ‘conspiracy theory’ in these contexts seemed to show up an extremely broad application of it, an application, which, in some cases, was accompanied by a rather impassioned approach to the events and one not always free from ideological presuppositions which aligned phenomena which, even though linkages between them could be shown, should more properly be distinguished one from another.

This article proposes to examine the media and institutional applications of this term during the episode of the ‘anti-conspiracy theory panic’, which followed upon the Paris incidents. This study will permit the very notion of ‘conspiracy theory’ to be brought into question, both on the level of definition and from a heuristic perspective.

## Keywords

Conspiracy theory, anti-conspiracy theory panic, *Charlie Hebdo*, non-*Charlie*, Albert Pike letter, media response to conspiracy theory, institutional response to conspiracy theory

The spontaneous mass reactions, rapidly channelled politically, bear sufficient witness to this. Several journalists and various experts did not hesitate to talk of a ‘French 9/11’, a parallel that was no doubt excessive and with little foundation, even if this ‘French 9/11’, in line with its American antecedent, seems to have stimulated wild imaginings and generated a disturbing wave of ‘conspiracy theories’.

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## Corresponding author:

Emmanuel Kreis, Groupe sociétés, religions, laïcités (UMR 8582 CNRS-EPHE), Paris, France.  
Email: emma.kreis@laposte.net

The term ‘conspiracy theory’ very rapidly came to be used in the media to account for accusations of a ‘false flag operation’ and for the circulation of doubts concerning certain details relating to these events: an identity card ‘forgotten’ in a glovebox, external wing mirrors of a car that changed colour, video footage of the murder of a policeman reckoned to be not very convincing, among other matters. The use of the term ‘conspiracy theory’ in these contexts seemed to show up an extremely broad application of it, an application, which, in some cases, was accompanied by a rather impassioned approach to the events and one not always free from ideological presuppositions which aligned phenomena which, even though linkages between them could be shown, should more properly be distinguished one from another. This loose treatment paid little heed to the observation of numerous researchers<sup>1</sup> who understand ‘conspiracy theories’ to mean ‘alternative’ constructions of history that interpret whole segments of it or even its totality and the functioning of societies as resulting from the realization of a master plan elaborated in secret by a small group of powerful and unscrupulous individuals<sup>2</sup>. This article proposes to examine the media and institutional applications of this term during the episode of the ‘anti-conspiracy theory panic’, which followed upon the Paris incidents. This study will permit the very notion of ‘conspiracy theory’ to be brought into question, both on the level of definition and from a heuristic perspective.

## Concerning the first occurrences of ‘conspiracy theories’ and their definition

Even while the perpetrators of the attack against *Charlie Hebdo* were still at large, several media began to report a wave of ‘conspiracy theories’. The *Conspiracy Watch* website, which specializes in the denunciation of conspiracism, was already informing its readers of the ‘first conspiracist reactions’ from the day of 7th January itself<sup>3</sup>. These were principally in the form of exchanges on the social networks of the cell-group of Alain Soral, Égalité & Réconciliation, and postings of the Réseau Voltaire. The next day, the weekly newsmagazine *l’Express* placed on line an article, which would be regularly updated until the 15th January, on the subject of ‘the bad conspiracy theories’<sup>4</sup>. Broadly picked up by other media, the *Express* article set out various different questionings or rumours around certain details of the events. On the 9th January, the deputy editor-in-chief of the news site *Rue 89* published a short piece in which he vigorously took to task the commentaries on the net which were casting doubt upon the ‘official version’ and asserting that the incident had been contrived<sup>5</sup>. On the same day, another article alluded to the ‘conspiracy theories’ in the course of relating the comments of a young ‘practising Muslim from the outer suburbs’ whose brother ‘has read all the conspiracist articles circulating on the social networks’, and emphasized as disturbing details ‘the videos available only a few minutes after the shooting, the forgotten I.D. card, the military-style weapons’<sup>6</sup>. At the same time, *Le Parisien* commented on the disturbance that the events caused in outer suburban schools and the tensions around the minute’s silence organized for the 8th January<sup>7</sup>. Responding to questions by high school students of Aulnay-sous-Bois about how true the reports of the events were, the journalist advised them to be on their guard against any ‘conspiracy theory’. For its part, the newspaper *Libération* ran an article entitled ‘*Charlie Hebdo*, the affair [which is] stirring up the conspiracists’<sup>8</sup>. The article dealt briefly with allegations of a false flag operation organized by the Jews, which were present on the websites of the leading media figures of anti-Semitism in France, the essayist Alain Soral and the humourist Dieudonné M’Bala M’Bala. It ended by drawing attention to article 27 of the law of 29 July 1881 on the liberty of the press, which rendered liable to a fine of 45,000 euros ‘the publication, dissemination or reproduction of false news [...] if this is susceptible to disturbing the public peace’.

The bloody hostage drama in the kosher supermarket at the Porte de Vincennes and the successful resolution on the 9th January of the hunt for the perpetrators of the shootings at the *Charlie Hebdo* offices, followed by the march in honour of the victims on the 11th January, did not allow much editorial space for addressing the ‘conspiracy theory’ issue. Nevertheless, the subject was not long in invading the media. A close analysis of reports in the principal French media<sup>9</sup> between the 7th January and the beginning of February brought to light around 100 references to ‘conspiracy theories’. In a number of cases this term went undefined and hence its use there rarely allowed an understanding of what it covered, apart from its negative character<sup>10</sup>. Despite this observation, several articles did seek to give a precise definition of what this terminology covered. But a significant number of them went little beyond relaying the different questions and rumours reported by *l'Express*, or the idea of a ‘false flag operation’. Certain journalists, even if referring to the same themes, did venture to carry their inquiries further by seeking out statements from various ‘civil society figures’, by conducting press reviews of ‘conspiracist websites’ and by going to meet ‘convinced adherents of conspiracy theory’<sup>11</sup>. The general result was a certain confusion. Thus, an article published by *Le Parisien* on the 17th January under the heading ‘La théorie du complot relancée [*Relaunch of the Conspiracy Theory*]’ can pass smoothly from stories about wing mirrors and ID cards to a commentary by Emmanuel Taïeb, a professor at Sciences-Po Lyon on the causes of the belief in an Illuminati or Judeo-Masonic conspiracy, before going on to anxious considerations around the issue of social networks, prompted by the testimony of ‘the President of the football club of La Duchère, a troubled quarter of the ninth arrondissement of Lyon’. The article concluded with the case of civil servants reprimanded for ‘seeing a plot behind the attack on *Charlie Hebdo*’, and with the declarations of the honorary President of the Front National, Jean-Marie Le Pen, concerning the ‘mark of the secret services’ all over the events<sup>12</sup>.

According to Ramses Kefi of *Rue 89*, ‘conspiracy theories’ took in ‘a smorgasbord of attitudes, from outright craziness to simple reflexive distrust towards journalists and politicians’<sup>13</sup>. For his part, Guillaume Brossard, of hoaxbuster.com, when interviewed by *Le Parisien* affirmed that there ‘were two types of conspiracists: the ideologues like Dieudonné, who exploit events in pursuit of propagating their own ideas; and those who, while not necessarily extremists, doubt everything except the “fact” that “something was being hidden from them”’<sup>14</sup>. If this latter category of conspiracists emerges frequently in the various journalistic investigations, several articles were nevertheless devoted to the ‘ideologues’. These articles highlighted several websites belonging to French conspiracist propagandists – which for the most part were anti-Semitic. Generally, they made a rapid mention that these websites were involved in postulating Jewish, Masonic, extra-terrestrial or other conspiracies before concentrating on various posts on these sites which aimed to prove that the terrorist attacks were in reality a false flag operation<sup>15</sup>.

Finally, one should note the numerous articles that sought the comments of various specialists and scientists. In comparison with the large number of technical experts called upon, the number of academics working on ‘conspiracy theories’ is quite small (notably comprising Gérald Bronner, Emmanuelle Danblon, Emmanuel Taïeb and Pierre-André Taguieff). Concerning myself, I was questioned by *Politis* on the subject of the ‘return of conspiracism after the *Charlie* affair’<sup>16</sup> on the 12th January. I replied that I had nothing concrete to contribute on the subject and that different doubts expressed around the events and the accusations of false flag operations were not sufficient, according to my choices of definition, to characterize a ‘conspiracy theory’. I recommended to the journalist that she should access the websites of Égalité & Réconciliation, Libre Penseur, Quenelle+, the Réseau Voltaire and others to obtain an idea of the way in which the French conspiracist and/or anti-Semitic milieus were beginning to infiltrate the events, but that, for the moment they were restricting themselves to insinuating that the attacks had been a Mossad operation. The next day I gave an interview to *Mediapart* and the day after that to *La Croix* without having

uncovered any constructed and genuinely conspiracist narrative<sup>17</sup>. Certain journalists, faced with my expressed lack of expertise in the matter of the wing mirrors or the overlooked identity card, did not even follow up our conversation any further. In my own defence I should declare that I was more interested in the nature of the discourses alleging ‘conspiracy theories’ than in such theories themselves, and that I got wind of a first genuinely conspiracist narrative only on the 18th January. By that time, ‘conspiracy theories’ had been making headlines in the media for five days already.

## ‘World War III: episode I!’

It was a colleague working on Islamophobia who on the 18th January informed me of the existence of a certain video, posted on YouTube on the 13th January, which was in the process of garnering considerable success (250,000 views)<sup>18</sup>. To the time of writing this article (28 October 2015) it now counts 1,962,090 views. Its author, going under the name of Chiminal Spray, is a modest YouTuber active since 2011 who has a little more than 7000 subscribers and whose videos attract on average around 1500 views. The one labelled ‘World War III: episode I!’ opens with a letter attributed to Albert Pike, who was Grand Commander of the Supreme Council of the Southern Jurisdiction of the United States of the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite (of Freemasonry), a position he held from 1859 to 1891. This strange document, dated 15th August 1871, allegedly announced the plan for world domination of the ‘Illuminati’ through the unleashing of three world wars. The first, in 1914, in order to destroy the Tsarist regime in Russia and usher in the advent of Communism; the second, through the destruction of Nazism, was to lead to the expansion of Zionism; finally, the third would be the consequence of a conflict between Zionism and Islam which would leave the exhausted nations in the hands of the conspirators. After reading aloud a printed page setting out the ‘plan’, Chiminal Spray illustrated the scheme with a video of the Israeli Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu calling for a ‘vast world-wide assault’ against ‘Islam’. This verbal ‘slip’ by Netanyahu during a press conference held on the 9th January had stirred up a polemic and was the object of several video posts. In this case, Chiminal Spray picked up the one posted on line on 12th January by Yahia Gouasmi, an anti-Semitic propagandist and founder of the Zahra Centre and the Anti-Zionist Party. The attacks against *Charlie Hebdo* and the Hypercacher supermarket would be the harbingers, according to Chiminal Spray, of the coming Third World War supposedly predicted by Pike in 1871.

This letter claimed to be by Albert Pike has become a classic of conspiracist literature and has seen a renewal of attention since the 2000s (Kreis, 2009: 156–172)<sup>19</sup>. Evidence of this, for example, is the importance accorded to it in 2003 by the British citizen Michael Haupt on his website *threeworldwars.com*<sup>20</sup>. The document posted by Chiminal Spray, ‘Albert Pike et le plan luciférien de gouvernement mondial [*Albert Pike and the Luciferian plan for world government*]’ seems, for its part, to derive from a French source, as is suggested by the reference to Jean Lombard who himself alludes in his publication to Pike’s letter<sup>21</sup>. But whether it is Haupt, Lombard or one of numerous other authors such as Des Griffin (1980: 39–40), all draw on a common source: William Guy Carr. A commander in the Royal Canadian Navy and an anti-Judeo-Masonic polemicist, Carr presents in his book *Pawns in the Game* an interpretation of Pike’s plan, which since then has been considered by various polemicists as being the text of the letter itself, and provides an extract from this letter, which was claimed to have been preserved in the library of the British Museum (1958: 20). In *Satan, Prince of this World* (1966: 43), published posthumously in 1966, the reader learns that the manuscript might not be in London, but had according to the writer been quoted by numerous authors, notably by Cardinal José María Caro Rodríguez in his book *El Misterio de la Masonería* [*The Mystery of Masonry*] (1923: 113 and 157). Indeed, this latter does mention Pike’s letter alongside the work *The Cause of World Unrest*<sup>22</sup> and writings by M<sup>gr</sup> Jouin and Friedrich

Wichtel concerning the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, as proof of the occult involvement of Judeo-Masonry in the Bolshevik revolution in Russia. There follows the segment of the text quoted by Carr, accompanied by three references *Le Diable au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle* [The Devil in the 19th Century] by Léo Taxil, *Le Palladisme* [Palladianism] of Domenico Margiotta (1895: 186)<sup>23</sup> and *The Cause of World Unrest*, whence the quotation seems to have been drawn (p. 51–52). Obviously, in this 1925 work, it is not a matter – and for good reason – of the three world wars mentioned by Carr. The reference to the British Museum is for its part certainly present, but its lack of clarity of expression gives the impression that the document is held in London, whereas the author in all likelihood is referring only to Taxil's *Diable au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle* in which the letter is reproduced in full (1892–1895: 594–605). Cardinal Rodríguez was not the only author of the inter-war period to make reference to this notorious document. Among others it features in the *Cahiers de l'Ordre* by the abbé Duperron<sup>24</sup> or in *The Secret World Government or the Hidden Hand* of General Cherep-Spiridovich (1926: 164).

To discover the first occurrence of the Albert Pike letter, we must go back to the 1890s and the deceptions of Léo Taxil. A swindler as well as an anticlerical journalist, Taxil, who was clearly caught up in some financial difficulties, suddenly converted to Catholicism in 1885. He then published his *Révélations sur la franc-maçonnerie* [Revelations on Freemasonry] in which he denounced Freemasons as being conspirators and worshippers of Lucifer. Personal success was not long in coming. From 1891 onwards, Taxil began revealing information about the Palladian Order, claiming it to be a Satanic secret directory of Freemasonry. Obscuring the sources of his supposed evidence right down to the merest detail, and inventing roles for those involved voluntarily or not, Taxil caused to be circulated under different pseudonyms several texts apparently corroborating his statements. In 1892–1894, concealed behind the identity of a certain Dr Bataille, he published *Le Diable au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle*, an episodic autobiographical tale of adventures whose hero undertakes investigations into the Luciferian hidden backrooms of the lodges. Among the numerous documents mentioned is Pike's supposed Palladian plan of campaign, which sets out the methods set in place by the Luciferians to bring about the destruction of the Catholic Church and world domination. This forgery – Taxil admitted in 1997 that it was a total fabrication by him – was by no means a prediction of future wars, and the references to Russia were motivated by the nihilist terrorist attacks of the 1870s and the success in France of the Franco-Russian alliance.

Curiously, Chiminal Spray's 'viral' video, which incorporated the events of January 2015 into a vast conspiracy and supplied links to a large body of conspiracist literature, did not arouse any media interest and the different journalists I pointed this out to did not accord it any great moment. 'World War III: Episode 1!' nevertheless corresponds to the different thematic lines associated with 'conspiracy theories' that appear in journalistic and institutional discourses.

## Uses and misuses of 'conspiracy theory'

A limited number of inter-related themes, including youth, working-class suburbs, Islam, education problems, the Internet and social media, political extremism, anti-Semitism<sup>25</sup>, can be seen in the way the media treats 'conspiracy theories'.

The earliest of these themes to appear in the media was that of 'the Internet and social media'. The *Express* article of the 8th January and the short piece by the deputy editor-in-chief of *Rue 89* denouncing the conspiracy-related commentaries on the Internet show the swiftness of the reaction of the media in the face of the criticisms and projections of doubt in relation to the news items that they were disseminating. 'Conspiracy theories' were presented by these media as being carried by 'social media and specialist sites'. In its 21st January edition under the headline 'another conspiracy claim', the daily newspaper *Libération* devoted a whole dossier to the subject of 'conspiracy



theories'. Apart from the vehement editorial, all of the articles addressed the question of the nature of news on the Internet. It emerged from these articles that 'the main production centres of these theories can be found on line' but that it is 'rarer for such theories to be picked up in the traditional media'. If they are, it is *per medium* of guests on 'popular television shows' who have expressed 'their doubts about the "official" explanation of the 9/11 terror attacks'. On the other hand, the foreign media were said not to show any evidence of the same restraint. Thus 'it was in a Russian tabloid that Jean-Marie le Pen stated his judgement that "the [Kouachi brothers] operation bears the hallmarks of the Secret Service"<sup>26</sup>'. While it is certainly true that the internet provides a platform for disseminating conspiracist outpourings, erroneous information and far-fetched notions, the extremely swift emergence of this particular proposition, the amount of attention given to it and the way in which it was handled seem more motivated by the anxiety of the 'traditional media' in the face of competition from the new vectors of information. In a dossier devoted to the 'practices of news sharing' published in *La Croix*, the director and head of programming for the television channel *France Ô* emphasized that 'there exists a major generational divide, for while the public service is doing its job properly, some young people are exchanging tweets about conspiracy theories<sup>27</sup>'.

Such 'young people', mentioned alongside references to 'lower-class suburbs', 'problems within the national education system', 'anti-Semitism' and 'Islam', and categorized as being open to 'conspiracy theories', could well be taken as showing proof not only of mistrust towards the discourse of the traditional media, but also towards the national movement of solidarity with *Charlie Hebdo*. From the 9th January, the day after the minute's silence to mark respect for the victims, 'conspiracy theories' were already being linked to 'incidents' that occurred at that time in certain schools<sup>28</sup>. The *Journal du Dimanche*, for example, reported the case of a woman teacher whose 'students declared "they had asked for it"' and who stated 'that others mentioned conspiracy theories<sup>29</sup>'.

The number of items disseminated around this notion saw a significant increase after the weekend of the 10th–11th January with the publication of the number of 'incidents' that had taken place in schools and the intervention of the Minister of National Education, Najat Vallaud-Belkacem. On the 12th January, when the question of bringing in a French version of the *Patriot Act* was being considered, the minister summoned the high school student unions to meet with her. 'Conspiracy theories' took up 10 min of the hour of discussions. According to Elliott Nouaille, president of the *Syndicat général des lycéens [General High School Students Union]*: 'It was not a subject which we had brought up ourselves. [...] She said to us, now let's talk about the conspiracy theories'. The minister seems then to have proposed that the students' unions should themselves set up an internet site to counter such theories<sup>30</sup>. This meeting, widely reported by the media, marks, even more than the first 'internet challenges', the start of a wave of articles and reports on 'conspiracy theories'. During her appearance on RTL three days later, Najat Vallaud-Belkacem again mentioned the 'conspiracy theories' that were 'in the process of undermining the trust of a part of our youth'. By that she meant "the questioning of the institutions of the Republic and the credibility of both politicians and also of the media". This phenomenon was being seen as all the more worrying in that 'one young person in five believes in the conspiracy theories<sup>31</sup>'. On the 18th January, Fleur Pellerin, the Minister of Culture, called for a pedagogical initiative to be undertaken among young people faced with 'conspiracist theories which were ferments of hatred and social disintegration<sup>32</sup>'. The subject was addressed once more by the Minister of Education during a press conference on the 22nd January, then again the next day during a visit along with the Prime Minister to an agricultural high school<sup>33</sup>. On the 27th January, the President of the Republic, François Hollande, during his speech commemorating the 70th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz, mentioned in his turn the 'conspiracy theories', which, fostered by anti-Semitism, 'are being unrestrainedly spread' on the internet and social media. The involvement of the President, however, coincided with the beginning of a loss of interest by the media in the subject and brought an end to the political

declarations of the previous weeks. This sequence of commentaries by politicians was accompanied by certain initiatives, such as the publication by the Fondation Jean-Jaurès<sup>34</sup> of a ‘situational report’ on conspiracism<sup>35</sup> or the *Entretiens* [Discussion Papers] of the Information Service of the government for the 12th February, in order to ‘deconstruct conspiracism’<sup>36</sup>, as well as a very large number of articles, broadcast programs and reports accompanying these institutional commentaries.

Finally, if somewhat marginally, the proposition associating ‘political extremism’ (outside Islam) with ‘conspiracy theories’, where it is not limited to simple slogans, appears principally when high-profile figures like Alain Soral or Dieudonné are involved, without their political direction being clearly analysed. This proposition also came up at the time of certain declarations made by the president of the Front National, but without any real further development of the idea. Finally as well, it is worth noting the very minor but nevertheless new appearance in the French media landscape of an association between ‘conspiracy theory’ and the extreme Left. This linkage echoes the result of a Dutch psycho-sociological study, which established a relationship between conspiracism and political extremism (van Prooijen et al., 2015). In its 14th January edition, *Charlie Hebdo* published an article asserting that besides the ‘“anti-Semitic” far-Right’ ‘such conspiracism is a problem of the radical Left and of the Islamic/Leftist sub-culture which is rampant in the forums’<sup>37</sup>. But the absence of any probative example enabling the illustration of this phenomenon in the French socio-political space may explain the paucity of resort to this type of discourse<sup>38</sup>.

Opposition to ‘conspiracy theories’ allows them to be stigmatized and subject to dismissal as much as it permits an explanation of them and reassurance about them. As tools for laying blame on the ‘uncontrolled’ information presented on the internet, on youth, on the lower socio-economic classes and on Muslims<sup>39</sup>, they are an instrument that allows the separation of the ‘majority’ from a dangerous ‘non-Charlie’ minority. They might explain, in effect, the mistrust towards the media and public institutions, but equally the fact that a part of the population did not at all see itself, or saw itself very little, as sharing in the national surge of fervour stirred up by the terror events. According to *Le Parisien*, a number of inhabitants of Bobigny, a working-class district of Paris, pointed to the conspiracy theory to justify their non-adherence to the ‘I am Charlie’ wave<sup>40</sup>. Getting rid of ‘conspiracy theories’, as the illustrations and causes of anomie, might thus offer a means for resolving the problems and fractures of society.

But the massive campaign against ‘conspiracy theories’ of January 2015 can appear, in certain aspects, to be just as disturbing as the propositions that it denounced. Poorly defined, ‘conspiracy theories’ become, following the line of argument of the communiqué 1035-960 of the CIA of January 1967 (deHaven-Smith 2013: 106-131), a simple derogatory device aiming at casting doubt upon the media and institutional narratives. It seems necessary, over and beyond the academic disputes and different positions taken, that the research community set itself the task of establishing a common definition of ‘conspiracy theories’ and what they cover, under penalty of being obliged to give up, as Jack Z. Bratich (2008) and Lance deHaven Smith (2013) had to do, making it into the object of serious study.

Emmanuel Kreis  
(Paris)

Translated from the French by Colin Anderson

## Notes

1. On the history of the use of the term ‘conspiracy theory’ see deHaven Smith (2013) and Peter Knight (2012). The meta-historical and meta-social dimensions of ‘conspiracy theories’ have been highlighted, among others, by Richard Hofstadter, Karl Popper, Dieter Groh, Michael Barkun, Émile Poulat, Alain de Benoist and Véronique Champion-Vincent, and as well in part by Pierre-André Taguieff.

2. In this present article the terms ‘conspiracism’ and ‘conspiracist’ will be used to characterize these elaborations and their authors.
3. ‘Premières reactions complotistes’, [conspiracywatch.info/Charlie-Hebdo-les-premieres-reactions-complotistes\\_a1326.html](http://conspiracywatch.info/Charlie-Hebdo-les-premieres-reactions-complotistes_a1326.html) (7 January 2015).
4. A. Se. and V. G., ‘Les mauvaises théories du complot’ [lexpress.fr/actualite/societe/charlie-hebdo-les-mauvaises-theories-du-complot\\_1638858.html#qOvFQW1hSEeYmExp.99](http://lexpress.fr/actualite/societe/charlie-hebdo-les-mauvaises-theories-du-complot_1638858.html#qOvFQW1hSEeYmExp.99) (8 January 2015).
5. Mathieu Deslandes, ‘Tout ça pue le complot judéo-maçonnique [*All this smells of a Judeo-Masonic Plot*]’, [rue89.nouvelobs.com/2015/01/09/tout-ca-pue-le-complot-judeo-maconnique-256979](http://rue89.nouvelobs.com/2015/01/09/tout-ca-pue-le-complot-judeo-maconnique-256979) (8 January 2015).
6. Ramsès Kefi, ‘Quoi qu’ils fassent, les musulmans sont bloqués [*Whatever they do, the Muslims are stuck*]’ [rue89.nouvelobs.com/2015/01/09/apres-charlie-hebdo-quoi-ils-fassent-les-musulmans-sont-bloques-257002](http://rue89.nouvelobs.com/2015/01/09/apres-charlie-hebdo-quoi-ils-fassent-les-musulmans-sont-bloques-257002) (8 January 2015).
7. Christel Brigaudeau, ‘Vous êtes sûr que tout ça est vrai? [*Are you sure that all that is true?*]’, [leparisien.fr/espace-premium/fait-du-jour/vous-etes-sur-que-tout-ca-est-vrai-09-01-2015-4430919.php](http://leparisien.fr/espace-premium/fait-du-jour/vous-etes-sur-que-tout-ca-est-vrai-09-01-2015-4430919.php) (9 January 2015).
8. Léo Mouren, ‘“Charlie Hebdo”: l’affaire [qui] agite les complotistes’, [liberation.fr/societe/2015/01/09/les-complotistes-investissent-la-toile\\_1176819](http://liberation.fr/societe/2015/01/09/les-complotistes-investissent-la-toile_1176819) (9 January 2015).
9. This analysis covered the following newspapers and magazines (print and/or digital versions): *Le Monde*, *Le Figaro*, *Libération*, *La Croix*, *L’Humanité*, *Le Parisien*, *Le Journal du Dimanche*, *Le Nouvel Observateur*, *Le Point*, *Marianne*, *L’Express*, *Mediapart* etc. This work was supplemented by surveys in the principal French audio and video media.
10. See by way of examples: ‘My generation used to choose the extreme Left, theirs is choosing jihad’, *Le Monde*, 9 January 2015; Aurélie Lebel, ‘Personally, I don’t feel concerned by all that’, *Le Parisien*, 13 January 2015; Mattea Battaglia and Benoît Floc’h, ‘Schools cannot solve all of society’s problems’, *Le Monde*, 15 January 2015, or Pierre Pratabuy, ‘Terrorism: the young kids admire those guys’, *Le Point*, 17 January 2015.
11. Rémi Noyon, ‘Attentats: avec Karim, jeune youtubeur qui a des “doutes” [*Terror Attacks: with Karim, a young YouTuber with “doubts”*]’, [Rue 89 rue89.nouvelobs.com/2015/01/19/attentats-karim-jeune-youtubeur-a-doutes-257157](http://rue89.nouvelobs.com/2015/01/19/attentats-karim-jeune-youtubeur-a-doutes-257157) (19 January 2015).
12. ‘Après Charlie Hebdo, la théorie du complot relancée’, [leparisien.fr/flash-actualite-monde/apres-charlie-hebdo-la-theorie-du-complot-relancee-17-01-2105-4455463.php](http://leparisien.fr/flash-actualite-monde/apres-charlie-hebdo-la-theorie-du-complot-relancee-17-01-2105-4455463.php) (17 January 2015).
13. Ramsès Kefi, ‘Quoi qu’ils fassent, les musulmans sont bloqués’, loc. cit.
14. Matthieu Delacharlerly with Frédéric Béghin, ‘Charlie Hebdo: six jours fous sur la toile [*Charlie Hebdo: six days of madness on the web*]’, [leparisien.fr/magazine/grand-angle/charlie-hebdo-six-jours-fous-sur-la-toile-22-01-2015-4469253.php](http://leparisien.fr/magazine/grand-angle/charlie-hebdo-six-jours-fous-sur-la-toile-22-01-2015-4469253.php) (22 January 2015).
15. Léo Mouren, ‘Charlie Hebdo, l’affaire [qui] agite les complotistes’, loc. cit.; Pauline Graulle, ‘Attentats: les conspirationnistes sont déjà à l’œuvre’, [politix.fr/Attentats-les-conspirationnistes,29715.html](http://politix.fr/Attentats-les-conspirationnistes,29715.html) (16 January 2015); Adrien Sénecat, ‘Chez les complotistes, les ennemis de vos ennemis sont aussi vos ennemis’, [lexpress.fr/actualite/societe/chez-les-complotistes-les-ennemis-de-vos-ennemis-sont-aussi-vos-ennemis\\_1645758.html](http://lexpress.fr/actualite/societe/chez-les-complotistes-les-ennemis-de-vos-ennemis-sont-aussi-vos-ennemis_1645758.html) (30 January 2015).
16. Text message from Pauline Graulle of *Politix* of the 12th January 2015.
17. Carine Fouteau, ‘Le lien entre antisémitisme et conspirationnisme s’est établi dès le XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle [*The link between anti-Semitism and conspiracism established since the 19<sup>th</sup> century*]’, [mediapart.fr/journal/france/150115/le-lien-entre-antisemitisme-et-conspirationnisme-setablit-des-le-xixe-siecle](http://mediapart.fr/journal/france/150115/le-lien-entre-antisemitisme-et-conspirationnisme-setablit-des-le-xixe-siecle) (15 January 2015); Marine Lamoureux, ‘Assiste-t-on à une résurgence des théories du complot? [*Are we witnessing a resurgence in conspiracy theories?*]’, [la-croix.com/Actualite/France/Assiste-t-on-a-une-resurgence-des-theories-du-complot-2015-01-15-1267984](http://la-croix.com/Actualite/France/Assiste-t-on-a-une-resurgence-des-theories-du-complot-2015-01-15-1267984) (15 January 2015).
18. See [youtube.com/watch?v=O5gVRBi\\_ba0&feature=youtube](http://youtube.com/watch?v=O5gVRBi_ba0&feature=youtube).
19. See also T. Melanson, ‘Albert Pike to Mazzini, 15 August 1871: Three World Wars?’, [conspiracyarchive.com/2015/01/10/albert-pike-to-mazzini-august-15-1871-three-world-wars](http://conspiracyarchive.com/2015/01/10/albert-pike-to-mazzini-august-15-1871-three-world-wars) (5 October 2010).
20. See [threeworldwars.com/albert-pike2.htm](http://threeworldwars.com/albert-pike2.htm). A rapid Google search will bring up at least 20 recent conspiracist texts mentioning the Pike letter.



21. Jean Lombard, otherwise known as Jean Lombard Coeurderoy, was the author between 1976 and 1980 of a massive production in four volumes under the Spanish title of *La Cara oculta de historia moderna* [The Hidden Face of Modern History] published by Fuerza nueva. Only a synthetic version appeared in French under the title *La Face cachée de l'Histoire moderne* [same English translation] in 1984. Pike's 'letter' is quoted on pages 553–554 of the French edition.
22. *The Cause of World Unrest* is an anonymous compilation of articles of the London Morning Post of July 1920. The principal authors, according to Colin Holmes, were probably Ian Colvin, H. A. Gwynne and Nesta Webster. See Holmes (2005: 1089–1109).
23. Domenico Margiotta was an Italian Freemason belonging to the Memphis-Misraïm Rite of the valley of Naples. He collaborated in the mystification of Léo Taxil by publishing various works on the Palladian conspiracy from 1894.
24. See J.-L. Georges-Michel, 'Plan de Campagne Maçonique pour la destruction du Catholicisme Romain [Masonic Plan of Campaign for the Destruction of Roman Catholicism]', *Les Cahiers de l'Ordre* (special number), May–June 1931, pp. 7–40. The text is presented as the minutes of a session held in August 1871 by the 'Supreme Luciferian Chiefs in Charleston of America' and passed on by a mysterious priest.
25. The omnipresent themes of 'Islam' and 'anti-Semitism' require a consideration, which is too broad to be sufficiently included here.
26. Dominique Albertini, 'Les rouages de la machine complotiste [The inner workings of the conspiracy machine]', *Libération*, 21 January 2015, p. 1–2.
27. Aude Carasco, 'Après les attentats, que font les medias? [After terrorist attacks, what do the media do?]', [la-croix.com/Culture/Medias/Apres-les-attentats-que-font-les-medias-2015-01-28-1274008](http://la-croix.com/Culture/Medias/Apres-les-attentats-que-font-les-medias-2015-01-28-1274008) (28 January 2015).
28. Christel Brigaudeau, 'Vous êtes sûr que tout ça est vrai? [Are you sure that that's all true?]' [leparisien.fr/espace-premium/fait-du-jour/vous-etes-sur-que-tout-ca-est-vrai-09-01-2015-4430919.php](http://leparisien.fr/espace-premium/fait-du-jour/vous-etes-sur-que-tout-ca-est-vrai-09-01-2015-4430919.php) (9 January 2015). Two hundred such incidents were reported to the Ministry of Education out of the 63,600 French school establishments.
29. Michaël Bloch, 'Charlie Hebdo: 70 cas of perturbations lors de la minute du silence [70 cases of disturbances during the minute's silence]', [lejdd.fr/Education/Charlie-Hebdo-70-cas-de-perturbations-lors-de-la-minute-du-silence-dans-les-ecoles-712210](http://lejdd.fr/Education/Charlie-Hebdo-70-cas-de-perturbations-lors-de-la-minute-du-silence-dans-les-ecoles-712210). See also 'Attentats: l'école en première ligne [Terror attacks: the school in the front line]', a report in the broadcast 'Envoyé spécial', *France 2*, 29 January 2015.
30. Discussion with Eliott Nouaille, 8 July 2015.
31. "L'Invité d'RTL", *RTL*, 15th January 2015, [rtl.fr/actu/politique/najat-vallaud-belkacem-est-l-invitee-de-rtl-15-janvier-7776218246](http://rtl.fr/actu/politique/najat-vallaud-belkacem-est-l-invitee-de-rtl-15-janvier-7776218246). This figure is not based on any particular study and seems to derive either from a survey – commissioned by the Fleuve publishing house at the time of publication of the novel by Éric Giacometti and Jacques Ravenne entitled *Le Règne des Illuminati* [The Reign of the Illuminati] in 2014 – finding that one French citizen in five believed in the existence of the *Illuminati*, or from an opinion survey by Sofres from 2008 showing that 20% of the under-25s thought that the 9/11 incidents had been organized by the Americans ([referential-nouvelobs.com/file/418/561418.pdf](http://referential-nouvelobs.com/file/418/561418.pdf)). A poll carried out by IFOP for the newspaper *Sud-Ouest* mentions the figure of 2% of French citizens who asserted that the *Charlie Hebdo* attacks were a fabrication and a plot ([ifop.com/media/poll/2914-1-study\\_file.pdf](http://ifop.com/media/poll/2914-1-study_file.pdf)).
32. 'Tous Politiques', [franceinter.fr/reecouter-diffusions/435127](http://franceinter.fr/reecouter-diffusions/435127).
33. Sophie Bordier, 'Les ministres répondent aux questions des lycéens [The ministers reply to students' questions]', [leparisien.fr/espace-premium/seine-et-marne-77/les-ministres-repondent-aux-questions-des-lyceens-24-01-2015-4473785.php](http://leparisien.fr/espace-premium/seine-et-marne-77/les-ministres-repondent-aux-questions-des-lyceens-24-01-2015-4473785.php) (24 January 2015).
34. A political foundation close to the Socialist Party.
35. Rudy Reichstadt, *Conspirationnisme un état des lieux* [Conspiracism a situational report], note n° 11, Fondation Jean-Jaurès-Observatoire des radicalités politiques, 24 February 2015. It is appropriate to observe that this note, which for the most part is based upon social psychology research and which vehemently attacks the 'proponents of a militant social science approach', provides the following definitions (p. 2): 'Conspiracism may be defined as a tendency to falsely attribute the origin of a shocking and/or dramatic event (natural disaster, industrial accident, economic crisis, death of a prominent personality,

- terrorist attack, revolution ...) to a hidden plot whose authors – or those reputed to profit by it – are thought to have conspired, in their own interests, to keep the truth from emerging. A conspiracy theory consequently consists of an “alternative” narrative which claims to significantly overturn the knowledge which we have of an event and thus to provide an alternative version to that which is generally accepted which it stigmatizes by qualifying it as “official”.
36. See [siglan.fr/fr/deconstruire-le-conspirationnisme](http://siglan.fr/fr/deconstruire-le-conspirationnisme). The same day, the National Assembly in a hearing open to the press heard a submission from Dounia Bouzar, general director of the Centre de prévention contre les dérives sectaires liées à l’islam [*Centre for the Prevention of Sectarian Prejudice associated with Islam*] (an organization coming under the inter-ministerial Mission for vigilance and concerted effort against prejudiced sectarian tendencies) who made significant mention of conspiracy theories as a means of recruitment for jihadists. See *Compte Rendu à l’Assemblée nationale de la Commission d’enquête sur la surveillance des filières et des individus djihadistes*, CR n°18, 12 February 2015.
  37. Jean-Yves Camus, ‘Les Charognards du complot [*The Carrion-feeders of conspiracy*]’ *Charlie Hebdo*, 14 January 2015. P. 4; ‘28 minutes’, *Arte*, 14 January 2015; Karl-Josef Hildenbrand, ‘Les theories du complot, une histoire d’extrêmes (gauche et droite) [*Conspiracy theories, a story of extremes (of left and right)*]’, [lexpress.fr/actualite/societe/les-theories-du-complot-une-histoire-d-extremes-gauche-et-droite\\_1642262.html#x4Zq8jD1woJwApy.99](http://lexpress.fr/actualite/societe/les-theories-du-complot-une-histoire-d-extremes-gauche-et-droite_1642262.html#x4Zq8jD1woJwApy.99) (19 January 2015).
  38. Nicolas Vanderbiest notes: ‘I have also noticed that I did not have any conspiracit of the extreme Left. Does this current exist or not? I do not know for sure, but I bring it nevertheless to your attention’, see N. Vanderbiest, ‘Quelle propagation de l’information pour la théorie du complot? [*What is the propagation of information for conspiracy theory?*]’, [reputatiolab.com/2015/03/quelle-propagation-de-linformation-pour-la-theorie-du-complot](http://reputatiolab.com/2015/03/quelle-propagation-de-linformation-pour-la-theorie-du-complot).
  39. See for example the particularly over-the-top article by Marie-Estelle Pech, ‘À Grigny, la théorie du complot va bon train [*At Grigny, conspiracy theory is alive and well*]’, *Le Figaro*, 15 January 2015, p. 7.
  40. Aurélie Lebelle, ‘Moi, je ne me sens pas concerné par tout ça [*Personally I don’t feel concerned by all that*]’, *Le Parisien*, [leparisien.fr/espace-premium/fait-du-jour/moi-je-ne-me-sens-pas-concerne-par-tout-ca-13-01-2015-4441307.php](http://leparisien.fr/espace-premium/fait-du-jour/moi-je-ne-me-sens-pas-concerne-par-tout-ca-13-01-2015-4441307.php) (13 January 2015).

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