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**TOWARDS A SOCIOLOGY OF CONSPIRACY
THEORIES: AN INVESTIGATION INTO
CONSPIRATORIAL THINKING ON DÖNMES**

**A THESIS SUBMITTED TO
THE UNIVERSITY OF KENT AT CANTERBURY IN THE
SUBJECT OF SOCIOLOGY FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

BY

TÜRKAY S. NEFES

APRIL 2010

**PAGES ARE OUT OF
ORDER IN THE ORIGINAL**

Dedicated to the Memory of Hayriye Özçelik and Salim Nefes

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ABSTRACT

This thesis investigates the social and political significance of conspiracy theories, which has been an academically neglected topic despite its historical relevance. The academic literature focuses on the methodology, social significance and political impacts of these theories in a secluded manner and lacks empirical analyses. In response, this research provides a comprehensive theoretical framework for conspiracy theories by considering their methodology, political impacts and social significance in the light of empirical data.

Theoretically, the thesis uses Adorno's semi-erudition theory along with Girardian approach. It proposes that conspiracy theories are methodologically semi-erudite narratives, i.e. they are biased in favour of a belief and use reason only to prove it. It suggests that conspiracy theories appear in times of power vacuum and provide semi-erudite cognitive maps that relieve alienation and ontological insecurities of people and groups. In so doing, they enforce social control over their audience due to their essentialist, closed-to-interpretation narratives.

In order to verify the theory, the study analyses empirically the social and political significance of conspiracy theories about the Dönme community in Turkey. The analysis comprises interviews with conspiracy theorists, conspiracy theory readers and political parties, alongside a frame analysis of the popular conspiracy theory books on Dönmes. These confirm the theoretical framework by showing that the conspiracy theories are fed by the ontological insecurities of Turkish society. Hence, conspiracy theorists, most readers and some political parties respond to their own ontological insecurities and political frustrations through scapegoating Dönmes. Consequently, this work shows that conspiracy theories are important symptoms of society, which, while relieving ontological insecurities, do not provide politically prolific narratives.

Chapter 1. Understanding Conspiracy Theories Sociologically

1.1 Introduction

Although conspiracy theories constitute a historically remarkable phenomenon, there have not been any systematic empirical studies on their social and political significance. There is no empirical data about what social effects they have, how they are communicated and how they work. The academic literature on the topic does not give any detailed analysis of why people find conspiratorial accounts appealing, how these theories affect their political perspectives, what sort of conspiracies they tend to believe in what circumstances, how this is reflected in politics, and in what ways political parties use conspiracy theories. Nor does the literature delineate the genealogy of conspiracy theories. There are no comparative studies that examine conspiracy theories historically. Despite highlighting various aspects of conspiracy theories, the academic literature to date fails to provide a coherent picture.

Regardless, conspiracy theories have always been important phenomena, which can influence politics and even change public opinion. The Clinton administration of the 1990s was concerned about the influence of internet conspiracy theories (Madsen, 1997: 6); in 1950s, the McCarthy era in the United States produced conspiracy theories about communists who were allegedly influencing the government institutions (Melley, 2008; Griffith, 1970). In Nazi Germany, Jews were subjected to similar accusations (Ben-Itto, 2005). General Franco's army and the Nationalist camp in the Spanish Civil War used the belief that they were fighting against a 'Jewish-Masonic-Bolshevist' conspiracy (Rohr, 2003). These examples may suggest that conspiracy theories have been used as a tool for blaming an imagined enemy for evil plans and justifying repressive actions against them.

The above points not only aim to show what is lacking in the analysis, but also underline the space this study attempts to fill. Through interviews with conspiracy theorists, readers and political parties, this thesis will provide an empirical analysis of how conspiracy theories influence people's and political parties' perspectives. It will analyse the content of these accounts to portray the social communication that

they initiate. Furthermore, it will propose a theoretical framework to conceptualise the social and political significance of conspiracy theories, which will be tested on empirical data. In short, the research intends to give a coherent picture, both theoretically and empirically informed, on the place of conspiratorial accounts in society and in politics.

To achieve this aim, the study will provide a three-dimensional scrutiny of the social significance, political implications and methodology of conspiracy theories. First, it will explore the social influence that is effective in the creation and spread of conspiracy theories. It will investigate why society creates conspiratorial accounts, and why they are more prevalent in certain periods. In this sense, the social construction and distribution of conspiracy theories and the discussions they create will be stressed. Second, the research will analyse their influence on the perspectives held by people and by political parties. In so doing, it will demonstrate the ways in which conspiracy theories affect micro and macro level politics. Third, the thesis will consider an often neglected area in the literature on conspiracy theories by looking at how the methodology of these narratives is relevant to their social and political significance. The existing literature investigates their methodologies and social significance separately.

The main hypothesis is that conspiracy theories often emerge in times of major transformations to relieve ontological insecurities and political vacuum within society. To do that, they envisage a scapegoat, which channels social anxiety towards an object by easily understandable and short-cut explanations. They relieve people from alienation by initiating cohesion against an enemy 'other'. In so doing, they are likely to produce political impacts through influencing the political ideas of their audience. However, conspiracy theories impose methodologically deficient, biased and essentialist perspectives, which often misrepresent the reality. In sum, the thesis proposes that conspiracy theories, as methodologically problematic narratives, have social and political significance because they appear to respond to specific social contexts and influence politics. Therefore, this study will consider the social significance, methodological properties and political impacts of conspiracy theories concurrently.

Some of the main questions that will be addressed in this work are as follows: What is the social significance of conspiratorial accounts? What are the social reasons that create conspiratorial accounts? Why do conspiracy theories tend to prevail during major social transformations? How could we delineate the conspiracy tradition? Who are conspiracy theorists? Why do conspiracy theorists write these narratives and how do they disseminate them? How do conspiracy theories affect the perception of politics on individual and political party levels? How much authority do they enjoy in politics? What kind of political ideologies do these theories transmit and which political groups are likely to use conspiratorial accounts? How are contemporary conspiracy theories different from the ones of the past? What are the distinctive methodological characteristics of these theories? How does the methodology of conspiratorial accounts relate to their social and political significance? These questions could clearly be discussed in different manners in different historical periods and social contexts. Hence, this work intends to focus on a case that is optimally representative of the conspiratorial literature. Only in that way could the study refer to the general conspiratorial tradition.

The thesis will particularly focus on conspiracy theories about Dönmes¹ in Turkey. There are three compelling reasons for choosing the Dönmes for the case study. First, the theories about the community are historically one of the most enduring and popular conspiratorial themes in Turkey. Second, they relate overtly to the general conspiracy literature: they could be seen as the local versions of the infamous *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. Third, there has recently been a boom in the conspiracy literature on Dönmes in Turkey, which has been both socially and politically influential. Fourth, there have not been any studies analysing the impact of the conspiracy theories about Dönmes in academic literature.

This work will look at the conspiracy theories about the Dönme community throughout history. While doing so, the main questions of concern are which political circles tend to use these theories, in what kind of contexts they emerge, and what influence they have on politics. The thesis will inevitably initiate a discussion of anti-Semitism in different periods of Turkish history. Moreover, it will investigate

¹ Dönme (Convert) is the name of a crypto-Jewish community mainly residing in Turkey today.

the political effects and social reasons for the emergence of these conspiracy theories through conversations with their authors, readers and political parties. The research will also describe the methodological characteristics of these theories through a frame analysis of popular books. It will show how their methodology relates to their political messages and social significance.

This chapter will first provide a sociological description of conspiracy theories. It will sociologically delineate what is a conspiracy theory by referring to its social functions and historical tradition, and present a definitional base on which the study will improve. The chapter will go on to consider their social and political relevance today. Subsequently, it will introduce the methodological and theoretical approaches of the research, explaining the reasons for choosing certain research methods and theoretical stances. Finally, it will summarise the plan of the thesis.

1.2 Conceptualising Conspiracy Theories

It is quite difficult to define conspiracy theories adequately, as conspiring is a very widespread social phenomenon. There are many conspiracies going on in everyday life: even the weather can apparently 'conspire' against your plans. The concept also has a wide range of social and political connotations. It is often used to devalue a theory or an idea. Hence, there is not an agreement on what exactly 'conspiracy theory' means, and the concept needs to be analytically delineated. To start with, one of the most important characteristics of conspiracy theories is that they explain noteworthy events in society as consequences of conspiracies. Incidents such as major changes or unexpected events, which may have important impacts on society, are popular subjects of conspiracy theories. Certainly, there are conspiratorial accounts about smaller scale events, but they often do not have significant effects on society unless they are used to explain major incidents.

Most of the definitions in the academic literature note that conspiracy theories draw on important events. According to Keeley (1999: 116), a conspiracy theory is "a proposed explanation of some historical event (or events) in terms of the significant causal agency of a relatively small group of persons – the conspirators -- acting in secret." He highlights that conspiratorial accounts explain events as results of

conspiracies caused by a few people. Nelson (2003: 499) stresses that conspiracy theories narrate social reality as being shaped by hidden conspirators: “[conspiracy theories strive] to expose the shadowy bosses who communicate behind the scenes to pull the world’s strings. They premise that paranoia is unappreciated prophecy: We have secret enemies, and ‘they’ have been scheming (with real success) to get us.” Basham (2003: 91) declares that conspiratorial accounts accuse a few people of causing significant events that affect society: “A ‘conspiracy theory’ is an explanation of important events that appeals to the intentional deception and manipulation of those involved in it, affected by, or witnessing these events. These deceptions/manipulations involve multiple, cooperating players.”

These definitions suggest that conspiracy theories claim to unveil a hidden reality behind significant events by blaming a person or a group. Thus, they afford a distinctive and unconventional perspective on power relations in society. They nourish a trend of seeing the world, which Hofstadter (1965) calls *the paranoid style* and Pipes (1997) regards as *the hidden hand mentality* or *conspiracism*. In other words, as Jameson (1992) reveals, conspiracy theories provide cognitive maps to understand the social and political reality. Fenster (1999: 108) agrees that “conspiracy theory must be recognised as a cultural practice that attempts to map, in narrative form, the trajectories and effects of power; yet, it not only does so in a simplistic, limited way, but also continually threatens to unravel and leave unsettled the resolution to the question of power that it attempts to address.” Hence, conspiracy theories correspond to a political style, as they tend to map power relations in society with morally-laden narratives. Pipes (1997: 22) remarks that: “conspiracy theories have a way of growing on a person, to the point that they become a way of seeing life itself.” While discussing the conspiratorial accounts of the rap singer Tupac, Quinn underlines this inherently political character of conspiracy theories:

On the whole, Tupac’s critical paranoia does not close down complex understandings and theoretical questioning, but instead tends to use its possibilities for total explanation to glimpse profound connections between the personal and the political... the individual and the larger relations of

power. Such critical thinking is of course essential to the production of political consciousness (Quinn, 2002: 196).

Another example that could help us to comprehend the political nature of conspiratorial accounts comes from Turkey. A well-known Turkish journalist, Mehmet Barlas, exposes the working of conspiracy theories in a story from the Southeastern city of Urfa, famous for the Lake of Abraham (cited in Guida, 2008: 46-50). Barlas mentions that people did not fish in the lake because of an ancient myth: When King Nimrod attempted to cast Abraham into flames on a hill, the flames became cooler and did not hurt Abraham. The ashes from those flames that fell into water were transformed into fishes, which are still believed to swim in the Lake of Abraham. During the Second World War, a German painter came to spend long hours there every day. The people of Urfa became suspicious of this foreigner and thought that he was a Nazi spy, who came to copy the shapes of these “holy fishes to improve German submarine design”. Then, they watched him in secret and found out that their guess was not right, since the painter spent long hours around the lake to catch and barbeque those holy fishes at night (cited in Guida, 2008: 46-50).

The suspicion of the people of Urfa was indisputably natural, as there was something unusual about the painter who stayed too long around the area. However, that suspicion leaped into a conspiratorial narrative involving major actors in world politics. An unusual event was transformed into maps of power relations on global level through a conspiracy theory. It could be argued that conspiracy theories are political narratives and cognitive maps that can contextualise everyday eccentricity into plans of power relations and provide meaning to people. Accordingly, Schneider (2002: 2) defines conspiracy theories as cognitive maps: “conspiracy theories are the myths of our age, in which the random and chaotic events of life are retrospectively ordered into a story with an explanatory purpose.”

Understanding conspiracy theories as cognitive maps may lead us to the concept of identity, which allows individuals to position themselves in a society through establishing links and borders with others. Fearon and Laitin (2000: 848) explain identity as a social category to which we take a pride in belonging. Fearon (1999: 12) states that if you lose a finger, you can still keep your identity, but if you suffer from

the advanced stages of Alzheimer's disease, you cannot locate yourself in society and therefore lose your identity. These accounts describe identity as a cognitive map anchoring us to society. As conspiracy theories also afford cognitive maps, they are likely to affect our identities by describing the world in alternative ways.

While doing so, conspiracy theories, like identity, provide ontological securities. According to Giddens (1991: 47), ontological security is a sense of continuity and order in events, including those not directly within the perceptual environment of an individual: "To be ontologically secure is to possess, on the level of the unconscious and practical consciousness, 'answers' to fundamental existential questions which all human life in some way addresses." Ontological security refers to a condition of being sure about your place in society. It allows a person to pin down the feelings of anxiety and uncertainty within tolerable limits, and therefore ontological security provides a protective cocoon for an individual to preserve his/her agency (Mitzen, 2006).

Kinnvall (2004) claims that contemporary social transformations make individuals more ontologically insecure. This encourages people to hold onto rigid identities of nationalism or of religion, because these provide a reaffirmation of existing identities in the face of ontological insecurities. Likewise, conspiracy theories provide an answer to feelings of ontological insecurity through contextualising anxiety in short-cut, essentialist, solid narratives. The people of Urfa, in the previous example (Guida, 2008), were relieving their ontological insecurities or political anxieties through creating a conspiratorial account about the German painter. By creating a conspiracy theory out of a random event, they attempted to draw a cognitive map that would help them to make sense of the wider social reality. In this line of thought, conspiracy theorists are people providing alternative cognitive maps to respond to ontological insecurities, and conspiracy believers are people who change their perspectives/identities when they subscribe into a conspiratorial perception of society. Therefore, their capacity to manipulate our identity and to relieve ontological insecurities makes conspiracy theories socially and politically significant texts.

Some of the common misunderstandings and confusions about conspiracy theories are due to neglecting these political and social implications of the phenomenon. For example, there is an important distinction between the word “conspiracy” and a conspiracy theory. Conspiracy is a “secret plan to commit crime” (Concise Oxford English Dictionary, 2009). It suggests that conspiracies are immoral acts, carried out secretly against the will of others. These include a wide range of activities, from planning a train robbery to toppling a political ruler. Conspiracy theories, however, are not merely theories based on conspiracies but cognitive maps that have broader connotations. Hence, we would not really talk about a conspiracy theory to rob a train, as the concept has wider political and social significance. Pipes (1997: 21) states this as follows: “A *conspiracy theory* is the fear of a nonexistent conspiracy. *Conspiracy* refers to an act, *conspiracy theory* to a perception.” Hofstadter describes conspiracy theory as a political perception, in the following terms:

All political behaviour requires strategy, many strategic acts depend for their effect upon a period of secrecy, and anything that is secret may be described, often with but little exaggeration as conspiratorial. The distinguishing thing about the paranoid style is not that its exponents see conspiracies or plots here and there in history, but that they regard a ‘vast’ or ‘gigantic’ conspiracy as *the motive force* in historical events (Hofstadter, 1965: 29).

Aaronovitch (2009: 309) highlights the social significance of conspiracy theories to distinguish the two: “I have written this book because I believe that conspiracies aren’t powerful. It is instead the idea of conspiracy that has power.” Cubitt (1993) also differentiates conspiracies from conspiracy theories by considering the content and the significance of these narratives. He claims that conspiracy theories regard conspiracies as the main element of society, while conspiracies constitute an everyday phenomenon. He underlines the difference as follows:

If conspiracies are various and numerous, what happens in politics and society is likely only rarely and irregularly to be what any particular set of conspirators has intended. A conspiracy theory asserts the opposite: that the events or trends with which it is concerned have regularly been the direct and intended products of conspiracy by one particular group. In effect, a

behavioural distinction is established between a non-conspiratorial majority in society and a minority who are fundamentally conspiratorial (Cubitt, 1993: 1-2).

This seems to suggest that conspiracy theories promote a belief system that challenges institutional approaches. Hence, they could be seen as conduits of political mistrust. Cedric (2006: 47) mentions that “thinking about conspiracy theory is to raise the question of the legitimisation of knowledge and how to produce knowledge.” Therefore, the power of conspiratorial accounts is not in their unlikely authenticity but in their ability to mobilise social and political discontent. That is to say, conspiracy theories’ empirical existence is secondary to their social and political significance. This aspect could be seen in the attitude of Orlin Grabbe, who reported the TWA 800 conspiracy theory on his website:

Stahl: You have a platform around the world.

Grabbe: Yes, I’d like to think that in the small, narrow subjects of which I’m writing about, I can compete with *The New York Times*.

Stahl: When you say you can compete with *The New York Times*, it’s actually true. If you plugged in TWA 800 [into a search engine], you might get a couple of articles from *The New York Times*, and you’d get a couple of articles from you, and an unsophisticated person really wouldn’t be able to distinguish in terms of accuracy, validity, checking journalism and all that...

Grabbe: Well, that’s true. The good side is that everyone can become a source, and the bad side is that everyone can become a source.

Stahl: Now you say flat out that TWA 800 was shot down by a phosphorous-headed missile. You don’t say it’s a theory, you don’t say may be, you don’t say there are indications that... You just say it.

Grabbe: Yeah! And that’s what I have to say.

Stahl: But you don't have any proof of that.

Grabbe: I know.

Stahl: Well...

Grabbe: So? (Cited in Balfour, 2000: 25-26)

Grabbe, as a conspiracy theorist, is not concerned whether his claims are verified or not, because the social impact he creates is more important. Thus, conspiracy theories' symbolic reality, i.e. their social and political significance, is prior to their empirical existence. Arendt (1967: 7) expresses that as follows: "if a patent forgery like the 'Protocols of the Elders of Zion' is believed by so many people that it can become the text of a whole political movement, the task of the historian is no longer to discover a forgery. Certainly it is not to invent explanations which dismiss the chief political and historical fact of the matter: that the forgery is being believed. This fact is more important than the (historically speaking, secondary) circumstance that it is a forgery."

In order to delineate conspiracy theories, we need to take their social and political significance into account. In this regard, conspiracy theories appear not as eccentric theories but as a specific narrative style with social/political functions. They provide political frames, identities and ontological securities by allegedly presenting the machinations in society. Therefore, Billig (1989: 164) sees them as an "ideological tradition", and Heins (2007: 791) suggests a fourfold analysis to explain the social significance of conspiracy theories. Considering the social and political significance of conspiracy theories also makes it easier to distinguish them from urban legends and rumours. While rumours are unverified social knowledge in circulation and urban legends are exemplary unusual stories about horrible events (see DiFronzo and Bordia, 2006; Shibutani, 1966; Kapferer, 1990), conspiracy theories are political narratives about power relations and how the world works: "Above all, conspiracy theory is a theory of power... Conspiracy theory perceives the power of the ruling individual, group, or coalition to be thoroughly instrumental, controlling virtually all aspects of social life, politics and economics" (Fenster, 1999: xiv). The thesis will

take conspiracy theories as narratives constituting a specific political tradition, which relies on a belief in a hidden, determining agency of people or groups on society. In other words, this research will conceptualise these theories as a specific social and political phenomenon, becoming prevalent in certain contexts.

1.3 The Contemporary Relevance of Conspiracy Theories

At the start of the twentieth century, stereotypes about Jews were turned into a major conspiracy theory by the book *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, which has been used by many different groups in a variety of contexts to blame Jews for moral decay and poverty in the world. For example, Nazi ideologues justified their political violence by the *Protocols* (Cohn, 1970; Bronner, 2003). Some other groups, such as the Bilderbergs, the Freemasonry, the Rothschild family and the Illuminati are also popular subjects of conspiracy theories, and therefore they have also been stigmatised. This suggests a relationship between the conspiratorial logic and the ideologies of hatred and bigotry. For that reason, analysing these theories will also mean to investigate the social bases of hatred and bigotry.

Currently, conspiracy theories seem to enjoy popularity (Strombeck, 2005). Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohammad repeated the arguments of *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* at the Tenth Islamic Summit Conference (Anti-Defamation League, 2003; BBC, 2003). He claimed that Jews dominate the world today, and that they invented ideologies such as socialism, communism and human rights to conceal their power (Anti-Defamation League, 2007). Mohammad Ali Ramin, an advisor to the Iranian Prime Minister Ahmadinejad, argued that Hitler was Jewish (Middle East Media Research Institute, 2005). The examples of conspiracy theories are not confined to politics. Books themed around conspiracy theories, such as *The Da Vinci Code*² (Brown, 2003) as well as Pat Robertson's, David Icke's and Don DeLillo's works, have sold extensively (Willman, 1998). Moreover, conspiratorial television series and films such as *X-Files*³, *Conspiracy Theory*, *Men*

² The book printed more than forty million copies and was published in forty-two languages. It was also adapted into a film with the same title (BBC, 2006).

³ The *X-Files* is an Emmy Award-winning popular American television series, which was on air for nine years. In the United States alone, it had between 7,800,000 and 29,100,000 viewers (see Kellner, 1999; Wildermuth, 1999; Sookup, 2002; Dorsey, 2002).

in Black and *JFK* attracted a wide audience (see Nelson, 2003). The death of Princess Diana (LondonNet, 2008; Broderick and Miller, 2008), Hurricane Katrina (see Aaronovitch, 2009), and the 9/11 attacks (see Fetzer, 2005; Knight, 2008) have all been subjects of conspiratorial accounts. Indeed, the world of conspiracy theories today stretches from the SARS virus to Reptilians.

Conspiratorial logic has recently become widespread in Turkey as well. Some groups accuse the Justice and Development Party (AKP) government of conspiring to abolish the modern secular Turkish state. With the coming to power of AKP, there was an idea that the party could be engaged in dissimulation (*takiyye*), and that it would soon enforce a state based on Islam in Turkey (Heper, 2005). These allegations turned into a big debate after one of the AKP members, Abdullah Gül, became a candidate for the presidential elections⁴. As the party held enough of a majority of the parliament, he was expected to become president. The opposition parties and some army officials contested this, as they saw the party a potential threat to secularism (Matthews, 2007; Zakaria, 2007; *The Economist*, 2007a; *The Economist*, 2007b). There were mass demonstrations, called “Republic Protests”, by the public who shared the same mistrust (BBC, 2007). Under these conditions, the parliament was forced to call early elections in July 2007.

There are also conspiracy theories about the Turkish candidacy to the European Union (EU) membership. Some claim that European countries weaken Turkey through the demands on the process of becoming an EU member (Akyol, 2007). The demands of the EU for a more liberal approach to Cyprus or to Kurdish minority rights are seen as conspiracies against the unity of the country. Some well-known writers such as the Nobel Laureate Orhan Pamuk and Elif Şafak are accused of being traitors serving foreign interests (Traynor, 2006; Ergun, 2006). These theories have turned into demonstrations and attacks on writers, journalists and academics. Recently, an Armenian journalist Hrant Dink, who had been sued by the state for insulting Turkishness, was assassinated by a teenager (CNN, 2007). Dink, who had angered the Turkish nationalists by challenging the state’s stance on the Armenian deportation, was the subject of right-wing conspiracy theories.

⁴ He eventually got the post.

After the assassination, the current Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan argued that the dark forces of ‘the deep state’ might be at work (Rainsford, 2007). The *deep state*, as a concept, is an important part of the *paranoid style* of Turkish politics. It is believed to consist of high level officials from military, security, intelligence services, judiciary branch and bureaucracy, who hold an ultra-statist and nationalist ideology. It is alleged to curb down the marginal elements in Turkish politics. In other words, it has been considered as the interior state, determined to defend the *status quo* by any means. Therefore, it has been related to assassinations of leftists in 1970s and Kurdish nationalists after 1990s. The former Prime Minister Ecevit and former president Kenan Evren both referred to the existence of the *deep state* (Kanlı, 2007). Süleyman Demirel, seven-time Prime Minister of the Turkish republic, implied the existence of the deep state as follows: “it is a fundamental principle that there is one state. In our country there are two” (Gorvett, 2006). The current Prime Minister Erdoğan believes that the deep state is the legacy of the Ottoman Empire (Sabah, 2007).

Currently, the deep state discussions in Turkey came to the fore with the trial on the alleged clandestine, ultra-nationalist terrorist organisation called ‘Ergenekon’. It is argued that the Ergenekon organisation is the core of the deep state, which aims to eliminate the perceived threats to the Turkish state including Nobel Laureate Orhan Pamuk (Rainsford, 2008). It is also claimed that the organisation has deep ties with the members of the security forces, universities and judiciary system (Acar, 2008). More than a hundred politicians, ex-military officials, journalists and intellectuals are accused of being involved in the Ergenekon network (Steinvorth, 2009). Because of the scale of the event, some commentators argue that the Ergenekon trial is “the case of the century” (Gülerce, 2008). The debates around the alleged Ergenekon network and the deep state not only show the potential existence of conspiracies but also denote the significance of the subject in Turkey.

As it could be seen from the examples of the popularity of the television series of *Kurtlar Vadisi - The Valley of Wolves*⁵, *Kurtlar Vadisi Teror - The Valley of the Wolves: Terror*, *Deliyürek - The MadHeart*, the cinema film *Valley of Wolves: Iraq* and the books of Soner Yalçın, such as *Efendi: Beyaz Türklerin Büyük Sırrı - The Master: Big Secret of White Turks* (2004), *Efendi 2: Beyaz Müslümanların Büyük Sırrı* (2006), Yalçın Küçük's *Şebeke-Network* (2004), *Tekeliyet 1 - Oligopoly -1* (2003), *Tekeliyet 2 - Oligopoly 2* (2003), and *Metal Fırtına - The Metal Storm* (Uçar and Turna, 2004), conspiracy theories are also prevailing themes of popular culture in contemporary Turkey. They not only attracted mass attention but also initiated political discussions. The television series *The Valley of the Wolves-Terror* was taken off the air because of the belief that these products motivate people like the teenage assassin of Hrant Dink. In that sense, conspiracy theories are prevalent in Turkey today⁶. In response to its growing importance, discussions on the subject have already started (see Polat, 2004; Bali, 2004; Bozarslan, 2004; Özdoğan, 2004, Erdem, 2004; Binark, 2007, Taburoğlu, 2008; Baykan, 2008). In addition, Turkey, geopolitically, provides an interesting case, as its culture is situated in between the East and the West, and its politics swing between the modern and the traditional. Regardless, the issue of conspiracy theories in Turkey has not been empirically studied. In fact, conspiracy theories outside the United States have not been systematically examined.

It should not go without stating that many conspiracy theories in Turkey share anti-Semitic tendencies⁷, and recently the most significant theme they use is the crypto-

⁵ *The Valley of the Wolves* was a television series, which appealed to a mass audience. It was about the conspiratorial world of the deep state and contained many political connotations. Its popularity and political relevance led to some masters theses on the series (Çelebi, 2006; Uslu, 2006; Gültekin, 2006; Uçan, 2006). Thanks to its popularity, it could afford to include Hollywood stars such as Sharon Stone and Andy Garcia in the cast in its last season, which was a first-time issue in Turkey. A cinema film *Valley of the Wolves: Iraq* was shot right after the series ended. It also featured another Hollywood star, Billy Zane. Recently, there was new television series called *The Valley of the Wolves: Terror*, which aimed to talk about the Kurdish problem in Turkey. It was banned after the first airing, and then the producers came up with a new one, *The Valley of the Wolves: Ambush*.

⁶ There are undoubtedly other fields of conspiratorial allegations in Turkey, such as football. They are not mentioned, as they are not directly relevant to the thesis.

⁷ As Halpern (1981) mentions, anti-Semitism is very hard to be identified, as it has a range of meanings from hostile Nazism to religious stigmatisation. Therefore, a working definition of anti-Semitism is needed: "Antisemitism is an attitude belief/feeling/disposition of hostility towards the Jews based on Greco-Roman/Christian/ Muslim [or any other] tradition, as a cultural/social/economic/political threat very low/very high, and minimally/maximally elaborated in religious/racial/socialist/nationalist terms by minor (lunatic fringe) groups/major (political) forces for extrinsic/intrinsic reasons" (Halpern, 1981: 252-253).

Jewish Dönmes. The current prevalence of the anti-Semitic content in conspiracy theories in Turkey seems to be parallel to the global discourse. The television series *Al-Shatat* in Syria and *A Knight Without Horse* in Egypt (see Middle East Media Research Institute, 2002; 2003) narrated the themes of *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. The discussion on new anti-Semitism (see Taguieff, 2004; Klug, 2004; Lewis, 2006; Finkelstein, 2005) could be another indicator to the increasing relevance of the subject today. The new anti-Semitism exists on a very thin line between an anti-Israel stance and anti-Semitism. The opponents of the concept claim that it has been used to silence whoever criticises Israel (Ali, 2004). Indeed, it can be seen as a re-popularisation of anti-Semitism along with an opposition to Israel. For that reason, it is not confined to right-wing politics. The current increase of the anti-Semitic themes has created a concern among leftist and liberal thinkers, some of whom criticised the prevalence of the subject in left-wing politics (see Euston Manifesto, 2007). By analysing the contemporary anti-Semitic conspiracy theories on Dönmes in Turkey, this work will also contribute to these discussions.

1.4 The Theoretical Approach and the Research Design

There are three main trends in the academic literature on conspiracy theories. The internalist approach focuses on the methodology of these theories (Pigden, 1995; Keeley, 1999; Coady 2003). It is involved with discussions such as whether conspiracy theories have methodological reliability. The externalist perspective elaborates on the significance and the effects of conspiracy theories. It has two different types of approaches: the classical and the cultural. The classical view mainly stresses the similarity of the conspiratorial logic with political paranoia. Popper's (1966) opposition to essentialism and conspiratorial logic, Hofstadter's (1965) attempts politically to delineate conspiracy theories, and Cohn's (1970) investigation of Holocaust are well-known products of this approach. They underline the political significance of the subject and tend to conceptualise conspiracy theories as political pathologies. Some went further, to present these theories as psychological pathologies (Robins and Post, 1997). The cultural perspective considers conspiracy theories as important social symptoms. It most often investigates secondary data like literary books or television series to understand the

underlying social reasons of conspiracy theories (Melley, 2000; Knight, 2000; Dean, 1998; Fenster, 1999).

The theoretical discussion of the thesis will combine these three trends in the academic literature on conspiracy theories. First, the classical approach will be helpful to understand the political influence of conspiratorial logic. It will be utilised while investigating the relevance of reactionary ideologies to conspiracy theories and these theories' political impacts on micro and macro levels. Second, the cultural approach, which looks at the social relevance of the subject, will be used to discuss the characteristics of the contemporary society that set the ground for these theories. It will be helpful to describe the social significance of conspiracy theories today: How are they constructed and distributed? Who are claims-makers⁸? Who tends to believe in them? In which social contexts are conspiracy theories prevalent? Third, the discussion will refer to the methodological characteristics of conspiratorial accounts and the relationship between the methods and the content. The internalist perspective will assist this analysis.

The study is based on two types of data: frame analysis and interviews. First of all, it will explore the content of popular conspiracy theory books to outline their ideological messages. The frame analysis of the best-selling *Efendi* series (Yalçın, 2004; 2006) will mainly examine the methodological characteristics, literary style and political content of a conspiracy theory about Dönmes. In that way, the study will provide a model of the working of conspiracy theories through investigating both the methodology and the political content of the *Efendi* series. It will also allow a comparative analysis in the following chapters, which consist of interviews with readers and political parties, in terms of revealing what is in the text in comparison to what is perceived by the audience.

Second, I conducted interviews with conspiracy theorists, political parties and individuals to discuss the political effects and social significance of conspiracy theories. Knight and Arksey (1999: 15) claim that interviews provide us means to explore human meaning systems. As the research mainly intends to understand the

⁸ According to Loseke (1997: 29), claims-makers are the people who try to persuade public about the importance of a problem.

effects of conspiracy theories on the political perspectives of individuals and political parties, interviews provide an efficient research tool, which can portray the ways conspiracy theories influence political perspectives.

The interviews with conspiracy theorists are attempts to understand their political stances and aim to contribute to the literature. By doing so, the divisions within the Dönme conspiracy literature are demonstrated through different theorists with various methodological and political attitudes. The interviews also identify the relationship between the political perspectives and methodological attitudes of those writers. I also interviewed readers of the *Efendi* series to see how the content of the books is perceived. The questions generally focused on what kind of political messages people receive from these books, how they respond to the content and how these conspiracy theories affect their political perspectives.

Moreover, I contacted five political parties representing different ideological stances: Conservative-Liberal AKP - Justice and Development Party, Turkish Nationalist MHP - Nationalist Action Party, the Republican CHP - Republican People's Party, Islamist SP - Felicity Party and Kurdish-leftist DTP - Democratic Society Party. I investigated what they thought of the conspiracy theories on Dönmes and how their approach was influenced by those theories. As they range from right-wing to left-wing, I will be able to discuss the effects of the conspiracy theories in different political circles. The question of who to interview in political parties left me with a dilemma of choosing between party members from central headquarters and from local branches. Because my aim was to understand the changes in general party approach, I decided to interview party representatives from central headquarters. This choice may restrict my ability to reach what is really happening on local levels, where I may find more genuine answers. However, local branches, varying from each other, would not provide sufficient data. Besides, members of party assemblies are more likely to be the most responsible and careful about transmitting party messages to the public. In that sense, it is easier to demonstrate how they officially evaluate, respond and contribute to the discussions of conspiracy theories through interviewing them.

One of the main focuses of the interviews is to lay out the social communication process of conspiracy theories. Thus, they start from the source of these theories, i.e. the writers, and go on to individuals and political parties. In this way, the thesis will be able to demonstrate the intentions of the writers, the perceptions of the readers and the uses in mainstream politics from a comparative perspective. The interviews will also provide evidence on different ways of involvement in conspiratorial literature from different political ideologies.

To sum up, the theoretically threefold approach is in accordance with the methodological eclecticism of the thesis. This eclectic stance allows me to analyse the methodological, social and political characteristics of the Dönme conspiracy theories in a holistic manner. It also helps to give a comprehensive account on the social and political significance of conspiracy theory from its production process to its impacts. In this respect, the thesis supplies a distinct methodological perspective to the literature as well as being the first attempt to provide an empirical analysis of the effects of conspiracy theories.

1.5 The Plan of the Thesis

The research is composed of ten chapters. The second chapter will discuss the academic literature on conspiratorial accounts, and attempt to highlight the differences and the common points of the three perspectives: the internalist, the classical and the cultural. It will also point to the weaknesses and the strengths of each approach. After demarcating the academic literature on conspiracy theories, the research will develop a theoretical standpoint in the third chapter. This will propose a comprehensive account by considering the three aforementioned approaches on the political impacts, methodological characteristics and social significance of conspiracy theories. In order to do that, it will use Adorno's (1994) discussion on astrology along with Girard's theory on sacrifice, which will help to consider the political, social and methodological aspects of conspiracy theories. In addition, the third chapter will analyse *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* as a case to demonstrate this theoretical approach.

In the fourth chapter, the thesis will start exploring the Dönme case by investigating the history of social constructions, principally conspiracy theories, about the community in Turkey. It will consider the socio-political mechanisms, reasons and significance of the conspiracy theories in different periods. While doing so, different claims-makers' conspiracy theories about the group and the variety of ways in which they problematise it will be identified. In this regard, both the contexts and the agents of the conspiratorial accounts will be discussed. The chapter will first introduce some relevant theoretical discussions of the social constructionist perspective. Second, it will present Dönme history along with the social constructions about the community. Third, it will consider possible reasons behind distinct constructions in different periods. It will enable an examination of the historical evolution of the conspiracy theories about Dönmes. It will also be able to test the reliability of the theoretical approach of the third chapter.

The fifth chapter will draw on the interviews with the popular conspiracy writers on the Dönme topic. The chapter will attempt to understand the reasons and the ways of producing a conspiratorial account. It will also illustrate the different methodological tools and identities of these writers. While doing so, it will look at how the writers differentiate themselves from each other in terms of ideological perspectives and the methods they use. In that way, it will comparatively investigate the effects of different political beliefs of the authors on conspiratorial accounts. Subsequently, the sixth chapter will present the study's frame analysis of the best-selling Dönme conspiracy series, *Efendi 1* (Yalçın, 2004) and *Efendi 2* (Yalçın, 2006). It will emphasise the political framework of the books in relation to their methodology, literary devices and the responses they created in media. It intends to interrelate the books' ideological content, social significance and methodological characteristics. It will show the workings of a conspiratorial account. It will complement the fifth chapter, in which the intentions of Yalçın are summarised, as it will also discuss the discrepancies between the writer's aims and the content of the series.

The thesis will explore the interviews with the *Efendi* series' readers in the seventh chapter. In doing so, it aims to reveal the effects of the books on the political perspectives of readers. The chapter will look at the issues such as whether conspiracy theories lead people to marginal political ideas, bigotry or anti-Semitism.

It contains conversations with people from different political, occupational, age and educational groups to provide a broad analysis regarding the effects of conspiracy theories on the political attitudes of their readers. In the eighth chapter, the study will outline the results of the interviews with representatives of four Turkish political parties. It will survey the influence of the conspiracy culture on party politics. In other words, it will discuss the significance of the conspiracy theories on macro politics. It will also demonstrate the different handlings of the same conspiratorial account among different ideological stances. The data from the political parties will give additional evidence on the historical evolution of the Dönme conspiratorial accounts among different political actors, as the research will compare the contemporary macro-political uses with the past. The interviews with the readers and the political parties will also be complementary to the frame analysis of the *Efendi* series and the interviews with the conspiracy theorists in terms of demonstrating the social communication of a conspiracy theory.

Finally, building on the analysis of the Dönme case, the research will attempt to comprehend the general sociological reasons of the prevalence of conspiracy theories today. In order to do that, the ninth chapter will consider the nature of contemporary social transformations with a particular focus on the changes in politics and communication technologies. It will discuss the social grounds on which contemporary conspiratorial accounts are built. In so doing, it will employ contemporary sociological theories such as network society and politics of fear. It will conclude with a discussion on the social and political significance of conspiracy theories today. A brief concluding chapter will summarise the findings of the thesis.

In total, the research is composed of three main parts. The first three chapters delineate the concept of conspiracy theories, evaluate the literature and posit the theoretical framework of the thesis. They develop the theoretical perspective of the thesis. The subsequent five chapters consist of the empirical work and the historical analysis of the Dönme discussion, which collect relevant empirical data on the case to test the hypotheses developed in the first three chapters. This will provide a detailed analysis of the Dönme conspiracy theories. The ninth chapter and the conclusion seek the universal validity of the claims made on the Dönme case by generalising the findings to the rest of the conspiracy literature. Therefore, the thesis

could be read like a wave rising among theory (universal), case (particular) and conclusion (universal).

1.6. Conclusion

This research is an effort to explain the social and political significance of conspiracy theories by looking at their methodologies, content and distribution. It is a product of an initial curiosity about why marginal political groups, which tend to get involved in violence, often use conspiratorial accounts. It aims to fill the gap in the academic literature about the social and political relevance of conspiratorial accounts. To achieve that, the conspiracy theories on Dönmes in Turkey were chosen as the case, because they reflect the universal tendencies of the general conspiratorial tradition. The study endeavours to create a basic understanding of conspiratorial thinking by prioritising its symbolic existence to its empirical reality, since, as cognitive maps, it has important social and political implications on individuals' and groups' identities. This aspect renders conspiracy theories' social significance more important than their doubtful reality. However, this does not mean that their alleged reality is without any importance, as their success depends on their ability to imitate reality and fill the gaps of official explanations. Besides, the thesis will be the first empirical research that develops a systematic understanding of the social communication and political effects of conspiratorial thinking. The following chapter will continue to develop the theoretical perspective of the thesis through an analysis of the academic literature, which will disclose its problems and strengths in detail.

Chapter 2. The Academic Literature on Conspiracy Theories

2.1. Introduction

The academic discussions about conspiracy theories are based on their philosophical and socio-political significance. The philosophical approach talks about the methodological aspects and epistemological warranty of these accounts. It centres on the internal aspects of conspiracy theories and will be called the internalist perspective. The socio-political approach focuses more on understanding the social and political implications of conspiracy theories. Hence, it will be called the externalist perspective. This chapter will first analyse the internalist discussion and then move to the externalist account. Finally, there will be a comparison of these two approaches in a brief conclusion.

2.2 The Internalist Perspective

Can we accept conspiracy theories as warranted explanations, i.e. are they reliable? If they are unwarranted, how can we explain real conspiracies such as Watergate? Would it be naïve to deny all conspiracy theories, or would it be blind to consider them erudite texts? While investigating these questions, the internalist literature draws on the methodological characteristics of conspiracy theories by using concepts such as fundamental attribution error, errant data and dispositional factors. As follows, the debate on the issue of warrant will be revealed, and then the rest of the methodological discussion will be analysed.

2.2.1 The Issue of Warrant

One of the first scholars trying to answer the warrant question is Keeley. According to Keeley (1996), three main components of conspiracy theories are as follows: they should explain events, they should show conspirators' key role, and there has to be a group of people conspiring. Keeley suggests a division between warranted and unwarranted conspiracy theories, although he fails to provide a clear distinction between the two. In this perspective, warranted conspiracy theories provide more

reliable perspectives and alternative explanations. In contrast, unwarranted conspiracy theories have the following characteristics:

1. An unwarranted conspiracy theory is an explanation that runs counter to some received, official, or 'obvious' account.
2. The true intentions behind the conspiracy are invariably nefarious.
3. An unwarranted conspiracy theory typically seeks to tie together seemingly unrelated events.
4. ... the truths behind events explained by conspiracy theories are typically well-guarded secrets, even if the ultimate perpetrators are sometimes well-known public figures.
5. The chief tool of the conspiracy theorist is what I shall call *errant data*⁹ (Keeley, 1996: 116-117).

For Keeley, errant data has a key importance in construction of conspiracy theories, as it is a tool of rejecting official accounts by creating an alternative *bricolage* out of the givens of reality. An example could be given from 9/11 conspiracy theories, some of which argued that all the Jewish employees in the Twin Towers did not go to work, as they had been warned by the Israeli secret agency Mossad (Vitkine, 2005). Here, a conspiracy theorist uses errant data by taking a statistic, no matter whether it is true or not, and adding a story to counter the official explanation.

Keeley (1996) argues that falsifiability¹⁰ is not a sufficient criterion to condemn conspiracy theories, as it is a more appropriate concept for natural sciences. Besides, rejecting conspiracy theories on the basis of falsifiability would mean an exclusion of the possibility that there are genuine conspiracies. Regardless, Keeley contends that the advantages of suspecting conspiracy theories outweigh the trust. First,

⁹ By errant data, Keeley (1996: 118) refers to two things: first, the data, which is not used in the official explanations, and second, the data contradicting the official explanation.

¹⁰ Falsifiability refers to the logical possibility of a research, theory or an assertion being demonstrated as false by an observation or an experiment.

conspiracy theories pose scepticism about official explanations and create a disbelief in all existing accounts: "We undermine the grounds for believing in anything. At some point, we shall be forced to recognise the unwarranted nature of the conspiracy theory if we are to be left with any warranted explanations and beliefs at all" (ibid, 123). Second, conspiracy theories present a controllable world and ignore the uncontrollable and complex character of human nature. In other words, human nature is not as controllable and as predictable as the natural world.

According to Keeley, conspiracy theories should not be trusted as explanatory schemes, because their scepticism undermines the belief in warranted/official knowledge and damages the authority of officialdom (ibid). In this sense, the problems of conspiracy theories are due to their way of looking at the world and about the theorists rather than the theories: they are about the degree of scepticism towards existing institutions. Therefore, the best we can do is not to study each conspiracy theory's authenticity but to "track the evaluation of given theories over time and come to some consensus as to when belief in the theory entails more scepticism than we can stomach" (ibid, 126). Keeley summarises the dilemma conspiracy theories pose as follows:

Considered in this light, the challenge of conspiracy theory is that it forces us to choose between an utmost nihilistic degree of scepticism and absurdism; the conspiracy theorist chooses to embrace the hyper-scepticism inherent in supposing dissimulation on a truly massive scale (by distrusting the claims of our institutions) over the absurdism of an irrational and essentially meaningless world. Until a third option is presented... we should expect UCTs [unwarranted conspiracy theories] to continue to enjoy significant popularity (Keeley, 2006: 59).

Basham (2006) does not agree with Keeley's conclusion and notes that conspiracy theories cannot be refuted solely because of their absurdity. Instead, he suggests that conspiracy theories should be rejected, as there is nothing we can do about them:

In the present civilisational system epistemic rejection of conspiracies cannot succeed... Nor because we find ourselves on the avant garde side of an

imagined cultural clash between *Hegelian Hyper-Rationalist* and *Camus-Absurdist* worldviews. A more solid ground for the rejection of conspiracy theories is simply pragmatic. *There is nothing you can do...* The futile pursuit of malevolent conspiracy theory sours or at least distracts us from what is good and valuable in life (Basham, 2006: 74).

Basham (2003) rejects the arguments that see conspiracy theories unwarranted on the basis of their unfalsifiability, uncontrollability, trustworthiness of public institutions and paranoia. Initially, he claims that unfalsifiability is an important point, but if we have the necessary grounds of suspicion, it is not sufficient to reject conspiracy theories. He gives an example from the Watergate scandal, which was a conspiracy theory in the beginning but turned out to be the reality in the end (ibid, 93). Secondly, the uncontrollability argument, which states that human relations are more complex and uncontrollable than conspiracy theories depict, is not sufficient either, since many organisations have hierarchical structures by which they can control people's conduct according to their interests. Thirdly, official institutions may not always be trustworthy, as they may have conflicting interests with the public. Fourthly, whereas the "paranoia is an *unreasonable* fear of someone" (ibid, 100), we have enough reasons to believe that conspiracies are happening. Thus, labelling people who believe in conspiracy theories as paranoiacs is not realistic. On the contrary, Basham claims that conspiracy theories are intrinsic to everyday life:

In today's society, there is an unavoidable and serious *prior probability* of active conspiracy... [Therefore] the conspiracy theorist's concern is a natural response... In the corporate world it [the conspiracy] is business as usual... Industries pour billions of dollars into preventing and no doubt conducting industrial espionage. They conspire against other corporations and expect the same against themselves. Competing political ideological and religious organisations are no different... It is called history" (Basham, 2003: 95-97).

Basham presents conspiracies as a natural component of social life; they are not *reductio ad absurdum* explanations of paranoid minds (ibid). Hence, Basham (2001: 277) prefers to respond to countless conspiracy theories by "not responding at all", as we cannot grasp their reach. Keeley (2003) replies to Basham mainly on three

grounds. First, he accuses Basham of taking the bull from the horns (ibid, 106) by which he means that Basham is discussing the most absurd conspiracy theories. Second, Basham's presentation of conspiracies as an everyday phenomenon is found inadequate by Keeley because of the wide gap between everyday conspiracies and global conspiracy theories. Third, Keeley states that there is no need for secrecy in all conspiracy theories. However, he agrees with Basham on the idea that unfalsifiability and paranoia do not provide legitimate grounds for rejecting conspiracy theories (ibid, 106-107). The uncontrollability aspect of society, which contradicts conspiracy theories' explanation of large scale events as plots of a small secret group, is an indicator to understand conspiracy theories' reliability, because the more conspiracy theories rely on small groups, the less they are warranted according to Keeley (ibid).

While Goodenough (2000) accepts the unwarranted-warranted distinction, he criticises some of Keeley's points. He opposes Keeley's acceptance of conspiracy theories as undermining official explanations, because there can be official conspiracies (ibid, 5). Moreover, the intentions behind conspiracy theories need not to be nefarious, because sometimes governments may produce conspiracy theories for public benefit (ibid). However, Goodenough agrees with Keeley on the importance of errant data and proposes his own scheme about why unwarranted conspiracy theories go wrong:

1. Unwarranted conspiracy theories are not able to assess evidence properly.
2. Unwarranted conspiracy theories are likely to take in some distorted information unquestionably as evidence, and therefore they are not reliable.
3. Unwarranted conspiracy theories are biased to opt for suspicious explanations, even if there is an equally mundane one.
4. Some people and organisations are demonised as inherently evil.
5. The rest of the people, who do not belong to the conspirators group, are

the victims of that evil minority.

6. Unwarranted conspiracy theories narrate all actions in a rational order and everything goes according to plans. In that sense, they are unrealistic.
7. The evidence against unwarranted conspiracy theories is never accepted by theorists.
8. Unwarranted conspiracy theories' tendency to attach meaning to be related [in a family or a community] is problematic.
9. It is not reliable that they explain events in a sequential order (Goodenough, 2000: 7-11).

Goodenough rejects unwarranted conspiracy theories' demonisation of some institutions, because there should be some good people in those institutions, who would reject the nefarious plans (ibid). This point is similar to the uncontrollability argument, which states that human relations are more complex and uncontrollable than conspiracy theories depict. Goodenough also states that conspiracy theories might be good sources of thinking, but they have methodological problems. The separation between warranted and unwarranted conspiracy theories is an attempt to preserve and benefit from useful explanations of these theories.

In a similar fashion, Casabuerta, Figueras and Martinez (1999) find conspiratorial accounts unwarranted due to *ad hominem* and patchwork quilt fallacies. They claim that conspiracy theorists' replies to criticism are *ad hominem*, because they attack the source or characteristic of the claim rather than addressing the substance of the argument or demonstrating counter evidence. Conspiracy theorists also commit patchwork quilt fallacies, as they construct their theories through combining irrelevant elements.

All the above scholars are caught in a dilemma about whether conspiracy theories are methodologically warranted explanations or not. They suggest that we can neither believe nor ignore them completely. They propose different solutions:

Basham claims that we should not care. Keeley contends that although some conspiracy theories are important, the degree of scepticism they pose is dangerous. For Goodenough, we need to develop better ways to differentiate warranted conspiracy theories from unwarranted ones to profit from them as alternative explanations. As will be discussed in the following section, other scholars from the same debate focus on different methodological questions.

2.2.2 Other Methodological Aspects of Conspiracy Theories

Clarke (2002: 133) criticises Keeley's account of conspiracy theories as wrong interpretation, because the division between warranted and unwarranted conspiracy theories just confuses the situation, and Keeley intends to attack a sort of conspiracy theory but "ends up attacking the reasoning patterns of conspiracy theorists." Clarke highlights situational and dispositional explanations (ibid, 146). Situational accounts are oriented towards the contexts of events, whereas dispositional explanations put the stress upon hidden causes. He argues that conspiracy theorists always look for dispositional explanations, which lead them to commit fundamental attribution error, i.e. over-emphasising dispositional factors over situational ones. Hence, "to give up a conspiracy theory in favour of a nonconspiratorial alternative is typically to abandon a dispositional explanation in favour of a situational explanation.... [which] involves overcoming the fundamental attribution error" (ibid, 146).

Clarke also differentiates between progressive and degenerating research programmes. Progressive research programmes make sound predictions, whereas degenerating research programmes modify initial conditions and auxiliary hypotheses to defend a theory from disconfirmation (ibid, 136). In other words, degenerating research programmes are biased on a belief and protect it at all costs. Thus, the conspiracy theories on the Watergate scandal are an example of a progressive research programme, and the ones about Elvis Presley are degenerative.

Apart from rejecting the unwarranted-warranted division, Clarke does not agree with Keeley on two main points. First, the definition of errant data and its relation to conspiracies are not telling, because errant data "is only errant in relation to an accepted theory, and to discount errant data on grounds that apply to both errant and

non-errant data would be to prejudice oneself in favour of data, simply because it happens to be explained by the received theory” (ibid, 140). Second, Clarke opposes Keeley’s claim that the belief in unwarranted conspiracies will undermine the trust in official institutions. He contends that believing in neither warranted nor unwarranted conspiracy theories will necessarily lead an individual to lose confidence in officialdom (ibid, 141). Accordingly, he does not find conspiracy theories harmful. He states that they are tools to challenge existing explanations and to improve our theories, and therefore even if one conspiracy theory will turn out to be true, it is worth taking all of them seriously. Conspiracy theories force governments to be more transparent, because they collect evidence and do not leave any space for potential government cover-ups. In this sense, Clarke’s critique stresses methodological problems of conspiracy theories, but it does not lead him to reject them: “Perhaps we should thank the conspiracy theorist for remaining vigilant on our behalf” (ibid, 91).

Coady (2005: 208) finds Clarke’s fundamental attribution hypothesis problematic, as that theory itself is a fundamental attribution error due to exaggerating the importance of dispositions. In other words, it is a paradox to accept fundamental attribution error as a disposition to dismiss conspiracy theories. Besides, Coady argues that situational factors are not appropriate explanatory tools:

The situational factor... cannot do the explanatory work on its own, but only in combination with some dispositional factor... The fact that a small alteration in situational factors (or in plain English ‘the situation’) leads to a surprisingly large alteration in behavioural patterns that does not mean that we tend to underestimate the importance of the situation when predicting behaviour, it means that we have failed to identify correctly the dispositions which led to the original behaviour (Coady, 2005: 207).

In response to Keeley, Coady (ibid, 203) suggests that conspiracy theories do not have to contradict official explanations, as they may explain the events that are not clarified by officialdom. Furthermore, Coady believes that conspiracy theories are socially context specific: we cannot distinguish between the warranted and

unwarranted versions (ibid). Hence, he refuses the dismissive attitude towards conspiracy theories and suggests a position between paranoia and naivety:

I propose an Aristotelian approach to the issue, according to which the intellectual virtue of realism is a golden mean between the intellectual vices of *paranoia* and *naivety*. Paranoids will be predisposed to believe that, in our society at least, official information is untrustworthy. Naifs, on the other hand, will be inclined to believe the opposite. Both groups will hold their attitudes sacred. A realist, by contrast, adopts an attitude of reflective equilibrium toward social information on the one hand, and conspiracy theories on the other. Her attitude towards conspiracy theories will depend on the extent of her prior trust in officialdom (Coady, 2006: 126).

Pigden (2006: 157) also disagrees with the approach that labels all conspiracy theories as false accounts: "I shall be arguing that the idea that there is something intellectually suspect about conspiracy theories as such – which is presupposed by the use of 'conspiracy theory' and 'conspiracy theorist' as generalised terms of intellectual abuse – is simply a superstition." He claims that many conspiracy theories are accurate. In other words, Pigden is against the contingency theory¹¹ view of the world: "... it is dangerous superstition since it invests the lies, evasions and self-deceptions of torturers and warmongers with a spurious air of methodological sophistication" (ibid, 165). He talks about historical examples such as King George II, whose actions can be best comprehended from a conspiratorial view:

Every historically and politically literate person is a conspiracy theorist on a grand scale, though many 'intellectuals', politicians and political commentators are apparently unaware of the fact. Why so? Because history records a vast number of conspiracies – that is secret plans to influence events by partly covert means - that are seriously in doubt (Pigden, 2006: 157).

¹¹ Contingency theories, contrary to conspiracy theories, claim that events happen randomly, and there is no ultimate plan behind them. Coincidences shape the history according to this view (Willman, 2002).

Similarly, Raikka (2008) points out that conspiracy theories are not necessarily weaker explanations than standard descriptions of politics, as there are conspiracies happening in politics. Therefore, while being aware of the inadequacies of conspiracy theories, Raikka shows the reasons for which we cannot dismiss all of them.

2.2.3 Discussion

Undeniably, conspiracy theories have social, political and cultural significance. They seem to provide symptoms of the contexts from which they emerge. For instance, many conspiracy theories about Hurricane Katrina have insisted on a government plot against the black population, which can be rejected as an unwarranted explanation on epistemological grounds by using the concepts such as fundamental attribution error or errant data. However, a closer look at the social meaning of these theories could be more telling. The police beating of a 64 year-old-black man in the aftermath of the disaster unfolds the racial tension between blacks and whites in New Orleans (see Bernardini, 2005; Randall, 2005). Furthermore, Kelman (2009) illustrates that in the environmental history of the city, levees were exploded at the expense of the poorer populations, and therefore he suggests that conspiracy theories about the hurricane cannot be dismissed as pathological views. The conspiracy theories about Hurricane Katrina, while being unverified and unwarranted, reflect the political and social problems of New Orleans, since blacks expressed their racial oppression through those accounts. Thus, the internalist perspective could benefit more from understanding the social and political significance of conspiracy theories.

Conspiracy theories, as the previous chapter argues, constitute a unique political tradition evolved through history (Billig, 1989). Different conspiracy theories such as the ones about Illuminati, Freemasonry, secret societies or communists feed off each other and draw on the same political tradition. The internalist perspective appears to dismiss that aspect. Symptomatically, Coady, who provides the most detailed definition of conspiracy theories in the internalist perspective, does not mention any historical tradition:

A conspiracy theory is a proposed explanation of an historical event, in which conspiracy (i.e., agents acting secretly in concert) has a significant causal role. Furthermore, the conspiracy postulated by the proposed explanation must be a conspiracy to bring about the historical event, which it purports to explain. Finally, the proposed explanation must conflict with an 'official' explanation of the same historical event (Coady, 2005: 201).

Although the internalist perspective is important to understanding conspiracy theories' methodological insufficiencies and epistemological problems, it lacks analyses of the social and political significance and the historical tradition of conspiracy theories. One of the symptoms of this lack can be observed in the Keeley/Basham discussion in which Keeley (2006: 109) accuses Basham of basing his analysis on the most absurd conspiracy theories. In this criticism lies the acknowledgement of the lack of a comprehensive and systematic approach to conspiracy theories. The internalist discussion does not attempt to interpret the historical and social significance of the phenomenon. It does not provide consistent examples; they vary historically and geographically from everyday conspiracies to global conspiracy theories, and obstruct a broad description of these theories. For that reason, the internalist perspective complicates the discussion rather than resolving it, as all contributors rely on examples from their own knowledge instead of drawing on the historical tradition of conspiracy theories.

The consequences of not considering the social significance of the phenomenon create various problems in other works. Basham (2003) misses the difference between conspiracies and conspiracy theories, when he claims that conspiracies can be seen in everyday life. While conspiracies refer to clandestine actions on many different levels, conspiracy theories denote a certain way of understanding the world. Everyday conspiracies, e.g. in a workplace, cannot be adequately examined in the same framework with anti-Semitic conspiracy theories, because they are not a part of the conspiracy theory tradition, which constitutes a specific, historically significant political style. Basham overlooks the social significance of conspiracy theories and fails to delineate the concept appropriately. He complicates the discussion and claims that an issue of this complexity cannot be adequately discovered. That leads him to conclude that we should treat conspiracy theories with indifference. Pigden (2006)

also misses the distinction between conspiracy and conspiracy theory and presents conspiracy theory as an ordinary phenomenon in politics.

Moreover, while criticising unwarranted conspiracy theories' necessarily nefarious institutions, Goodenough (2000) claims that the whole institution cannot be composed of bad people. This argument fails to acknowledge that institutions select employees according to their needs. Besides, the institutional hierarchy can prevent employees from knowing its actions. Clarke (2002) argues that conspiracy theories advance our knowledge, because they criticise existing theories and allow us to improve them. He does not notice that many conspiracy theories are also used by fundamentalist groups to justify their prejudices. In other words, conspiracy theories might not always help us to improve our theories, but close the ground on which all theories are discussed. They can thus be seen as potential obstacles for theories.

Keeley could be criticised on three grounds. First, the five characteristics of unwarranted conspiracy theories are not really applicable. They are not all nefarious, well-guarded secrets contradicting official explanations. Second, the distinction between unwarranted and warranted conspiracy theories is not a useful one, because we cannot really distinguish them. Third, conspiracy theories do not have to undermine the credibility of official institutions, as they could also be used by them. For example, Nazis used conspiracy theories about Jews to justify their policies (Cohn, 1970; Ben-Itto, 2005; Bronner, 2003).

All these failures are due to a lack of consideration of the historical tradition and significance of conspiracy theories. If Clarke was more aware of the historical consequences of conspiratorial thinking, if Goodenough took into account the uses of conspiracy theories by organisations and if Keeley was to consider official conspiracy theories, the problems in their accounts could have been avoided. That would also make it easier to distinguish between everyday conspiracies, gossip, mythology and conspiratorial tradition. Otherwise, the internal discussion will continue in a theoretical vacuum. If we treat all conspiracy theories in the same manner, we need to explain a conspiracy in an office and one on global scale in the same theoretical framework. Therefore, the internalist perspective by itself is not capable of deciding whether conspiracy theories are warranted or unwarranted, as its

discussion misses the social significance and the historical background of the subject. The chapter will continue with the externalist perspective, which stresses these areas.

2.3 The Externalist Perspective

2.3.1 The Classical Approach: Conspiracy Theories as Political Pathologies

Karl Popper's account of conspiracy theories is informed both by his methodological and political ideas, as a result of the logical consistency between his methodological and social perspective (Artigas, 1999). This coherence is to a large extent due to Popper's philosophical stance: "While his fundamental insights may stem from the philosophy of science, what he has to say there reaches out into politics, into the theory of rationality and into the nature of life itself" (O'Hear, 1995: 2). Hence, his coherent worldview may provide a bridge between the internalist and the externalist perspectives.

In his well-known book *The Logic of Scientific Discovery*, Popper (1965) claims that sciences have to work according to falsification. In this view, scientific theories should be expressed in falsifiable ways. He defends an open society ideal to be achieved through transparency and falsifiability (Popper, 1966). The open society is aware of its imperfectness, complexity and context-dependent nature (Popper, 2002: 132). Popper (2006) argues that conspiracy theories lack seeing the complexity of social phenomena and deny the fact that most of the social reality has been produced as unintended effects. For him, conspiracy theories also contradict the falsifiability principle, as they provide unfalsifiable and essentialist explanations. Therefore, Popper frames conspiracy theories as inadequate explanations, which obstruct the open society ideal.

Post and Robins (1997), in a similar vein, consider conspiratorial narratives to be pathological, by affiliating psychological deficiencies such as paranoia, denial and schizophrenia with the belief in conspiracy theories. According to them, the paranoid-schizoid attitude actually is a normal process of childhood psychological development. Children develop a stranger anxiety towards unknown others, which is

shaped either by love or hatred (ibid, 78). The world for a child is built up simply with friends and foes. This attitude is altered in adulthood, when people develop sophisticated ego defence mechanisms. Paranoia exists in all people's psyches, but the paranoid people are the ones who do not develop their ego defences. Therefore, conspiracy theorists and their followers are psychologically incapable people, seeing the world composed only of enemies and foes, as they do not have proper psychological defence mechanisms.

Showalter (1997), in a similar fashion, associates conspiracy theory with modern hysteria. Curry and Brown (1972) also view conspiracy theories as a pathological perspective on American politics. Likewise, Hofstadter (1965) uses the concept *paranoid style* to explain the conspiratorial logic in American politics. He does not call people paranoid but refers to their political perception, because while paranoia refers to a psychological problem in clinical terms, he points to a social phenomenon:

But there is a vital difference between the paranoid spokesman in politics and the clinical paranoiac: although they both tend to be overheated, oversuspicious, overaggressive, grandiose, and apocalyptic in expression, the clinical paranoid sees the hostile and conspiratorial world in which he feels himself to be living as directed specifically *against him*; whereas the spokesman of paranoid style finds it directed against a nation, a culture, a way of life whose fate affects not himself alone but millions of others (Hofstadter, 1965: 34).

Hofstadter (1965) refers to conspiracy theories as inferior political analyses, which have problems in reasoning. He suggests that, on the one hand, conspiracy theories attempt an impossible task of eliminating the social complexity and create a coherent world with precise characters. On the other hand, the paranoid style starts with sound ideas and realistic, defensible arguments but ends up with a product of fantasy. The most important factor dividing the paranoid style from sound arguments is its leap of imagination: "What distinguishes the paranoid style is not, then, the absence of verifiable facts, but rather the curious leap in imagination that is always made at some critical point in the recital of events" (ibid, 37). In consequence, the paranoid

style is incapable of comprehending historical processes: "We are all sufferers from history, but the paranoid is a double sufferer, since he is afflicted not only by the real world, with the rest of us, but by his fantasies as well" (ibid, 40).

In parallel, Pipes (1997) associates conspiratorial narratives with totalitarian leaders such as Hitler, Stalin and their anti-democratic politics. Although his approach is verifiable, its prescription of conspiracism as a product of anti-democratic ideologies limits his analysis. He mentions that conspiracy theories have three important results: 1) they obstruct the analysis to understand the historical progress; 2) they create an adversary culture and hatred; 3) they can lead to real conspiracies, as in the case of Stalin or Hitler, who believed in conspiracy theories and used them to justify their own actions: "Someone convinced about the utility of plots is himself highly likely to take up this method of organisation" (ibid, 177).

The classical perspective gives insight mainly about the political significance of the subject. While doing so, it understands conspiracy theories as political pathologies. There are also some accounts that attempt to focus on the cultural significance of the topic but still frame them as paranoid perspectives (see Zonis and Joseph, 1994). The cultural perspective avoids this kind of pathologisation.

2.3.2 The Cultural Approach: Conspiracy Theories as Social Symptoms

The cultural perspective understands conspiracy theories as political and social symptoms rather than pathologies. Knight (2002) criticises Hofstadter, Post and Robins and Pipes, i.e. the classical approach, for seeing conspiratorial thinking as a political pathology. He argues that as follows:

All these writers suggest that conspiracy theories have been and will continue to be very harmful forms of belief... In contrast, the present study starts from the position that contemporary conspiracy thinking can indeed be dangerous and deluded, but it can also be a necessary and sometimes even a creative response to the rapidly changing condition of America since the 1960s... The task is therefore not to condemn but to understand why the logic of conspiracy has become attractive to so many different areas of American

culture, and how it is reshaping how people think about the questions of causality, agency, responsibility, and identity (Knight, 2002: 8).

Knight views conspiracy theories as symptoms of society and states that conspiracy theories after the Kennedy assassination in the United States can be classified in a frame of conspiracy culture rather than as an extremist ideological stance (ibid, 28). Knight argues that Harvey Lee Oswald has become a postmodern figure: "It might be argued that the Kennedy Assassination ushered in the era of simulacrum, in which reality becomes a cheap copy of an original that itself seems to have lost all solidity" (ibid, 113). Knight also proposes that conspiracy theories could be seen as a part of a class-based alienation from contemporary neo-liberalism. Besides, Knight (2001; 2002; also Kellner, 2002) suggests that the postmodern erosion of the boundaries between real and paranoia, self and other is the root cause of the popularity of conspiracy theories today. In postmodern eclecticism and playfulness, conspiracy theories seem to be a part of the *zeitgeist*. Moreover, according to Knight (2001; see also 2008), while conspiracy theories are previously linked with marginal political groups, today they are moving to the centre.

Parallel to Knight, Spark (2001) declares that the tendency to think conspiratorially and believe in conspiracy theories is becoming an everyday phenomenon today. He accepts conspiracy theories as a part of the mainstream culture: "Thus, an awareness of conspiracy theories no longer signals being individually certain of a hidden plot or a secret order, but more of entertaining doubts, often about things which are quite openly visible, and the feeling that in a contingent world there is some truth, somehow, in certain elements of conspiracy's imagination" (ibid, 59). Spark argues that conspiracy theories voice the discontent in contemporary politics, and therefore he criticises the classical approach, which denies them as political pathologies:

Thinking conspiratorially, or considering 'open conspiracies' as ideologically symbolic is not politically regressive. While the events in Seattle came as a surprise, this was not for want of economic globalisation being an issue during the 1990s; indeed, a good part of the discourse about the New World Order, Left and Right, had to do with the legislation for a global economy

and fears that measures such as NAFTA would bring unemployment to Americans, as jobs were exported to Mexico (Spark, 2001: 59).

Melley (2000; 2002) proposes that current everyday uncertainties about the “posts age” create an agency panic, which provides the foundations for the prevalence of conspiracy theories. For Melley (2000: 12), agency panic is “the intense anxiety about an apparent loss of autonomy or self-control - the conviction that one’s actions are being controlled by powerful external agents.” The major components of the contemporary agency panic include a belief in controlled, passive individuals and active devilish power structures profiting from this enslavement. He relates agency panic to conspiracy theories in the following terms:

The culture of paranoia and conspiracy may be understood as a result of liberal individualism’s continuing popularity despite its inability to account for social regulation. Agency panic dramatises precisely this paradox. It begins in a discovery of social controls that cannot be reconciled with the liberal view of individuals as wholly autonomous and rational entities. For one who refuses to relinquish the assumptions of liberal individualism, such newly revealed forms of regulation frequently seem as unacceptable or unbelievable that they can only be met with anxiety, melodrama, or panic (Melley, 2000: 14).

Melley, who criticises the classical approach for pathologising conspiracy theories, proposes that through conspiracy theories people overcome the feeling of passivity and powerlessness (ibid). They are again able to claim a knowledge and understanding of society by believing in these accounts. In parallel, Dean (1998) sees conspiracy theories as one of the many narrative styles of the postmodern age. Dean (2002) demonstrates that today everything in the consumer world is connected like conspiracy theories, e.g. the by-products of *Harry Potter* or *Star Wars* are stretching from computer games to mugs. They give a *jouissance* of a coherent life to the consumer, since his/her everyday-life from the outfit to the food can be related to the meaning system of *Star Wars*. In this sense, conspiracy theories, like consumer products, give the feeling of completeness and connectedness, and conspiracy theory readers have the feeling of contentment and increased agency (ibid). Barkun (2003)

also underlines the ability of conspiracy theories to provide a coherent story of important events. He claims that the success of conspiracy theories is due to three main factors: First, they explain everything from a radical view. Second, they are widespread in popular cultural products like films. Third, they can give a very simplified account of the political reality.

James (2001) analyses the right-wing extremist groups in America and claims that today conspiracy theories respond to the alienation caused by the contemporary political system in the United States. West and Sanders (2003) classify conspiracy theories as reactions to contemporary social and political transformations. They investigate how conspiracy theories provide answers to the ambiguities created by contemporary changes all around the world. Like Melley, they contend that contemporary transformations nullify individual agencies, and alienated parties voice themselves through conspiracy theories (ibid, 16). In the same edited volume, Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff argue that this age may be another Enlightenment period, and conspiracy theories might be the new vocabulary of the era (ibid). They also highlight the socially constructed nature of the subject by claiming that non-empirical phenomena like conspiracy theories can be significant for society.

In the same line of thought, Brown (2002) takes up the issue of the abduction stories of the 1960s and shows that the aliens or the abductors looked like foetuses. She links this observation to the hot debates in the 1960s over the issues of abortion and the woman's body. She suggests that the fight over the female body created frustration and alienation in women, which was reflected in those abduction conspiracies. Therefore, she presents conspiracy theories as reflections of ongoing repression and alienation. Lewis and Kahn (2005), who also identify conspiracy theories as social symptoms, see a political agency in contemporary conspiracy theories, as these accounts attempt to reconfigure the meaning out of the current social, political and cultural ambiguities. Despite understanding these accounts as societal symptoms, Boyer (2006) proposes that they do not only re-conjure a lost totality but also function as a narrative that limits the association with a known cognitive schema, i.e. they may help people to dissociate from the unwanted parts of historical and political knowledge.

Fenster (1999) neither completely refutes conspiracy theories as paranoid narratives nor accepts them as warranted explanations. Instead, he draws their social functions, parallel to Bakhtin's (1984) carnivals. He understands the proliferation of conspiracy theories as a postmodern crisis in public space and politics. In that sense, his approach contains themes from Touraine's (2003) 'deinstitutionalisation of the society', Bauman's (2000: 200) the *cloakroom* or *carnival society*, and Sennett's (1992) *The Fall of the Public Man*. He states that conspiracy theories may point to the hidden or unnoticed problems of the society, but as they are methodologically deficient narratives, we cannot rely on them. He describes that dilemma as follows:

So the point is, Don't fear populism [of conspiracy theories], don't fear relatively simple ways of understanding the causes behind prevalent political issues, but don't embrace them without understanding their downside risk. And always educate about the complex structures that affect what often appear to their victims as simple dynamics. At bottom, it's an issue not simply of finding the best political theory for a particular set of empirical data but of finding the best mode of political persuasion for the particular situation. And those moments when the American left had some success in the twentieth century (in the 30s and 60s/70s) was when it was able to harness persuasive narrative elements of populism while neutralising its exclusionary, hateful, and overly simplistic elements (Fenster cited in Berlet, 2004: 1).

The cultural approach does not only exist in the contemporary academic literature. As White (2002) also mentions, the republican synthesis approach of Bailyn (1967), which understands conspiracy theories as integral to the logic of republicanism, draws on a similar logic to the cultural perspective. He claims that conspiratorial explanations do not solely belong to political marginalities but are inherent in mainstream ideologies like republicanism (ibid). The cultural approach takes conspiracy theories as social symptoms and attempts to read the underlying societal reasons of their prevalence. Although they lack empirical studies on the subject, they provide a valuable analysis on the social and political significance of conspiratorial accounts.

2.3.3 Discussion

The classical approach (Hofstadter, 1965; Robins and Post, 1997; Pipes, 1997; Popper, 1966) focuses on conspiracy theories as deviant political explanations. Pipes points to left and right-wing extremism to explain the prevalence of conspiratorial accounts. Likewise, Robins and Post study these theories through psychological concepts such as clinical paranoia. Although the classical approach provides an invaluable political analysis about the dangers of conspiratorial thinking by focusing on its unwarranted aspects, it pathologises all conspiracy theories. It neglects the social and political reasons of these theories and the possibility of their ingenuity. Indeed, conspiracies take place in politics and society.

The cultural approach conceptualises conspiratorial accounts as social and political symptoms. It explains conspiracy theories with concepts such as postmodernity and globalisation. While it affords a number of different views on the subject, it lacks empirical analyses especially on the social and political impacts of conspiratorial accounts. It neither considers the political consequences nor the historical significance of conspiratorial accounts. This makes the perspective rather speculative, as it does not rely on comprehensive and empirical evidence. In other words, the discussion does not provide enough evidence for its assumptions. Besides, most of the literature on conspiracy theories, both the externalist and internalist perspectives, talks about the theories in the United States. They do not provide much data about other contexts. As a result, there are not many means to check the validity and reliability of the claims of the cultural perspective. The classical approach's pathologisation and the cultural perspective's lack of empirical and political analysis of the significance of conspiracy theories could be overcome through an account that combined the two in a non-biased, empirical way.

Furedi's (2001; 2003; 2005) account of the contemporary underestimation of human potential and the erosion of modern humanism, could provide a new perspective to the theoretical discussion of the cultural perspective. Furedi (2005) argues that humanity as the object of history, which determines its living conditions and organises its surroundings, has been reversed. Today, people are seen as fragile beings, who can be easily harmed by each other's acts. This brought about the idea

that human effects on nature and on other fellow human beings should be supervised and controlled. Hence, the new human being is seen as a passive subject of the history. Furedi's perspective allows us to suggest that this feeling of incapacity leads people to create or believe conspiracy theories. For example, after events such as Hurricane Katrina or 9/11, the feelings of terror, fear and incapacity set the ground for the spread of conspiracy theories. In other words, the contemporary awareness and fear about human actions create an anxiety, which promotes a fertile ground for conspiratorial accounts.

2.4 Conclusion

This chapter divides the academic discussion on conspiracy theories into three parts. The internalist perspective analyses the methodological and epistemological aspects of these theories to understand whether they are warranted or not. In contrast, the externalist perspective focuses on the social and political significance of conspiracy theories. The classical approach sees conspiracy theories as a part of marginal politics and as paranoid narratives. Although it pathologises conspiracy theories, it is successful in identifying the political significance and implications of the concept. The cultural approach conceptualizes the subject as a symptom of society and relates its prevalence to issues such as globalisation and postmodernity. Hence, it is the closest approach to a sociological analysis, which has its focus not on the rights or wrongs of conspiracy theories but what they represent and say about society.

A comprehensive research project on conspiracy theories should take all these three perspectives into account. The internalist perspective could be useful in understanding the methods and epistemological aspects of conspiracy theories. The classical approach could be helpful in understanding the political outcomes of these theories, as it emphasises the political significance of the subject. The cultural approach could assist discussion of the social relevance of conspiracy theories and the underlying reasons of their prevalence. These three approaches could be considered in an interrelated manner by analysing the methods of conspiracy theories in relation to their social and political significance.

This thesis will combine these three perspectives. The internalist perspective will be considered while looking at the ways in which the conspiracy theories about Dönmes make claims. The classical approach will be in use to understand the political significance of these theories. I will particularly benefit from the approach in analysing the influence of the conspiracy theories on political parties and individuals. The cultural perspective will be discussed to analyse the underlying social reasons behind the prevalence of the conspiracy theories. The next chapter will attempt to construct a theoretical framework of conspiracy theories by combining the three perspectives, i.e. by considering the method, the political influence and the cultural significance together. To achieve that, it will mainly use Adorno's (1994) semi-erudition thesis, which appears to explain them in one theoretical framework.

Chapter 3. Conceptualising Conspiracy Theories as Conduits of Fundamentalist Knowledge: *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*

Blindness is all-embracing because it comprehends nothing (Adorno and Horkheimer, 1997: 172).

3.1 Introduction

There is a noticeable association of reactionary and fundamentalist circles with conspiracy theories, e.g. the Nation of Islam and the Militia movements¹². This affinity implies a link between conspiracy theories and fundamentalist knowledge. Fundamentalist movements seem to use conspiracy theories to delegitimise the political systems they oppose. Accordingly, this chapter will conceptualise conspiracy theories by focusing on the reasons underlying the affiliation of conspiracy theories with fundamentalism and reactionary movements. This will be achieved by a three-dimensional analysis on their methodological characteristics, social significance and political impacts. The chapter will explore questions such as how and why conspiracy theories are frequently used by fundamentalist ideologies, and what methodological and textual aspects of conspiracy theories create this relationship. In short, the aim is to develop a comprehensive theoretical framework to understand conspiratorial accounts.

In order to sketch the relationship between fundamentalism and conspiracy theories, this section draws on Adorno's (1994) discussion on astrology, where he analyses astrology's effects on individuals' political attitudes. Although other possible theoretical approaches may also provide adequate analyses, Adorno's perspective provides a rich analysis on the relationship between the methodology of a text and its political consequences. For that reason, it fits this chapter's attempt at a theoretical conceptualisation of conspiracy theories by combining the internalist and the externalist perspectives, i.e. considering the methods, the political influence and the

¹² As Pitcavage (2001) describes, the Militia movement is a right-wing movement that has loose connections to paramilitary groups that self-identify as 'militias'. They are mainly against the alleged left-wing, globalist, New World Order conspiracies. Some members of the group committed criminal acts such as stockpiling illegal weapons and explosives and were plotting assassinations and bombings against the alleged New World Order conspiracy (ibid, 957).

cultural significance of these theories. Furthermore, Adorno's account will be supported by Girard's (1995) theory of sacrifice.

The chapter will argue that conspiracy theories' methodological features and social significance lead fundamentalist and reactionary ideologies to use them as conduits. The link between conspiracy theories and fundamentalism will be explained by Adorno's concept of semi-erudition. The chapter will begin the discussion with an analysis of Adorno's account of astrology. Second, it will relate semi-erudition to fundamentalist ideologies and conspiracy theories. In that way, it will widen the scope of Adorno's discussion to the social and political significance of conspiracy theories. Third, Girard's theory on sacrifice and how it complements Adorno's discussion of semi-erudition will be explained. Fourth, the chapter will discuss the example of *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* to verify those theoretical claims. Finally, it will summarise the findings in a short conclusion.

By exploring the relationship between conspiracy theories and fundamentalist knowledge, this chapter responds to some approaches in the academic literature. The cultural approach registers conspiracy theories as one explanatory model among many (see Birchall, 2001; 2006; Dean, 2002), while some others claim that we should take these theories seriously, as they may have truth value (Pigden, 1995; Fetzer, 2005), or see conspiracy theories as useful, because they challenge conventional wisdom (Clarke, 2002). The classical approach, which stresses the paranoid nature of conspiracy theories, identifies them as pathological viewpoints (Hofstadter, 1965; Robins and Post, 1997). The following discussion will contribute to the academic literature on the subject by considering these views and suggesting an alternative framework.

3.2 Adorno's Discussion on Astrology

In *The Stars Down to Earth*, Adorno (1994) analyses the content of the astrology column of the *Los Angeles Times* newspaper. The study had not been discussed

much until Crook's (1994) edited book was printed¹³. Before going into detail, some reservations about Adorno's work on astrology should be mentioned. The criticisms of Adorno's treatment of popular music (1981) can be repeated about astrology. While examining the social significance of popular music by only looking at its content, Adorno does not really take the audience response into account (Gendron, 1986). In a similar manner, Adorno does not deal with the audience perception and reaction when he analyses astrology. Harding (2000) states that Adorno's reflections on astrology remain on an abstract level, because his findings are limited to a content analysis. In parallel, Dutton (1995) points to the lack of field data and argues that Adorno is inclined to detect fascism in anything he does not like¹⁴.

Adorno's argument on astrology could be linked to his stance on Enlightenment thought and identity thinking. According to Adorno (1973), identity thinking is defining things with regard to their functional attributes and ignoring other features they have. Identity thinking, in other words, is a pragmatic negation of the complex nature of things for the sake of functionality. Hence, Adorno proposes that social representations are shaped by this metaphysical approach of identity thinking (see also Neimark and Tinker, 1987). For him, we should acknowledge the negated parts of the phenomenon; otherwise, we will create other myths. Hence, Adorno and Horkheimer (1979) criticise the Enlightenment for imposing pragmatic categorisations and explanations on nature in order to control it, which leads to a misrepresentation of reality. They suggest that this distortion is actualised through identity thinking and propose non-identity thinking¹⁵. This perspective also discloses Adorno's discontent with astrology, because he claims that it is one of these illusions or myths that have pragmatic value for people in modern times.

Adorno's perspective on astrology can be explored under a few themes such as *secondary superstition*, *ideology for dependence* and *semi-erudition*. Firstly, Adorno (1994) calls astrology a *secondary superstition* because modern science can give

¹³ After Crook's edition (1994), some reviews on Adorno's perspective of astrology were written by Dutton (1995) and Hooker (1996). It was also briefly utilised in the discussion on conspiracy theories by Bell and Bennion-Nixon (2001).

¹⁴ Throughout this thesis, unlike Adorno, I will be able to test my claims on the potential effects of conspiracy theories by interviews.

¹⁵ Habermas (1987) condemns Adorno for being elitist in his criticism. He finds it contradictory to be able to criticise modernity while finding it totalitarian.

better answers than astrology. Thus, it is irrational to keep faith in astrology. In other words, Adorno argues that the historical context of astrology is no longer relevant, and therefore it is a secondary superstition today.

Secondly, Adorno claims that social implications of astrology contribute to individual passivity. As it forecasts the future, it treats people as incapable of knowing and changing their objective conditions (ibid). Astrology alleviates people's tension about the unknown future while making them compliant to its descriptions. In that manner, the Enlightenment idea of the active, powerful individual, who dares to Know!¹⁶, is inverted in astrology columns. Accordingly, Adorno refers to astrology as an *ideology for dependence* and sees a kind of sexual pleasure in that aspect: "Indulgence in astrology may provide those who fall for it with a substitute for sexual pleasure of a passive nature. It means a primary submission to unbridled strength of the absolute power" (ibid, 43). The astrology column advises people what to do in different circumstances such as the right way to behave in family life or in the business world. People are told to behave differently during day and night, which relies on a fetishist conception of time. In that way, the astrology column does not provide individuals with an opportunity to organise their lives but encourages them to conform to predefined forms of behaviour:

People with a weak ego or objectively incapable of moulding their own fate show a certain readiness to shift their responsibility to the abstract time factor which absolves them of their failures and promotes their hope as though they could expect relief from all their ills from the very simple fact that things move on and more particularly that most sufferings are likely to be forgotten – the capacity of memory actually being linked with a strong development of the ego. This psychological disposition is both strengthened and utilised by the column, which enhances the confidence in time by giving it the mystical connotation that time is somehow expressive of the verdict of the stars (Adorno, 1994: 70).

¹⁶ Sapere Aude, Kant's well-known frame to define the Enlightenment, means dare to know.

Adorno remarks that the astrology column advises individuals to be in accordance with people from higher positions at work (ibid). In that way, astrology nurtures conformism and individual integration. It also nourishes commodity fetishism by suggesting satisfaction by buying and consuming new goods. In this regard, happiness is attributed to an object, and the individual, as a passive consumer, is led to be satisfied with consumption. In total, astrology weakens individual agency on many different levels and produces passive and conformist individuals.

Thirdly, *semi-erudite knowledge* or *semi-erudition* is a key concept in Adorno's debate on astrology, in which he combines the ideology for dependence and secondary superstition themes. Semi-erudition refers to a tension between the information-gathering and the interpretation phases of research. Semi-erudition takes place when the data-collecting activity surpasses a researcher's reflection. It indicates that a researcher does not sufficiently use her/his reasoning to evaluate data. In that sense, it is a failure in interpretation, which involves a substitution of causal analysis by linkages based on a belief. Astrology is semi-erudite, because the information about stars is biased by belief. Although there is scientific data, the reasoning is fused with belief that does not satisfy scientific/rational standards. In contrast, astronomy, as a science, does not have the same sort of belief-fused data analysis and therefore is not semi-erudite. Creation science, which attempts to provide a scientific explanation of the creation of the world by God, has a semi-erudite attitude, because it is biased by a belief. In other words, the reasoning of creation science is solely used find the linkages between a belief and empirical reality, and it ignores other possibilities. It contrasts to the materialist scientific approach and remains a pseudo-science.

Semi-erudition also poses a psychological condition. It signifies a manifestation of the crisis of human agency in which an individual cannot control the objective conditions of his/her own life but pretends to master it. Therefore, semi-erudition refers to an intellectual crisis according to Adorno:

The semi-erudite vaguely wants to understand and is also driven by the narcissistic wish to prove superior to the plain people but he is not in a position to carry through complicated and detached intellectual operations.

To him, astrology, just as other irrational creeds like racism, provides a short-cut by bridging the complex to a handy formula and offering at the same time the pleasant gratification that he who feels to be excluded from educational privileges nevertheless belongs to the minority of those who are 'in the know' (Adorno, 1994: 45).

Likewise, Alessandrini (2003) labels semi-erudition methodologically incapable of explaining events and declares that it cannot be overcome by the right knowledge. It lies deep inside the human psyche, because semi-erudition is a fixation on facts obstructing any critical analysis. It is a disavowal of the real situation by simplifying and fetishising it. In that sense, what should be done is to replace semi-erudition with a true critical practice. It could be suggested that semi-erudition constitutes ideology for dependence and secondary superstition in a wider framework.

The discussion so far indicates that astrology, as a semi-erudite belief, has social impacts. Adorno (1994) summarises this social significance as follows: first, when social control becomes more direct and influential on individuals, the feeling of incapacity leads people to believe in semi-erudite explanations. Second, individuals are oriented solely to search for their comfort. Thus, people are easily satisfied with the simplified explanations of astrology and are not motivated to critical thinking. Third, astrology provides a key to every door and explains everything in straightforward terms. Fourth, the anxiety of doom in modern society is relieved by semi-erudite accounts. Fifth, Adorno sees semi-erudite knowledge as a part of the passage of human history from pre-modern to modern. It is in between reason and belief, and it signifies the latent irrational side of modernity.

In short, semi-erudition promotes a threefold perspective on conspiracy theories. Methodologically, semi-erudite accounts contain a strongly-biased reading of the objective reality. Socially, they tend to become popular in certain contexts and enforce passivity. Politically, conspiratorial accounts, as semi-erudite conduits, are often used in political communication especially by reactionary/fundamentalist movements. The social and political relevance of semi-erudition will be further elaborated in the next section by discussing the affinities between conspiracy theories and fundamentalism.

3.3 Conspiracy Theories, Semi-Erudition and Fundamentalism

In order to investigate the common characteristics between fundamentalist ideologies and conspiracy theories, this section will point to their semi-erudite characteristics. While doing that, the occult origins of the fundamentalist knowledge will serve as a theoretical bridge through which conspiracy theories and fundamentalist thought will be associated. It should also be stated that although fundamentalism cannot be equated with right wing extremism (Lipset and Raab, 1978: 118), it will still be considered in its reactionary meanings. In general, the discussion will demonstrate how semi-erudition serves as a conduit to fundamentalism.

3.3.1 Semi-Erudition: Reactionary Logic, Fundamentalism and the Occult

By reactionary ideologies, I refer to political stances that present a strong discontent with a dominant political system and propose a return to an idealised origin. In other words, reactionary thought conceptualises society today as a deviance from its natural state. As Seton-Watson mentions (1966; 184): "A reactionary is one who wishes to resurrect the past, and reactionary ideologies are based on the vision of the past, usually more mythical than real, which are intended to inspire political action in present." It could be stated that fundamentalism involves strong reactionary motives. Indeed, the word "fundamentalism" is derived from a twentieth century reactionary American Protestant movement, which suggested a return to the origins of Protestantism (Marsden, 1980: 3; Mårtensson, 2007). Today, the use of the concept is restricted neither to that particular faction nor to any movement. It generally refers to religiously-oriented reactionary movements. Fundamentalists, as reactionaries, basically aim to restore the ancient law of their community. They see society in a crisis and reject existing order by reclaiming the natural harmony of the past. Riesebrodt considers these important characteristics in his definition of fundamentalism as follows:

First fundamentalism, even if it has secular relatives, is primarily a religious phenomenon. It is not just fascism, populism, or any other type of social movement in a religious garb... Second, fundamentalism as a 'rejection of the world' is a reaction to social and cultural changes which are experienced

as a dramatic crisis... And third, fundamentalism is a defensive reaction which attempts to preserve or restore an idealised or imagined former social order which is characterised by a strict patriarchal order and moralism (Riesebrdt, 2000: 272).

The insistence on an organic essence is a shared feature of fundamentalism and occult traditions; they both view the world as having an inner, true reality that is both connected to and hidden from the empirical reality and known only to those with the true knowledge. According to Katz (2005), fundamentalist knowledge is linked to the belief in an organic universe. The occult tradition and fundamentalist thought presume connections between a cosmic divine mind and human intellects. Their shared concern is how to follow the footprints of a cosmic order to reach the real knowledge. In this sense, fundamentalism, the attempt to return to an original harmonious order, dwells within the occult tradition. Hence, as Katz also suggests, the occult is an inevitable characteristic of fundamentalism.

The Nazi regime and its relationship with the occult can give us a few examples of the significance of the phenomenon in reactionary ideologies. Mosse (1961; also Labarth et al., 1990) argues that the occult tradition in the beginning of the twentieth century laid the ideological ground for the national socialist ideology. The occult theme of natural harmony, linked with German romanticism, idealised the Aryan past. It also created the figure of the urban Jew as a threat to the natural harmony. Mosse summarises this relation as follows:

In Germany the recovery of the unconscious, in reaction against the dominant positivist ideologies, laid the groundwork for the German form of XXth century totalitarianism. This reaction combined the deep stream of German romanticism with the mysteries of the occult as well as with the idealism of deeds. What sort of deeds these turned out to be is written in blood on the pages of history (Mosse, 1961: 96).

Heinrich Himmler, one of the leading coordinators of the Holocaust, took advice from astrologers and was inclined towards occult arts (Goodrick-Clarke, 1994). Tateo (2005: 7) mentions that "the Nazi SS (Secret Service) troops were called 'the

guardians of the dark order,' and there was a special unit called 'Amenerbhe' with the particular task of looking for signs of the occult." On the verge of the communist revolution in 1917, the Russian Tsar and his family were also keen on occult traditions. Famous occultists Grigori Rasputin and Philipe lived in the palace to cure the problems of the family (Ben-Itto, 2005). The Russian Tsar, Himmler and the Nazi party shared similar views on Jews and discriminated against them. It could be argued that although the occult tradition does not have any political hypotheses, it might have an affinity with bigoted politics. The reason may lie in their shared presumption of an original harmonious state of humanity. Any disturbance of this harmony can be attributed to intruders such as Jews, and therefore the occultist thought may facilitate an appropriate cognitive environment in which conspiratorial beliefs and reactionary ideologies can work.

In a similar vein, Zizek (1997) argues that although all ideologies claim to represent the reality and propose a harmonious order, this promise is an impossible task to achieve. He suggests that any ideology needs a 'symbolic Jew' to cover up this failure to symbolise the total reality. In other words, society creates a fantasy of an omnipotent Jew to supplement the fantasy of an organic community. Thus, thinking of a harmonious community free from any antagonisms leads to a fantasy of an obscene master, who conspires against the harmony. It could be argued that the exaggeration of the harmonious community fantasy by fundamentalism and reactionary movements connects them with conspiracy theories.

3.3.2 Conspiracy Theories as Semi-Erudite Conduits

Adorno (1994) discusses astrology as a semi-erudite knowledge, because, like occult practices, it refers to an inner, non-empirical essence of the world, i.e. a metaphysical acceptance of the nature of the world. Thus, astrology is biased towards discovering links between stars and everyday life. In that sense, Adorno dismisses it as *pseudoscience* and associates its social significance with fascism, as they both nourish a passive audience and obstruct critical analyses. It could also be argued that occult traditions and fundamentalism, which carry an *a priori* belief in a harmonious state of society, commit semi-erudition; they take a metaphysical metaphor as reality

and interpret empirical data accordingly. In other words, they swing between reason and belief.

Similarly, while explaining an alleged corruption of a system through plots, conspiratorial accounts rely on beliefs. Pagan (2005: 29) explains that: "Belief is a major component of conspiracy theory: the conspiracy theorist believes that hidden forces are at work, machinations known only to some." Like the occult tradition, conspiratorial accounts are semi-eruditely centred on beliefs, and their reasoning functions to confirm them:

Inherent in conspiracy theory is a dialectic between the seen and unseen, the explicable and inexplicable. With its every use, the term re-creates and renegotiates the disparity, giving conspiracy theory its ability to fascinate – and to frustrate. Conspiracy theory bespeaks the very epistemological rupture it attempts to mend (ibid, 30).

For that reason, Pipes (1997) associates conspiracy theories with semi-erudition in terms of having a problem in locating the causal relationships properly. He states that:

If anything, these imaginary plots tend to be more rigorously logical and have fewer loose ends than does real life. Like alchemy and astrology conspiracism offers an intellectual inquiry that has many facts right but goes wrong by locating causal relationships where none exist; it is the 'secret vice of the rational mind'(Pipes, 1997: 30-31).

Furthermore, conspiracy theories are contradictory to the trust in human agency (Melley, 2000; 2001), because they do not guide their readers to face the complex reality but to rely on oversimplified accounts. On this issue, Goertzel (1994) finds a significant relationship between the belief in these theories and the feelings of insecurity and anomie. Abalakina-Paap et al. (1999) discover that high levels of anomie, authoritarianism, and powerlessness, along with a low level of self-esteem, are related to the belief in conspiracy theories. Conspiracy theories are likely to be seen in times of major transformations and ambiguity, as they provide simple

explanations for the alienated, who cannot respond to the changes adequately and feel powerless (Jameson, 1992; Lipset and Raab, 1978; Fenster, 1999). In other words, a need to reposition identities or cognitive maps could easily be fulfilled by conspiracy theories, which provide alternative political maps. Adorno acknowledges conspiracy theories' tendency to appear during major social transformations in the following way:

... it seems that in eras of decline of social systems, with the insecurity and anxiety widespread in such eras, paranoid tendencies in people are evinced and often channelised by institutions wishing to distract such tendencies from their objective reasons. Thus organised flagellantism and apocalyptic fantasies among the masses were characteristic of the first phase of the decay of the feudal system, and witch-hunting of the period of Counter Reformation when an attempt was being made to artificially reconstruct a social order that by that time become obsolete. Similarly, today's world, which offers such a strong reality basis for everybody's sense of being persecuted, calls for paranoid characters (Adorno, 1994: 122).

Conspiracy theories also tend to be reactive, as they de-legitimise the systems they criticise. They are predominantly nostalgic narratives, longing for a period of purity and attributing degradation to the existing system:

Conspiracy theories flourish at a time of crisis, of political and social change. Yet twentieth-century conspiracy theories are rarely engaged with actual history. Instead they appeal to myth and end up exemplifying what Eco calls 'Ars Oblivionalis' rather than the art of memory. The conspiratorial view is fundamentally nostalgic. Its revival in modern times reflects a nostalgia for a transcendental cosmology and a quasi-religious world view dominated by an order of similarities and analogies... Nostalgic for the mythical age of purity or innocence, conspiracy theories often forget or ignore actual collective memories of the recent past and abdicate any responsibility for actions in present (Boym, 1999: 98).

In this regard, conspiracy theories seem to be parallel to fundamentalist ideologies' return to original texts, as they both point to decay in society and refer to a harmonious foundation. The *a priori* belief in a natural state leads fundamentalist thought as well as conspiracy texts to commit semi-erudition, because their interpretation of the world is structured by that belief. Adorno (1994: 121) presents that similarity as: "just as those who can read the phony signs of the stars believe that they are in the know, the followers of totalitarian parties believe that their special panaceas are universally valid and feel justified in imposing them as a general rule." However, unlike fundamentalist ideologies, conspiracy theories do not always propose direct solutions to decadence.

In a similar line, Bennett (2007) postulates that conspiracy theories, providentialism and divination come from the same historiography tradition. Providentialism searches God's involvement in every event. Divination is a problem-solving discourse in which the diviner explains a situation according to a religious text. Both divination and providentialism, like fundamentalism, consist of readings of the reality from a rigid ontological stance. Accordingly, they are semi-erudite attempts to understand the reality. Bennett claims that because these texts make the reality fit the text, they are common in times of crisis, when people need explanations for misfortunes (ibid). He demonstrates the semi-erudite character of providentialism, divination and conspiracism and links them methodologically, as all of them understand reality according to some higher forms. In short, they all provide semi-erudite, essentialist cognitive maps.

There are some historical and current examples of the affiliation of semi-erudite conspiracy theories with fundamentalist knowledge. For example, one of the first and most notorious figures of the conspiracy literature, Augustin Barruel, was a Jesuit priest, who claimed that French revolution was planned and executed by secret societies such as Bavarian Illuminati and Freemasonry. He was also an ardent supporter of the king and the church as his views on politics were shaped by his religious convictions. Hofman (1993; also Tackett, 2000) mentions that Barruel mistrusts individual or public will on politics, because he rejects any possibility of democratic politics and demarcates all power to the king, i.e. the absolute ruler. This

may indicate that Barruel's conspiratorial conception of politics involves semi-erudite amalgamation of reason, belief and a mistrust of human agency.

Sisko (2000) discusses August Anton von Göchhausen's *Exposure of the Cosmopolitan Republic* (1786) as an example of conspiracy thinking. Göchhausen's book condemns Enlightenment as a conspiracy, which opposes both Christianity and the state (ibid, 116). He was deeply critical of Enlightenment's priority given to reason, and he was claiming that Enlightenment excluded imagination, heart and feelings, in summary, human nature. For that reason, he suggested a return to Protestantism (ibid, 117). Like Barruel, he saw it necessary to collect the power in the person of a powerful monarch, the highest bishop and the protector of the church (ibid, 117). While doing so, Göchhausen was framing the evil as cosmopolitan spirit, which prioritises reason over belief. He regarded a handful of different and opposite ideas as an enemy: Enlighteners, Jesuits, crypto-Catholics, Illuminati and Freemasonry (ibid). The most relevant of those to this research is the use of crypto-Catholics, as it shows that crypto-beliefs provide an ideal stranger figure for conspiracy theorists, which will also be discussed in the Dönme case.

In addition, Sayyid Qutb, an influential figure in political Islam and a leading intellectual of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, merges fundamentalist beliefs with conspiracy theories and claims for a return to the historical Islamic notion of *umma*, i.e. the community: "For Qutb, just as the telos of history lies in the actualisation of the *umma* on earth, so too, there is a final resting place of all human activity: harmony" (Euben, 1997: 44). Qutb thinks that the return to *umma* can be achieved through strictly following the messages of the Koran. In that sense, Qutb's theory is not open to individual's own reasoning and freedom of engaging in philosophy. For him, all truth is written in the Koran, and we should just follow that. Qutb targets the rationalist discourse and modernisation in the following way:

For Qutb, the ultimate danger to our moral existence lies in the hegemony of the authority of science, the claim that knowledge of the world is ascertainable through human reason, and that a theory of legitimate authority must be premised upon the right of humans to govern without the necessity of divine intervention (Euben, 1997: 51).

It is argued that Qutb influenced many Islamic fundamentalists such as Osama Bin Laden (Swenson, 2006). Qutb also believed in a Jewish-Zionist conspiracy theory (Wistrich, 2002). In his article, *Our Struggle with the Jews*, Qutb explains his conspiracies towards Jews as a part of a cosmic war of Islam (Nettler, 1987). Therefore, it can be argued that a semi-erudite attitude runs parallel to fundamentalism and conspiratorial logic in Qutb's texts.

Another figure who was involved in conspiratorial logic and fundamentalism is Sergei Nilus, from Russia in the early twentieth century. He was a university educated lawyer, who was fluent in English, German and French (Ben-Itto, 2005). He had a good secular education for his time, which he later rejected. Like Qutb, he proposed a return to religious texts, in his case to Orthodox Christianity. He was a devoted supporter of Jewish world domination theories and was the first publisher of the classical conspiracy theory, *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* (ibid). Nilus represents the semi-erudite character of conspiratorial logic and fundamentalism, as he refused the changes in society and attempted to revive the old belief systems. While doing so, he produced conspiratorial beliefs about Jews through which he held them responsible for modernisation.

While talking about the prevalence of the anti-Semitic conspiracy theories in Yugoslavia following the NATO bombing in 1999, Byford and Billig (2001) mention four important conspiracy theorists, three of whom have fundamentalist and occult beliefs. Durdevic, Velimirovic and Kezenevic use occult, mystical and quasi-religious elements, such as parapsychology, in their conspiracy theories:

Durdevic's work includes mystical and quasi-religious interpretations of current events and world history, based primarily on anti-Semitic conspiracy literature produced in the United States and the teachings of Nikolaj Velimirovic, amid-twentieth-century Serbian Orthodox Bishop (Byford and Billig, 2001: 52).

Captivatingly, one of the most wanted leaders of the Bosnian war, Radovan Karadzic, who shared the ideas of these theorists, was disguised for years as a new age healer (Colvin and Wander, 2008).

Likewise, as Goodman (2005: 7) remarks, Uno Masami and Asahara Shoko, who support the conspiracy theory *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* in Japan, are also linked with occult practices: "Uno Masami combined Japan's indigenous xenophobia, nationalism with Christian fundamentalism in a conspiracy theory that derived from *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*." In parallel, Shoko used "Buddhist cosmology, yoga practices, Christian apocalypticism, and a belief in the prophecies of Nostradamus" in his own conspiratorial vision (ibid, 14).

Adnan Oktar, a well-known advocate of creationism in Turkey, also provides a good example to the relevance of fundamentalist views, semi-erudition and conspiracy theories. Oktar published a number of books in which he mainly opposed the evolution theory. As Yüksel (2008) mentions, Oktar fuses religious creationism with scientific language in his works. Oktar founded the Scientific Research Foundation, which mainly works to disprove the evolution theory. Especially in his early works, Oktar (1986) constructs his opposition to evolution theory from a conspiratorial perspective. He believes that the evolution theory has been deliberately indoctrinated by Freemasonry to damage the spiritual and moral values (Yahya, 2008). Under the pseudonym Harun Yahya (1995; also see Hopkins, 2003), he also published a book denying the Holocaust. Oktar is responsible for suing and banning the internet websites, such as that of Richard Dawkins, which support the evolution theory. Oktar and his movement, like the others mentioned above, seem to legitimise their fundamentalist beliefs and semi-erudite accounts through conspiratorial works. In other words, conspiracy theories help them to fit the reality to the texts they believe. While doing so, they pragmatically use a scientific rhetoric.

All these conspiratorial, fundamentalist and reactionary views rely on a semi-erudite ground, as they show the use of reason to confirm beliefs. In that sense, semi-erudite explanations appear to provide ontological securities by affirming people's beliefs and identities. Fundamentalist movements use conspiracy theories for their semi-erudition, which allows them to propagate for a diverted harmonious state of society

and the resurrection of it as an alternative. It could be stated that fundamentalists circulate their views through conspiracy theories, because those accounts constitute a suitable conduit in terms of their methodological affinities and social significance. It could also be mentioned that people on political margins might use semi-erudite narratives like conspiracy theories to form their resistances, as they provide alternative cognitive maps and identities. Conspiratorial explanations are practical political weapons for these groups. However, conspiracy theories are not being denied as products of fundamentalist knowledge here. It is rather argued that they provide efficient conduits for marginal movements to communicate their messages. Thus, conspiracy theories do not solely belong to marginal groups, as they can also be used by mainstream politicians to undermine their rivals' political credibility. In the next section, the discussion will introduce Girard's theory to give a more detailed analysis of how conspiracy theories, as semi-erudite narratives, fit reactionary movements in terms of their social significance.

3.4. Conspiracy Theories as Sacrifices: A Girardian Perspective

Girard (1995) understands sacrifice as the most important and necessary component of society, because it prevents the spread of reciprocal violence in a community. He suggests that every sacred rite involves a form of violence on human or animal victims. This sacrifice channels the anger and the tension in a community to a surrogate victim. It absorbs and prevents all potential internal conflicts, tensions and jealousy. A surrogate victim helps to avoid the antagonisms by being sacrificed for a community, as it "draws to itself all the violence infecting the original victim and through its own death transforms this baneful violence into beneficial violence, into harmony and abundance" (ibid, 95). It keeps the vengeance in check (ibid, 13) and restores the harmony of a community (ibid, 8). Thus, sacrifice provides the originating cement of society.

Girard's postulate on the necessity to channel violence to an outsider is based on his understanding of human nature. He believes that violent opposition is a natural consequence of being human, as all people desire to be the divine example for self-sufficiency, which leads to a competition of desires. He coins the concept mimetic desire, which suggests that people learn to desire through imitating the desire of the

other, to explain the inevitability of clashing desires. In other words, "*the subject desires the object because rival desires it*" (ibid, 145). It generates a subtext for mimetic violence, because people naturally imitate each other, and this creates an insoluble antagonism.

Girard's main thesis is that: "society is seeking to deflect upon a relatively indifferent victim, a 'sacrificeable' victim, the violence that would otherwise be vented on its own members, the people it most desires to protect" (ibid, 4). Girard likens the surrogate victim to the function of religion, as it brings peace to the community. The surrogate victim, in short, educates people: "The surrogate victim, as founder of the rite, appears as the ideal educator of humanity, in the etymological sense of *e-ductio*, a leading out" (ibid, 306). According to Girard, a sacrifice is successful as long as it manages to veil its artificiality: "Its vitality as an institution depends on its ability to conceal the displacement upon which the rite is based" (ibid, 7).

It could be argued that sacrifice and sacred in Girard's work is the essential condition for a social order that can provide ontological securities: "The myths of the symbolic thought can be compared to a larva's cocoon: without this no shelter no development can take place" (ibid, 237). When a social order is in danger, when it cannot provide ontological securities, Girard talks about this as a sacrificial crisis: "The sacrificial crisis can be defined, therefore, as a crisis of distinctions- that is, a crisis affecting the cultural order. This cultural order is nothing more than a regulated system of distinctions in which the differences among individuals are used to establish their 'identity' and their mutual relationships" (ibid, 49). In other words, when the social system collapses, the holding sacred myth also dissolves, because once the distinctions that give identity/meaning to the group are lost, it brings violence back to the community: "For if all violence involves a loss of differences, all losses of difference also involve violence" (ibid, 281). In that way, sacrificial crisis links to ontological insecurities and loss of cognitive maps, as they all refer to the collapse of symbolic borders.

Sacrificial crisis necessitates a new sacred rite and new surrogate victims that would bring a rebirth to community through channelling the inner violence to outside.

Otherwise, contagious violence will demolish all the remnants of that society (ibid). Thus, a surrogate victim, preferably neither from outside nor from inside the community, is sought. The reason for this preference is that if the victim is completely foreign, the violence may not be successfully channelled, as it would be harder to scapegoat a totally foreign element (ibid, 269). If the surrogate victim is an undistinguishable insider, then it would be hard for people to differentiate themselves from the surrogate victim (ibid, 269). For example, it would be hard to scapegoat Scandinavians in a small African community, or to scapegoat a well-conforming person in the group, as it would be hard to explain the reasons of their evilness. The best choice according is a figure that lives neither outside nor inside the group, i.e. a stranger in between the borders:

There must be a 'metonymic' relationship between member of the community and ritual victims. There must also be discontinuity. The victims must be neither too familiar to the community nor too foreign to it (Girard, 1995: 270).

Girard's theory can help us to understand the workings of conspiracy theories. From the Girardian perspective, conspiratorial lines could be the narratives that create or point to a surrogate victim to restore the harmony of the group. In other words, conspiracy theories, which generate a Manichean order between good and bad, could be seen as narratives that engender new sacred rites or sacrifices through appointing surrogate victims. Conspiratorial accounts about Jews provide a great example to this line of thought. As Bauman (1989) pointed out, Jews have been chosen as scapegoats because of being strangers to the communities in which they lived.

In that sense, Girard's explanation of the need to sacrifice meets the semi-erudition approach on conspiracy theories, because both perspectives highlight the social significance of envisaging a scapegoat to avoid the collapse of the social. Sacred rites and conspiratorial accounts both manage the tension in society and imagine new cognitive maps to relieve ontological insecurities. While semi-erudition perspective emphasises how conspiracy theories rely on a belief to provide a complete picture of society, Girard's theory demonstrates how a sacrifice envisions a scapegoat to maintain the status quo. Girard's theory completes Adorno's semi-erudition

perspective in understanding conspiracy theories, as it shows the central and restorative aspects of blame in society.

Conspiracy theories both from Adorno's and Girard's perspectives could be seen as narratives attempting to suture the gaps in the symbolic system of a society, and they do not hesitate to put 'the stranger' into danger for that. After developing the theory on the social, political and methodological significance of conspiracy theories, the next section will consider a historical conspiracy theory that has been used by a variety of fundamentalist groups in different contexts to verify their beliefs.

3.5 The Protocols of the Elders of Zion

One of the most influential conspiracy theories in history, *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, documents alleged secret plans of Jews to dominate the world through liberalisation and modernisation, which allegedly undermine the moral bases of societies. It was first published in Russia at the beginning of the twentieth century and used mainly by reactionary movements and the marginal right. By 1920, the text was proved to be a forgery, but this did not decrease its popularity. It was originally plagiarised from the 1864 work of Maurice Joly (2004), *Dialogue in Hell between Machiavelli and Montesquieu*, which comprised imagined discussions between Machiavelli and Montesquieu. Herman Goedsche's book *Biarritz* (1868) is another source from which the text was plagiarised. In the novel, Jews meet in a cemetery once in every century to discuss their plans to rule the world.

The Protocols is suitable for any fundamentalist use in terms of its content, because it blames Jews for social decadence and deviance from the natural order of society. It claims that Jews secretly control economies, spread democracy, anarchism, nihilism, alcoholism and pornography to create chaos and undermine morality. It suggests that the corruption Jews cause by modern changes in society will lead to political and economic disasters. Then, the gentile states will be desperate for the governance of Jews. They will take control and establish a Messianic age when the Jewish king will get rid of all the filth with which they infected the gentile societies. Democracy will be abolished, all power will be held by the Jewish king, drunkenness will be punished, unemployment will be abolished, and there will be fair taxing. The Jewish

king will be like the philosopher king of Plato: he will be a man of the public, whose personal qualities such as honesty will create admiration. People will live in welfare without injustice and preserve the governance of the kingdom of Zion.

The Protocols of the Elders of Zion has been quoted in many different contexts. It was common in between the world wars, especially in Europe: for example, Lord Sydenham found justification for his racist ideas in the text in the early twentieth century Britain (Ruotsila, 2000). Currently, it is more widespread in the Middle East. Although it is a proven forgery, it is still used by many people and groups against Israel. For example, Hamas (1988), which heads the contemporary government of Gaza, used *The Protocols* extensively. The Islamic Action Front Party of Jordan, a branch of the Muslim Brotherhood, provides another example. Sheikh Hamza Mansour, the party's secretary-general, praises television shows that pose *The Protocols* as reality, by stating that these programmes show the sick psychological nature of Jews (Jihadwatch, 2005).

It could be argued that *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* is a semi-erudite conspiracy theory, which accuses Jews of conspiring to bring about the modern transformations. It creates a bad-father figure of Jews (Cohn, 1970; Bronner, 2003), i.e. they are seen as the obstacles to a harmonious order. Thus, the text justifies the fundamentalist blame about Jews and legitimises potential violence against them by exaggerating the ontological insecurities about modernity. It produces an ideal surrogate victim figure from Jews. Therefore, despite the fact that it was plagiarised, different reactionary movements use the Protocols as a political conduit to legitimise their political visions. Fundamentalist and reactionary political movements, which have dogmatic definitions about the natural state of the society, often use conspiracy theories, as these theories' semi-erudite character allows them to blame an imagined evil (or surrogate victim) hindering the attainment of their ideal society. Consequently, I suggest that the semi-erudition of conspiracy theories provides a suitable ground for fundamentalist ideologies. The political significance of *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, which has been used by several fundamentalist movements to blame an omnipotent Jewish figure for a diversion from the natural harmony, underlines this point.

3.6 Conclusion

This chapter argues that both conspiratorial explanations and fundamentalist ideologies constitute semi-erudition, because they are attempts to affirm certain beliefs through reason. Thus, conspiracy theories are invaluable conduits for fundamentalist ideologies to undermine the credibility of an order, which they see as morally decadent. In parallel, conspiracy theories seem to supply oversimplified explanations, which pacify people. Moreover, their strict depiction of good and evil nurtures scapegoating. Young (2007: 172) mentions that: “the creation of demonisation and othering can permit the impermissible,” and conspiracy theories provide such fiendish depiction of others. As the discussion on *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* illustrates, these theories’ oversimplified understanding of power relations could be used as resonant justificatory mechanisms for political violence.

Despite associating conspiracy theories with fundamentalist ideologies, the chapter refrains from pathologising them, because they do not only reflect the paranoid beliefs of fundamentalist groups (Sutton, 1999). The chapter rather conceptualises conspiracy theories by exploring their methodological problems and social significance, and how these traits are utilised by fundamentalist ideologies. For that reason, it highlights Girard’s and Adorno’s perspectives and does not refer to any *a priori* condition in which conspiracy theories are viewed as wrong or deficient.

Major contemporary thinkers stress increasing anxieties in contemporary society (Bauman, 1992; 2000; Beck, 1992; Giddens, 1994). In this cultural climate, the feeling of ambiguity escalates, and people respond to that with different means - one of which is conspiracy theories. However, these theories have negative social consequences such as promoting submissive audiences or justifying bigotry through generating surrogate victims, as this chapter has showed. The cultural approach, which often conceptualises conspiracy theories as one of the many explanations, should be wary of the historical package these theories carry. Nevertheless, conspiracy theories are not just paranoid means, as they reveal social and political discontent in different contexts.

The semi-erudition perspective allows the conceptualisation of conspiracy theories by taking their methodology, cultural significance and political consequences into consideration. Therefore, this thesis will use the approach along with Girard's theory to understand different aspects of the conspiracy theories on Dönmes. The next chapter will develop this conceptualisation of conspiracy theories through exploring the case study, the pathologisation of the Dönmes.

Chapter 4. The History of the Social Constructions about Dönmes

If the delinquent exists only by displacing itself, if its specific mark is to live not on the margins but in the interstices of the codes that it undoes and displaces, if it is characterised by the privilege of the tour over the state, then the story is delinquent. Social delinquency consists in taking the story literally, in making it the principle of physical existence where a society no longer offers to subjects or groups symbolic outlets and expectations of spaces, where there is no longer any alternative to disciplinary falling-into-line or illegal drifting away, that is, one form or another of prison and wandering outside the pale (DeCerteau, 1988: 130).

4.1 Introduction

Conspiracy theories are social constructions, which, as in the case of *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, can provide justification for state policies in different contexts (Ben-Itto, 2005; Cohn, 1970; Bronner, 2003). In this sense, they could be politically decisive for the destiny of some communities. Žižek (2008: 57) suggests that social construction of the Jew is taken for granted by people, and therefore people do not hate the real Jew but its social construction, the symbolic Jew: "What the perpetrators of pogroms find intolerable and rage-provoking, what they react to, is not the immediate reality of Jews, but the image/figure of the 'Jew' which circulates and has been constructed in their tradition." Moreover, he prioritises the social construction of reality as follows: "Reality, in itself, in its stupid existence, is never intolerable: it is language, its symbolisation, which makes it as such" (ibid, 57). Likewise, Rosenthal notes that in Romania the social construction of Jews has been more significant than the actual presence of the community:

... the vanishing of Jews from Romanian society did not bring about the disappearance of anti-Semitism... this movement revealed a special form of anti-Semitism... labelled... as 'the mythical Jew'. This concept stresses the mythical and, at the same time, discursive imagery of the Jew in the Romanian symbolic system. Thus, it is no longer the Jews' perceived character or the physical appearance that is the object of anti-Semitism, but

an abstraction: an image, which, like other myths, mixes elements of the past – in the form of prejudice... The irrational, mythical component of the anti-Semitic stereotype dominates this abstraction... today a mythology has replaced a stereotype (Rosenthal, 2001: 424).

As conspiracy theories can determine what is accepted as real irrespective of their truth value, attention should be given to how they are socially constructed. This chapter will explore the conspiratorial social constructions about crypto-Jewish Dönmes throughout history. It will analyse the ways conspiratorial accounts describe the Dönme community, how different claims-makers handle the issue in different historical contexts, and the reasons for emergence of these theories. In other words, it will discuss the social construction of the problem the Dönme community represents in Turkish politics. Dönmes have been a common target of scapegoating in Turkish political culture. Therefore, they afford a focus for the exclusionary aspects of Turkish politics. These theories are also well-linked to the global anti-Semitic discourse. Accordingly, the chapter will be an analysis of anti-Semitism in Turkey. In short, it aims to demonstrate the demonisation of 'others' in Turkish political culture by examining the conspiracy theories about the Dönme community.

First, the chapter will introduce some relevant theoretical discussions of the social constructionist perspective. Second, it will present the Dönme history along with the conspiracy theories about the community. It will evaluate these constructions through examining the content of the published material on the community in the last hundred years. Third, it will consider possible reasons behind the variety in the conspiratorial constructions in different periods by using Bauman's division of *liquid* and *solid modernity*. While doing so, it will explore the internal factors as well as the external contexts that give rise to the conspiratorial accounts. It will conclude with the social and political reasons behind the conspiracy theories about the Dönme community.

4.2 The Social Constructionist Perspective

Social constructionism, related to many developments in a wide range of disciplines including philosophy and psychology, is a theory of how human beings interact and

make sense of the world. The perspective initially emerged in social problems theory as a challenge to traditional objectivist approaches and focused mainly on explaining how certain social conditions came to be construed as “social problems”. One of the most cited applications of the theory was by Spector and Kitsuse (1977), who sought to demonstrate how social problems are “socially constructed”. They argue that social problems are human creations rather than being direct reflections of the objective reality. Likewise, Goode and Ben-Yehuda (1994: 151) maintain that: “threats are culturally and politically constructed, a product of the human imagination”. The constructionist perspective frames reality as a social construction and sees social conditions dependent on people’s definitions. Therefore, it has a non-objectivist and an anti-essentialist emphasis:

From the functionalist perspective, objective conditions are the basis of social functions and dysfunctions. From the social problems [or social constructionist] perspective, subjective social values are used to assess objective social conditions (Manis, 1974: 309).

The question of the weight that should be given to the constructed nature of social reality resulted in a debate within this approach. Woolgar and Pawluch (1985) argue that social constructionism suffers from *ontological gerrymandering*, because it attempts to focus only on social meaning processes by restricting itself from examining the objective reality. They claim that if the approach wants to talk about reality, it has to touch upon some truth basis or objective conditions. In summary, there is an epistemological antagonism in the social constructionist analysis concerning the importance of the objective reality, which generated different approaches within the perspective (see Holstein and Miller (eds.), 1993).

The *strong response* or strict constructionist approach of Spector and Kitsuse distances itself from the objective reality and emphasises claims-making and construction processes of social problems. It focuses on how people create and communicate social problems, and it does not make any claims about the objective reality. Thus, the approach involves “a radical scepticism about ontological claims” (Birmingham & Cooper, 1999: 309). In contrast, the *weak response* or contextual constructionist perspective is interested in objective conditions, and their analysis is

supplemented by the reality of phenomena (see Best, 1993; 1995). While focusing on claim-making processes, the stance makes use of the objective reality. In this way, the perspective can make truth claims and will not be entrapped in relativism. Likewise, Best and Furedi (1995) use the weak response to investigate a social problem in relation to its material conditions. The chapter will also suggest that social problems often have some form of physical existence, although their constructions determine their scope. Williams summarises this as follows:

What we know about environmental-social problems is never objective in the true sense of the word; that is knowledge is always mediated by intersubjective experience yet at the same time is constrained by a real world independent from our experience (Williams, 1998: 477).

The chapter will consider this methodological pitfall in the analysis of the social constructions about Dönmes. It will mainly focus on different contexts of construction, differences among claims-makers and the ways they construct the Dönme identity. It will also investigate the socio-political reasons behind the conspiracy theories about the group. In this sense, the chapter studies the social constructions of the community in relation to its actual existence.

4.3 The History of the Dönme Community

Dönme, one of many different names like Avdeti, Sabbatean (Sabataycı), Selanikli-*Salonikan*, was given to a crypto-Jewish community that originated in the seventeenth century¹⁷. However, they call themselves 'Ma'aminim' - *the believers* (Şişman, 2002b). The majority of the group resided in Salonika in the Ottoman Empire until the population exchange between Turkey and Greece, and the rest inhabited other cities such as Istanbul and Izmir (Smyrna) (Baer, 2007). There is not much information about their numbers, networks and effects due to their concealed character, which could be one of the main factors attracting conspiracy theories.

¹⁷ According to Neyzi's (2002: 153) interviewee, the terms Dönme and Selanikli are used by outsiders to insult the group members.

Şişman (2008: 25-26) argues that there are four distinct periods in the Dönme history. The first is when its founder Sabbatai Sevi was alive in the seventeenth century. The second period started after his death and lasted throughout the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries. The third epoch started at the beginning of the twentieth century and continued during the fall of the Ottoman Empire, when the Dönme group was influenced by modernisation movements. The fourth era of the community history refers to the contemporary period from 1990 onwards (ibid). While the discussion acknowledges this historical schema, it will not go into detail about the community in the eighteenth century. It will examine their story in the following order: first the emergence of the group, coinciding with Şişman's first period, then the fall of the Ottoman Empire and the establishment of the Turkish republic, when they became a part of political discussions. Lastly, it will examine them in the contemporary era.

4.3.1 The Emergence of the Dönme Community

Sabbatai Sevi was the leader of a Jewish messianic movement in the seventeenth century, which laid the foundations of the Dönme community. He had a religious education to become a rabbi and studied the Talmud and the Halakha (Jewish law). However, he was actually influenced by the Lurianic¹⁸ interpretation of Jewish mysticism. In 1665, his collaborator Nathan of Gaza, who had a prominent role in the Dönme movement, declared Sabbatai Sevi as the expected messiah of the Jews and himself as Sevi's prophet. This claim gradually gained acceptance among the Jewish community. As Neyzi (2002: 143) argues, Sabbatai's pronouncement created so many expectations among Jews that they believed that Sabbatai Sevi would topple the Ottoman Sultan Mehmet IV.

He created a big impact not only in Jewish circles in the Ottoman Empire but also among different religious groups throughout the European, African, Asian and Northern American continents. According to Şişman (2008; 2002), millenarian Christian movements also recognised Sabbatai as the potential Jewish messiah, who would provide the necessary conditions for the second coming of Jesus, and they

¹⁸ Isaac Luria (1534-1572) was a Jewish rabbi and a mystic from Safed. His teachings of Kabbalah have influenced many Jewish mystics (Fine, 2003).

helped the spread of his message around the world. Chasin and Popkin (2004) discuss the effects of Sabbatai Sevi among Protestants in the Netherlands. Similarly, Hathaway (1997) mentions the controversy the group members created in Ottoman Egypt of the seventeenth century: “the phenomenal excitement generated by Sabbatai Sevi’s prophetic announcement of 1665-66 led to the appearance of prophets all over Europe and the Ottoman Empire.” In short, Sabbatai Sevi became a very important religious figure in the seventeenth century all around the world.

In response to the threat posed by the growing movement, Jewish religious authorities requested that the Ottoman Empire take action. Sevi was taken to court and was forced to convert to Islam. After the conversion, he was given the name Aziz Mehmet Efendi and was employed by the emperor. Şişman (2008) suggests that the palace showed him hospitality by giving him the emperor’s name as well as employing him in a good position. Nonetheless, Sabbatai Sevi was taken to court a second time with the belief that he was not fully converted. He was sent to a small town Ülgün in today’s Albania, where he spent the rest of his life.

Sabbatai Sevi’s conversion to Islam generated a great disappointment, especially among his followers. Nevertheless, several hundred families followed him and converted to Islam (Scholem, 1971). They comprised the origins of the Dönme community. They publicly acted as Muslims but practised their version of Judaism in private and did not marry outsiders. It should be mentioned that not all of Sevi’s followers became Dönmes - some, like Nathan of Gaza, stayed in Judaism, and others, like Jacob Frank, converted to Christianity (Şişman, 2008).

Dönmes’ identity stayed as an open secret in the Ottoman Empire (Baer, 2004). Their existence was acknowledged by others, but no actions were taken. In the meantime, the Dönme community was divided into three sub-sects, namely *Karakaşlı*, *Kapancı* and *Yakubi*, due to different claims about who incarnated Sevi’s spirit (Baer, 1997). People who believed Jacob Querido, Sevi’s brother-in-law, as Sevi’s incarnation created the *Yakubi* (Jacobites) group in 1683. Subsequently, there were further arguments among the remaining followers about whether Baruchya Russo (Osman Baba) was the incarnation of Sevi. This dispute created another split of the Russo adherents *Karakaşlılar* from the *Kapancı* group, who continued to

believe only in Sevi (ibid). This division shaped the basic structure of the Dönme society, as these groups specialised in different trades and had limited contact with each other.

4.3.2 Dönmes in Turkish Modernisation

The Dönme community was influenced by the modernisation movement in the Ottoman Empire during the late nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries. They established modern schools such as Feyz-i Sıbyan, Terakki (which later became Şişli Terakki), Feyziye (which later became Işık Lisesi) and Feyzi Atı (which later became Boğaziçi Lisesi) (Neyzi, 2002: 144), and developed into a well-educated community with global commercial ties (Baer, 2007). They were cosmopolitan figures and proponents of modern, secular ideas in the Empire (Ortaylı, 1998). The relative freedom of Dönme women could be counted as one of the facets of their cosmopolitanism (Hanioglu, 1994). Young Dönmes published a modernist journal *Gonca-ı Edeb*, where they advocated the Enlightenment ideas against the dogmas and prejudices of their community (Şişman, 2002a). In the same period, Salonika, where most of the group members lived, was the centre of the *Young Turks* and the *Committee of Union and Progress* (CUP): the modernist movement against the Sultan in the Ottoman Empire. Some Dönmes, such as Mehmed Cavid Bey, the minister of finance in 1908, joined the movement and played important roles (Neyzi, 2002: 145).

The Dönme affiliation with the Turkish modernisation movement later produced one of the most prominent themes of conspiracy theories in Turkey. The reactionary movements against modernisation have framed the Young Turk movement as a Jewish conspiracy, and the Dönme involvement has been used as proof. These accusations were voiced loudly after the 1908 *coup d'état*¹⁹ in which Dönme Mehmed Cavid Bey²⁰ and Jewish-freemason Emmanuel Carosso were among the leaders overthrowing Sultan Abdulhamid II. In addition to this, Theodor Herzl, the

¹⁹ 1908 Young Turk revolution suspended the Sultan Abdulhamid II rule and restored the parliament (Hanioglu, 2001; Kansu, 2001).

²⁰ As Bessemer (2002: 22) states, there were unproven conspiratorial accounts about Mehmed Cavid Bey, which accused him of cooperating with Jewish and Zionist banks while attempting to find loans from Europe.

head of the World Zionist Organisation, had come to Istanbul in 1899 to buy Palestine from Abdulhamid II for Jews to establish a state, but the Sultan had not granted the request (Bali, 2008). When the CUP toppled Abdulhamid II and exiled him to Salonika, some conspiratorial lines claimed that this was because of the refusal to sell Palestine.

According to Koloğlu (2002: 56), the use of Freemasonry lodges by CUP, the claims of the Abdulhamid II's supporters, the disappointed CUP members who did not find themselves in the party list for elections, and the anti-Semitic ideas of the contemporary English government, assisted the conspiracy theories about the Jews/Dönmes. That is to say, local and international circles, disappointed by the CUP policies of the period, formed a political bloc relating the CUP government to a Jewish conspiracy. In this regard, we can talk about different claims-makers, who suffered one way or another from the contemporary changes, spreading Dönme/Jewish conspiracies about CUP. Therefore, we can see an interaction between the local and the international agents in the emergence of the conspiracy theories on Dönmes. Kedorie (1971) shows that the British ambassador of the period, Sir Gerard Lowther, was one of the conspiracy theorists (see also Hepkon, 2007). It should be noted that the anti-Semitic literature was transferred largely from Europe during that period. Hence, these theories were not only limited to the Ottoman political sphere but concerned political actors on a global level. For example, a well-known anti-Semite Sergei Nilus, the first publisher of the classical conspiracy theory *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, supported Abdulhamid II against CUP:

He retired to his private chapel to pray for the victory of the Sultan over the Young Turks. The late Orthodox father, Varsonofii, who had also been present tried in vain to convince Nilus that Abdul-Hamid had rightly been punished for his mass murders of Christians, but he only succeeded in arousing Nilus's anger (Ben-Itto, 2005: 93).

In short, the exile of Abdulhamid II in 1908, the involvement of Dönmes in CUP and their cosmopolitanism have been used in the conspiratorial explanations. Dönmes, for claims-makers, represented the change modernisation brought to the Ottoman

Empire. Therefore, people who reacted against CUP accused Dönmes of political transformations. Accordingly, we see the conspiratorial lines on Dönmes in Islamist journals against CUP such as *Volkan* as early as 1908 (Baer, 2004). It could be said that the people or groups alienated by the modernisation movement in Turkey were attracted to the conspiracy theories about Dönmes in the early twentieth century.

As CUP cadres gradually became the founding elite of the Turkish republic, the conspiracy theories began to assume that the modern Turkish republic was established by Jews and Dönmes. For example, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the founding father and the first president of modern Turkey, was a CUP member. He was born in Salonika and attended a modern school established by a Dönme. Such facts increased the suspicion about people from Salonika and their origins, as they seemed to form the founding elite. These suspicions have been voiced in the conspiracy theories, especially by the right wing and by Islamists, to delegitimise the foundations of the Turkish republic.

In the meantime, there were important incidents affecting the destiny of the Dönme community: the fall of Salonika in 1913 to Greece, the 1917 fire in Salonika, the population exchange between Greece and Turkey in 1924, the Karakaşzade Rüşdü affair and the Capital Levy. To start with, Salonika fell to Greece in 1913, and soon after that Greek authorities wanted to create a Greekified population by getting rid of the remaining Turkish citizens (Baer, 2007). Dönmes became unwanted in Greece, as they were counted as Muslim Turks. Bessemer (2003: 120) states that the 1917 fire in Salonika was another traumatic experience for the group: after losing their previous status, they also lost a significant number of their religious texts. Subsequently, Dönmes were included in the population exchange between Greece and Turkey, which was meant to be between Muslim Turks in Greece excluding the Western Thrace, and the Orthodox Greeks in Turkey excluding Istanbul (Baer, 2004). Some Dönmes wanted to convert back to Judaism to stay in Greece. However, their appeal was refused by the Jewish religious authorities in Greece (Galante, 1935: 77-79 cited in Baer, 2004: 693).

Before the deportation of Dönmes to Turkey, a self-acclaimed member of the group, Karakaşzade Rüşdü, submitted a petition to the Grand National Assembly of Turkey

against the incoming Dönmes. He essentially argued that they were a separate group, which had never mixed with the Turkish community, and therefore their deportation should be subject to their willingness to assimilate in Turkish society (Bessemer, 2003). In other words, he urged Dönmes either not to come to Turkey or to accept assimilation. Rüşdü's petition created a discussion about Dönmes in the Turkish media until his retreat in the debate due to the immense hostility to the group (ibid, 123). Bali (2008: 17) remarks that the debate gained an important amount of attention in the media, albeit lasting only a few weeks.

The Capital Levy of 1942 reiterated the public concern about Dönmes. The law was intended to tax the citizens who made fortunes from the wartime economy (Neyzi, 2002: 146). However, it was quite heavy-handed on non-Muslim minorities. They were forced to pay very high taxes, and the ones who could not afford them were sent to 'work camps' in Eastern Anatolia to labour in difficult conditions. According to Mango (2006: 1021-1022), the tax showed the influence of racist and fascist ideologies in Turkey. What attracted Dönmes' attention was their inclusion, along with Christians and Jews, in the section of society subject to taxation. They were shocked, because they considered themselves an invisible group. It also created a belief that the state secretly kept records of Dönmes. According to recent interviews with group members, the fear still prevails (Yurddaş, 2004).

Dönmes, in the late nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries, represented the global, cosmopolitan, modernising face of the Ottoman Empire (Baer, 2007) and played important roles in CUP and Turkish modernisation. It seems that the group was seduced by the promises of modern Turkey such as secularism, the equality of all citizens regardless of ethnicity and religion. The Dönme attachment to the ideas of modernity and secularism of the newly born Turkish republic show their willingness to be integrated into society, because they hoped to be treated as equal citizens in secular-modern Turkey (Baer, 2004; Neyzi, 2002). Nonetheless, the conspiratorial accounts about the group, as in the Karakaşzade Rüşdü affair and the Turkish state's exclusionary practice, exemplified by the Capital Levy, alienated the group members.

4.3.3 Dönmes in Contemporary Turkey

After the Capital Levy affair in 1942, for nearly fifty years, comments on the group's existence were limited to the right-wing conspiracy theories and to academic literature without public concern. Throughout this period, the right-wing and Islamic circles accused some alleged members of the community of causing moral decay. Dönmes returned to broad public attention in the 1990s, when conspiracy theories became more widespread in Turkey (see Bora, 1994). It also corresponded to the globalisation process, when minorities gained more voice and acceptance in the society. Films such as *Salkım Hanım'ın Taneleri*, whose storyline is about the injustices of the Capital Levy, exemplified the sympathetic and nostalgic look towards the non-Muslim minorities in 1990s.

In addition, the efforts by Ilgaz Zorlu, an acclaimed group member, played an important role in bringing the community back to the spotlight. He wrote articles about the history of the group and wanted to convince everyone of the necessity of Dönme conversion back to Judaism. Bali (2008: 26) argues that Zorlu attracted both the local and the international media. He rapidly became a well-known figure in Dönme discussions. Zorlu's book (1998) *Evet Ben Selanik'liyim -Yes I am a Salonikan* amplified the interest in Dönmes. Bali summarises the effect of the book as follows:

The book immediately became something of a media sensation in its own right, going through as many as nine—albeit small—printings, and immediately attracting a great deal of attention in the Turkish—and particularly, Turkish Islamist—press. This was not entirely unexpected, since all subjects dealing with Jews and the crypto-Jewish Dönmes had long been a favourite topic - in some cases, obsession - of Turkey's Islamists and ultranationalists... Zorlu, due to his self-proclaimed Dönme roots, began to be held up by the Islamists as an 'insider', one capable of divulging the closely-guarded secrets of a powerful and mysterious sect. Thus, Zorlu's every utterance and his very presence suddenly became 'documentary evidence' for the existence of a secret community whose continued existence - often suspected- could never be proven. Zorlu appeared on a number of

televised debates and discussions, addressing what was largely an Islamist audience, was widely interviewed and discussed in the Islamist press, and in a panel organised during the biggest book fair of Turkey (Bali, 2008: 26-27).

Zorlu has particularly been welcomed by the Islamic circles, as his claims about Dönmes partly fit their theories. Bessemer (2003: 152) states that: "İlgaz Zorlu has reiterated the claim that a group, albeit a small one, of non-assimilated Sabbateans still exists, as well as of a much larger group of partially or totally assimilated ones, and that they have pervasive influence on Turkish society." Zorlu's text, which contends that Dönmes have an important weight in Turkey, recalled the conspiratorial claims about the group. Therefore, the demand for Zorlu's work has increased in political circles, which carry conspiratorial ideas about Jews and Dönmes. Indeed, the amount of interest shown in his work led Zorlu to establish his own publishing house, Zvi/Geyik Publishing, where he published his works as well as the conspiratorial accounts on Dönmes such as that by Eygi (2000). In short, Zorlu's claims on the subject and popularity in the media triggered more works on Dönmes, especially conspiracy theories.

Another important event in the 1990s was the accusations by Halil Bezmen, a famous businessman, of discrimination against Dönmes in Turkey. As a member of the Dönme community, he claimed in the United States, where he sought refuge, that the Turkish state was biased against the group. This created a controversy in the Turkish media and heightened the interests on the community (Bali 2008). It could be suggested that the last stage of the Dönme history witnessed an increased amount of attention to the group. The following section will discuss this in more detail while analysing the content of the works on Dönmes in the last hundred years.

4.4 The Representations of Dönmes: 1919-2008

While the Dönme community has existed from the seventeenth century onwards, the debates about it began in the early twentieth century. For one hundred years, people in Turkey have been articulating the significance of Dönmes for the country. This section will attempt to analyse this period by investigating the written material on the group. To achieve this aim, table 4.1 below illustrates the numbers and the content of

the works on Dönmes. The table divides the literature between conspiratorial accusations about Dönmes, for example that they secretly rule Turkey, and the neutral discussions on their religious aspects and cultural characteristics.

The bibliographical search was guided by Bali's (2004) *A Bibliography of Books, Theses and Articles Published in Turkey Concerning Judaism 1923-2003*, which includes books, articles and unpublished master and doctorate theses in Turkish. Bali was also very kind to send his updated list of the published material after 2003. Unfortunately, I could not include all the newspaper articles and the internet discussions on the Dönme issue. Nevertheless, I will explore some important media debates such as the ones succeeding the arguments made by Karakaşzade and Zorlu about the group. I will discuss the responses in the newspaper and internet media to the *Efendi* series in the next chapter. I also made an internet search to double-check the bibliography, which was rewarding particularly regarding the post-2003 period. On the contents of the works, I mainly relied on my own readings and Bessemer's (2003), Baer's (2004), Landau's (2007) relevant works. At points, where I was not sure about the content, Şişman and Bali were very helpful and generous in answering my questions. However, they should not be held responsible for any flaws.

Table 4.1 The Content of the Publications on Dönmes (1908-2008)

Publication Year	Neutral	Conspiratorial	Total
1919	1	1	2
1924	4	3	7
1925	6		6
1926	1		1
1934	3		3
1935	4		4
1936	2		2
1940	1		1
1945	1		1
1948		1	1
1951		2	2
1952		1	1

1953		4	4
1957		1	1
1965	1		1
1967	3	1	4
1968	1		1
1972		1	1
1973		1	1
1976		3	3
1977	1		1
1978	1		1
1979	1	2	3
1983	1		1
1986	3		3
1987	1	1	2
1988	4	1	5
1989	1		1
1990	2		2
1991	1	1	2
1992	3		3
1993	1		1
1994	14	2	16
1995	11	1	12
1996	3		3
1997	3		3
1998	11		11
1999	5	5	10
2000	16	3	19
2001	8	3	11
2002	18	2	20
2003	2	1	3
2004	35	15	50
2005	1	4	5

2006	6	3	9
2007	2	5	7
2008		2	2
No records		2	2
Total			255

According to Bali (2008), there are three distinct discourses of the published materials about Dönmes. The first period starts with the establishment of the Turkish republic and continues until the end of the single-party era in 1946. The basic political framework of the era was shaped by the Republican People's Party (CHP) regime and its attempts to modernise the country. In this period, the state opposed the Islamic and far right-wing circles and therefore did not allow them to publish conspiracy theories (see table 4.1). The published accounts were more often neutral works in that period. The second era begins with the multi-party system in 1946, when the censor of the single party ended. Thus, the Islamist and right-wing conspiracy theories about Dönmes had a chance to circulate in the media. The third epoch is in 1990s, when globalisation and multiculturalism influenced Turkish politics. This period revealed a blooming of the written works about the community.

In the period of 1919-1946, the aforementioned Karakaşzade Rüşdü affair of 1924 was reflected in a number of articles. Most of the responses to Karakaşzade, some of which talked about the sexual enforcements of the group, aimed at scandalising the issue. Baer (2004) notes that Karakaşzade's insistence on the Dönme assimilation created a debate between him and an anonymous writer in *Vatan* newspaper. This writer, argued to be the Dönme founder-owner of the newspaper, Ahmed Emin Yalman, opposed Karakaşzade by claiming that the group would naturally dissolve, and there was no need to force them to assimilate (ibid, 698). After the Karakaşzade debate, there was no other written material about the group until 1934. Between 1934 and 1945, Gövsa and Galante analysed the Dönme community from an academic point of view (Bessemmer, 2003). While the state imposed exclusionary policies such as the Capital Levy on the community, these discriminatory trends were not observed in the published material due to the state censorship.

This period was followed by the right-wing conspiracy theories after 1946, the end of the single-party era. These publications were mainly by the Islamic right-wing journals and newspapers such as *Sebülreşad* and *Büyük Doğu*. For example, the newspaper *Büyük Doğu* published the confessions of an alleged Dönme, Nazif Özge, in 1952 (Bali, 2002). Like Karakaşzade, Özge had negative experiences with the community. He claimed that they had attempted to rape his wife, who was a Dönme, for their religious reasons (ibid). While the conservative newspaper granted him the status of the authentic confessor, they did not really trust his mental state. In the end, they published his accusations but stressed that Özge's psychological state had been disturbed by other Dönmes.

There are a couple of factors that could have been influential in the right wing's ability and motivation to publish on the subject in that period. First of all, the state censorship of published materials decreased after 1946. Moreover, on May 15, 1948, Israel proclaimed its independence (Bessinger, 2002: 25), which resulted in a war between Israel and Arabic states Jordan, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon and Egypt. It created anti-Zionist and anti-Semitic sentiments in the whole Islamic world. Similarly, the only conspiratorial work on Dönmes between 1957 and 1972 was published in 1967, at the time of the Six Day War between Israel and Arabic states. However, there is not an ongoing relationship between the conspiratorial accounts on Dönmes and the Arab-Israeli conflict. For example, the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982 did not coincide with any published conspiracy theories on Dönmes, which could also be due to the political censure after the 1980 military coup in Turkey.

The right-wing conspiracy theories led to violence against some Dönmes such as Ahmed Emin Yalman, who was a prominent journalist in the Turkish media with a secular-liberal stance. As Bali (2008) mentions, Yalman's hosting of the first beauty contest in Turkey in 1952 provoked right-wing writers such as Nihal Atsız²¹, and Necip Fazıl Kısakürek²². They engaged in heated debates with Yalman. The hostility towards Yalman went so far that there was an armed attack on him on November 22, 1952 (ibid, 187). The right-wing conspiracy theories also contributed to the

²¹ Nihal Atsız (1905-1975) was a Turkish writer, well known for his fascistic and pan-Turkish political views. He has been influential on Turkish right-wing movements (Uzer, 2002).

²² Necip Fazıl Kısakürek (1904-1983) was a Turkish conservative poet. He has been very influential on Turkish right-wing and Islamist movements.

assassination of the well-known journalist Abdi İpekçi, the editor-in-chief of the newspaper *Milliyet*²³. He was murdered by an ultra-nationalist urban guerrilla, Mehmet Ali Ağca²⁴, in 1979 (ibid). In the same period, there were also some academic works on Dönmes. The discussions of a historian, Cemal Kutay (1965; 1967a; 1967b; 1968), were published between 1965 and 1968. Indeed, during the 1970s and 1980s, we can see a balanced number of right-wing conspiratorial explanations (n=9) and neutral studies (n=13).

The third period of the published material on Dönmes begins in the 1990s. There was a boom in the Dönme discussion from 1990 onwards, when repressed identities in Turkey started to be represented more publicly (Gürbilek, 1992). The Dönme discussions revived when Turkish society was introduced to the multiculturalism discourse in 1990s. Accordingly, the number of history journals that were willing to publish on the issue grew. Moreover, Zorlu's attempts increased the public interest. Islamist writers, such as Eygi and Dilipak, found chances to support their perspectives through engaging in debates with Zorlu. In the 1990s, the interest in Dönmes significantly increased, ranging from newspaper articles lists of alleged Dönmes on the internet, and from conspiracy theories to academic works on the subject. In parallel, the trend has continued in 2000s with the publication of novels such as *Sabetaycı Selim'in Öyküsü (The Story of Selim the Sabbatean)* (Gelardin, 2006) or the novels satirising the conspiracy theories about Dönmes, such as *Onomastica Alla Turca* (Erdem, 2004). Bali describes the boom of the Dönme subject in the following terms:

Hundreds of articles and interviews appeared in the press on the subject, and the country's various television channels hosted frequent discussions and debates. Nearly all those writing on and discussing the subject did so from the starting assumption that there indeed existed a 'Sabbatean hegemony' over Turkey, with but the rare voice daring to criticise the 'Dönme-mania' that had taken hold of the country (Bali, 2008: 22).

²³ A major mainstream Turkish daily newspaper.

²⁴ Ağca later escaped from prison and attempted to assassinate Pope John Paul II (Meyer, 1998).

The conspiratorial perspective was not only confined to the right-wing or Islamic perspectives in the 1990s. Left-wing writers were also affiliated with the conspiracy theories on Dönmes. A well-known Marxist professor Yalçın Küçük (1999a; 1999b; 1999c) published articles about the community. He was followed by a journalist, Soner Yalçın, whose *opus magnum Efendi* series (Yalçın, 2004; 2006) became one of the most popular conspiracy theories in Turkey. Despite having a very different methodology and content, the left-wing approach, like that of the right wing, attributed its political discontent to secret Dönme/Jewish activities. The left wing framed the neo-liberal transformations in Turkey as a Dönme conspiracy. It also broadened the scope of the conspiracy theories on Dönmes by including many well-known people such as the Eurovision song contest winner Sertab Erener and the Nobel Laureate Orhan Pamuk (Habervitrini, 2005). Hence, the left-wing discussions attracted the attention of the general public and popularised the Dönme debate. For example, Yalçın's (2004; 2006) *Efendi* series was printed by *Doğan Kitap* (Doğan Publishing House), one of the most popular publishing houses in Turkey.

The popularity of the left-wing conspiracy theories might be due to their ability to promote books with more sophisticated appeals. They use scientific language and footnote citations, which promote a more stylish look compared to the ideologically-biased, pejorative language of the right-wing theories. Both Küçük and Yalçın make use of onomastics²⁵ in their accounts. Besides, the left-wing accounts promote a more coherent and convincing picture of the political structure of Turkey. It should not go without mentioning that while a minority of the left-wing approaches entered into the Dönme conspiracy theories' domain, the majority condemn these theories (see Kurtuluş Cephesi, Günerbüyük, 2004).

In the same period, the Islamist and right-wing interest in Dönmes also increased. In addition to many newspaper articles, Eygi's book (2000) was published by Zorlu's printing house, and Zorlu wrote a book with a well known Islamic author Abdurrahman Dilipak about alleged frauds in a Dönme school (Zorlu and Dilipak, 2001). Although they shared an anti-Semitic rhetoric and a belief in a secret Dönme rule, the Islamists maintained their distance from the left-wing theorists, who carried

²⁵ Onomastics, the study of proper names of all kinds and the origins of names, is widely used in the left-wing Dönme conspiracy theories.

strong secular convictions. Moreover, some left-wing accounts (see Yalçın, 2006) claim that many Islamic sects are secretly dominated by Dönmes, which heightened the antagonism between the two.

The Dönme controversy also concerned other political groups, such as the Kurdish movement. Bali (2008) cites that Kurdish nationalists such as Musa Anter²⁶ and Abdülmelik Fırat²⁷ accused a member of parliament, Coşkun Kırca²⁸, of being a Dönme and trying to throw Kurds out of their lands (ibid, 176). In this opposition, Kırca's pro-state, Turkish nationalist stance played an important role. Both Anter and Fırat associated Kırca with state oppression of the Kurdish minority. They ridiculed Kırca for not being Turkish but imposing Turkish nationalism. While doing so, they visited anti-Semitic stereotypes, calling Dönmes self-seeking or cowards (Anter cited in Bali, 2008: 175) or having titles such as 'Pis Yahudi' meaning 'Dirty Jew' in their essays (ibid). Fırat also argued that a well-known Kurdish intellectual and novelist Yaşar Kemal was controlled by the Jewish lobby through his Jewish wife, Tilda (Akman, 1996). The Kurdish use of the conspiracy theories on Dönmes linked the community to state nationalism and to global Jewish lobbies. They saw Jews and Dönmes as the power behind their own oppression. They appropriated nearly the same anti-Semitic rhetoric of the left-wing and the right-wing accounts. However, as in the case of the left-wing accounts, the conspiracy theories on Dönmes among the Kurdish political groups were not popular in general.

The contemporary prevalence of the Dönme conspiracy theories in different political circles coincides with the aforementioned concept, new anti-Semitism: a re-popularisation of anti-Semitism in a variety of ideologies along with an opposition to Israel. The distinctive characteristic of the new anti-Semitism is its ability to unite many different political ideas from both left and right. The conspiracy theories on Dönmes achieve a similar task by hegemonizing an anti-Semitic content to a variety

²⁶ Musa Anter was a well-known Kurdish author and a political figure. Among Kurds his name is remembered as "Ape Musa", meaning uncle Musa, which indicates respect.

²⁷ Abdülmelik Fırat, at the time of these discussions, was a DYP (True Path Party) MP from Erzurum. Later, he continued his political career by establishing his own party, HAK-PAR. He is known with his pro-Kurdish ideas as well as being a grandson of Sheikh Said, the executed leader of the 1925 Kurdish-Islamist rebellion.

²⁸ Coşkun Kırca was a former diplomat and later a DYP (True Path Party) delegate in 1990s. He was known for his pro-secular, nationalist and pro-state ideas, which did not make him a sympathetic figure among Kurdish nationalists and Islamists.

of political concerns and by reaching the general public. They fit the definitions of new anti-Semitism in the sense that they raise similar concerns about the Dönme community among different political movements.

The differences among these three seasons of conspiracy theories illustrate a significant diversity. In the first period, the published accounts were more concerned with the integration of the Dönme community and their religious heresy. In the second period, different political groups, such as Islamists, found opportunities to represent themselves in the political arena and to propagate conspiracy theories about the community. The accusations were directed towards well-known figures such as Ahmed Emin Yalman, Abdi İpekçi and Cem İpekçi²⁹. In the last and the current episode of the debate, the subject's reach was widened by various claim-makers. Along with the Islamic right wing, we can identify left-wing and Kurdish uses of the conspiracy theories. Everybody had their own version of Dönmes to substantiate their political perspectives. They all shared the tendency to blame the 'other' through Dönme allegations. Hence, the Dönme identity became a popular scapegoat in Turkish political culture. Nevertheless, there are also academic works from the same period (Şişman, 2008; Baer, 2004; Bali, 2008), which attempt to demystify the conspiratorial uses and pejorative language.

The search through the literature demonstrates a couple of recurrent themes in the conspiracy theories on Dönmes:

1. They are in power: they control the media, politics and higher positions in the country;
2. They established the Turkish Republic;
3. The Dönme community is a secret and closed group like Freemasonry;
4. They cause moral decay;
5. They are allied with foreign powers against the will of the country.

The first three concerns reflect the tension of the ordinary citizen about getting a fair share of the political power. In this sense, people who feel that the system is unfair

²⁹ Ismail Cem İpekçi (1940-2007) was a well-known Turkish politician of the left-wing, a journalist and a former minister of foreign affairs.

might be tempted to blame Dönmes. The fourth statement refers to the moral decay and diversion from the ethics of the ordinary citizen by pointing out that the Jewish/Dönme-oriented cultural world is dominant. The fifth completes the demonisation by supposing a link between the group and a global Jewish network.

The conspiratorial accounts about Dönmes have reactionary tones. In the early years of the Turkish republic, the fear of modernisation and the ambiguity of the population exchange brought these theories alive. In the 1990s, their resurrection was largely due to the neo-liberal changes. Accordingly, the current conspiracy theories long for the early republican years and devalue the contemporary era (Yalçın, 2004; 2006; Küçük, 2004). In other words, they voice a concern about the multiculturalism of the post-1980s Turkey (see Yavuz, 1999; 2002). It could be suggested that these theories base themselves upon the fears and ontological insecurities caused by major changes in different periods.

It seems fair to argue that conspiracy theories provide ideological nodal points, where the meaning of the world is organised in times of social dislocations. According to Laclau (1990), myths suture the dislocated political space by establishing a new space of representation. The conspiracy theories on the Dönme community, by hegemonising a conspiratorial content to their description of politics, promote ideological nodal points to suture the dislocations. They serve as a point of resistance for the people who are negatively affected by the social transformations. For example, the Abdulhamid II supporters, the disappointed members of CUP, and the English ambassador of the time bought into the Dönme conspiracy literature for different reasons. They were all alienated by government policies, and therefore they were united by the conspiratorial explanations that condemned the changes that they suffered. We can see a similar attitude in today's usage of Dönme conspiracy theories among different political actors. In this regard, conspiracy theories seem to relieve some groups from the negative consequences of social dislocations. In the next section, I will attempt to identify the Dönme community's characteristics and the external events to explore the origins of these theories and their significance in more detail.

4.5 Understanding the Conspiracy Theories about Dönmes: Fluidity v. Nationalism

I will discuss both the internal characteristics of the community and the external effects of Turkish politics to understand the social and political factors that have been influential in the conspiratorial accounts. While focusing on the internal features of the community, I will also provide examples from other crypto-Jewish experiences, such as the Marranos of seventeenth-century Spain.

4.5.1 The Internal Factors: The Features of the Dönme Community that Hail the Conspiracy Theories

Dönmes' double identity, fluidity and assimilationism have been influential factors on the conspiratorial accounts. To begin with, Dönmes have lived a double identity throughout their history (Baer, 2004). They acted as Muslims in public and as Dönmes at home. Şişman (2008) mentions that initially Sabbatai Sevi experienced the dilemma of living a double life, because, while he was in touch with Islam, he kept his Jewish beliefs. He used to carry a Talmud in one hand and a Koran in the other during some of his speeches³⁰. He had to be both Aziz Mehmet Efendi and Sabbatai Sevi. In some letters, he called himself Sabbatai Mehmet Efendi, which illustrates his identity ambiguity (ibid).

Dönmes' existence in relation to Judaic and Islamic religious authorities constituted the ambiguity of their double identity. While they were becoming members of Islamic sects such as Bektashism (Ehrlich, 2001; Şişman, 2008), they also maintained their Jewish customs. Today, they are not allowed to take Israeli citizenship, which is granted to anyone who can prove their Jewish ancestors. Landau remarks on their double identity as follows:

At the time, every Dönme used two personal names, a Jewish and a Turkish, as determined by the relevant social context; many retained their original Sephardic names as well. In effect, however, the Jews accused them of

³⁰ After this had been reported, he was arrested for not converting to Islam wholeheartedly.

apostasy, while the Turks suspected that they were not truly convinced Muslims... They could be considered neither Orthodox Jews (since they worked on Jewish holy days, to impress Muslim Turks) nor devoted Muslims (since they circumcised their sons at the age of eight days)... it seems that their central beliefs are summarised in Eighteen Precepts (Ordinances), attributed to Sabbatai Tsevi himself. These are supposed to parallel the biblical Ten Commandments, but ... somewhat ambiguous... recommended comportment toward both Jews and Muslims... and strong prohibitions of marriage with either (Landau, 2007: 2).

The Dönme identity crossed the boundaries of Judaism, Islam and in some cases Christianity. They existed on a thin line between religions. On the one hand, they used this fluidity to their advantage. For example, they were assimilated well in Ottoman society as new Muslims by getting good positions in bureaucracy, doing trade and artisanship. When Salonika was lost to Greece, some of them attempted to convert back to Judaism to refrain from deportation. On the other hand, this double life made them a common scapegoat for all communities. According to Danton (1997: 25), neither Turks nor orthodox Jews liked them. Thus, they were isolated from both communities.

Losing most of the religious material in the Salonikan fire of 1917 and the secularisation of group members increased the ambiguity and fluidity of their identity. Indeed, fluidity has been a defining character of crypto-Jewish communities, because where the crypto-Judaism starts and ends has always been a contextual issue, shaped differently by diverse discourses and group members' preferences. In this regard, they constantly have to create and re-create their identities. Kunin (2001) observes these tendencies while analysing contemporary crypto-Jews in the American Southwest. He utilises the concept *bricolage* to explain the fluid identity of the group. He explains this as follows:

Identity as a Crypto-Jew is not static. Individuals are constantly moving in and out. This fluidity means that Crypto-Jews are constantly reconfiguring their past in their current identity (Kunin, 2001: 45).

The argument here is that the fluidity of the group's identity makes them ideal targets for conspiratorial accounts, as they are excluded from all categories of society. The crypto-Jews of Spain, Marranos ("pigs" in Spanish), or new Christians in the seventeenth century provide a very good example. Like Dönmes, after conversion, new Christians became more prosperous, and they gained more power in Spanish society: "As a result, in the century between 1391 and 1492, New Christians came to exert great influence in Spain's economic, institutional, and cultural life, and played a significant role in the urban *comunero* movement" (Freidman, 1987: 8). Subsequently, tension was aroused between the old and new Christians. The old Christians accused the latter of secretly continuing their faith in Judaism. New Christians were subject to the same violence, which had shaped the previous relations between Jews and Christians (Shell, 1991). This, as a result, created the blood purity laws by which the Spanish Inquisition reinforced social and racial segregation. Both Christian and Jewish religious authorities refused the fluid crypto-Jewish identity as religious heresy:

Jewishness, then, was not a statement of faith or even a series of ethnic practices but a biological consideration. This... was explained by Fray Prudencio de Sandoval, Charles V's biographer, who wrote in 1604, 'Who can deny that in the descendants of the Jews there persists and endures the evil inclination of their ancient ingratitude and lack of understanding, just as in Negros [there persists] the inseparability of their blackness' (Friedman, 1987: 16).

This was the origins of modern racism for Lewis (1987), as the reason to extirpate Jews was based on their biological impurity. In other words, the policy essentially strayed from the previous anti-Semitic attitude, which had accused Jews of religious heresy (ibid). The biological explanation of the religious difference laid the foundations of modern racism by attributing the differences to ethnic and racial origins:

In this way, we may see the beginnings of anti-Semitism, properly so called; that is to say, a new kind of hostility to Jews. This is no longer primarily theological or religious, and thus in principle removable by conversion.

Instead it is based, or claims to be based, on racial and ethnic differences. And since these are innate and unalterable, the resulting suspicion and hostility are increased, not allayed by conversion (Lewis, 1987: 4).

In many respects, the Dönme history is similar to Marranos: indeed, Scholem (1971) calls them the second Marranos. Like Marranos in Spain, Dönmes were assimilating into general society after their conversion. Ehrlich (2001: 7) argues that their fluid identity made them an ideal group for their assimilation into Ottoman identity. He explains that Dönmes, like other mystic movements, shelter people from the pressures of Orthodox religious authorities. In this regard, he frames the Dönme movement as an attempt to move away from Judaism to be assimilated in general society. That is why he argues that Dönmes inherit proto-secular sentiments:

Whether the mystical designs of Sabbatean doctrine intended to form such a community is secondary to the fact that mystical doctrine outside of a protected environment contains highly liberal characteristics. As a group, Dönme assimilated, leaving only a shadow of their doctrinal selves. Sabbateanism, despite its mystical nature and its roots in sectarianism sowed the seeds of tolerance, assimilation, interpretation, anti-fundamentalism and universalism within Judaism and in wider circles and in so doing was a proto-secular group (Ehrlich, 2001: 40).

Like Marranos, Dönmes were excluded when their assimilation was at peak. The conspiracy theories about Dönmes were common during an age when the group members were coming to prominent positions. Baer (2004) likens this to the Jewish persecutions in the Holocaust, which took place when Jews were relatively more assimilated. Their success in assimilation might have created envy and enmity in other groups. Friedman notes, about Marranos:

In short, the more ardently Jews sought acceptance as Christians, the more ardently Christians identified them as Jews. The more Jews converted to Christianity, the more necessary the fiction that Jews never converted. The more New Christians assimilated into their own surroundings, the more biological distinctions were needed to separate New Christian from Old

Christian. The more New Christians might contribute to their new faith, the more necessary it became to expurgate the faith of 'Jewish' influence (Friedman, 1987: 26).

Dönmes, as a crypto-Jewish group, carried a double identity in between Islam and Judaism. For that reason, they were better able to achieve than other religious minorities in the Ottoman Empire and were free from orthodox religious demands. Nevertheless, the strict fragmentation in their lives produced an ambiguity and fluidity with regard to their identity. While they were independent from any religious authorities, they had to construct and reconstruct their identity in changing circumstances. This led orthodox Islamic and Jewish circles to scapegoat the community, because Dönmes present a perfect stranger figure in a sociological sense (Simmel, 1999; Bauman, 1991). Their identity exists between social boundaries and therefore poses ambivalence. They are neither insiders nor outsiders but strangers, which makes the community an easy target for scapegoating. In the next section, these innate features of the community will be investigated in relation to social contexts.

4.5.2 The External Factors: The Role of Turkish Politics in the Conspiracy Theories about Dönmes

Turkish nationalism has influenced the social constructions of Dönmes in different contexts. First of all, it should be acknowledged that Turkish nationalism, in origin, was an attempt to unify a very mixed population of the Ottoman Empire, which included Greeks, Arabs, Albanians, Turks, Kurds, Armenians and other minorities. Throughout the 1920s the Turkish state imposed top-down policies to homogenise the population (Zürcher, 1995). Kadioğlu (1995) describes this process as the state looking for citizens. The population exchange with Greece, expelling 1.2 million Orthodox Christians to Greece and in return accepting four hundred thousand Muslims, exemplifies the state-imposed nature of Turkish nationalism in the early republic years (Ari, 1995). Baer (2004: 693) calls that process "a final turn from plural society to xenophobia."



The policies for creating a homogenised population were also accompanied by modernisation reforms: the alphabet was Westernised, the legal system was secularised, the caliphate status of the Ottoman Sultan was abolished, and the style of dressing was modernised (Neyzi, 2002). The new Turkish republic promised equality to all citizens on the basis of modern citizenship. The Ottoman system of multiculturalism was altered by the central state ideology, i.e. Kemalism, which assured an inclusion of the minorities in a secular/modern society. This also refers to the quandary nature of Turkish nationalism (Lewis, 1951). Although the state allowed the minorities to find a haven under secularism, it was biased in favour of the Turkish identity (ibid, 140). For that reason, Akman (2004: 36) states that Kemalist nationalism could be identified as modernist nationalism, which aims to modernise the country from the top down through integration and assimilation. This is described by İçduygu and Kaygusuz as follows:

The modern Turkish model came to resemble the French model of civic-territorial citizenship. However, in this way, it also inherited the basic democratic deficit of the model, which is the construction of a centrally defined, hegemonic cultural identity as the only legitimate public identity, and removal of all other identity claims, such as language, culture and belief from public sphere (İçduygu and Kaygusuz, 2004: 41).

In this regard, modern Turkey, because of the dispersion of the multi-ethnic Ottoman Empire through nationalist movements, has been suspicious especially of the non-Muslim minorities. The alleged Armenian genocide of 1915 during the CUP governance of the Ottoman Empire could be given as an example of the outcomes of such paranoia (see Akçam, 2004). Indeed, the Turkish republic was established by CUP cadres shortly after the alleged genocide³¹.

Besides, İçduygu and Kaygusuz (2004: 32) remark that the Sèvres treaty after the First World War, dividing Anatolia among Armenians, Kurds, Greeks and Turks, deeply entrenched the paranoia about the minorities. The concept "Sèvres syndrome"

³¹ Indeed, Dönmes are also held responsible from the so called Armenian genocide in 1915. Some theories claim that CUP had secret Dönme background and conclude that the alleged Armenian genocide was a Dönme plan (Kapner, 2007).

refers to this historically-conditioned fear on the part of the state elites of being dismembered by foreign powers (Jung, 2001; Guida, 2008). Yılmaz (2006) also adds that the Tanzimat reforms, which brought rights and privileges to minorities in the Ottoman Empire in 1856, constitute another ontological insecurity in Turkish state memory. Those reforms, in the end, did not save the Empire from the collapse. In contrast, they helped minorities to undermine the unity and achieve independence. They generated a belief that giving rights and freedoms to minorities would not make them loyal to the state. Therefore, the “Tanzimat syndrome” contributes to the fear of minorities and creates a suspicion among the state elite in giving rights and freedoms. In this picture, Western powers are seen as cunning actors, which destabilise the country through human rights rhetoric.

Likewise, the lyrics of the Turkish national anthem starts begin with “No Fear!” and go on: “For the crimson flag that proudly ripples in this glorious twilight, shall not fade.” This illustrates the centrality of the ontological insecurities about the dismemberment of Turkey, as the anthem begins with the assurance that the Turkish republic will not disperse. In a similar line, Mehmet Ağar, who served for the special forces in the southeastern Turkey and is identified with the deep state, mentions that the deep state means the determinacy to not to retreat one more step after losing Kerkuk, the last province lost by the Ottoman Empire in the First World War (Şimşek and Selamoğlu, 2002). He presents the ontological insecurities and the defensive logic of Turkish nationalism in this speech.

In response to this historical record, Turkish citizenship was developed as a tool to prevent particularistic loyalties and identities, which could lead to dismemberment (ibid, 44). Turkish nationalism was shaped by a strong desire to assimilate ethnically and religiously varied people in the same territory. Modern Turkish citizens were expected not to stress their distinct ethnic or religious identity but to share the modernisation vision of the nation. For that reason, although there were inherent state fears from minorities, Dönmes were the exemplary citizens through their modern appearance and secular identity. As a result, there is a double movement in Turkish state ideology regarding Dönmes. While Dönmes embody the modernist vision of the country, there is still a suspicion, which originates from the paranoia about the minorities.

This mistrust was crystallised in different contexts, such as in the treatment of non-Muslims in the Turkish army. Neyzi (2005: 171) mentions that when they were conscripted in 1921 right before the Independence War, they were not given arms or uniforms to prevent their “mobilisation by competing forces”. The Capital Levy in 1942, which imposed heavy taxes on minorities, is another example of the state’s suspicion of non-Muslims. The suspicion was not confined to the single-party regime. The liberal governments of DP (1950-1960) also exploited the popular suspicion. On 6-7 September 1955, the DP government secretly initiated a riot specifically against the Greek minority during the Cyprus crisis. The events got out of hand and turned into xenophobic violence on all religious minorities in Istanbul. Kuyucu (2005) refers to these events as a part of the Turkish state’s project of transferring the economic capital from non-trustable non-Muslim communities to Turks, as throughout the riot the shops of minorities were looted and the state did not give enough compensation afterwards. Therefore, “the 6-7 September riots targeting non-Muslim minorities, the designated ‘others’ of Turkish nationalism, constitute an important episode in the ethno-national homogenisation (i.e. unmixing) of Turkey” (ibid, 364).

Currently, there is an alleged political scandal about the state listing of suspicious people, some of whom are suspected, because they sing in minority languages (Ntvmsnbc, 2008). The media’s capture of this “Andıç” report, which has a section about the suspected Dönmes, reflects the mistrust of non-Muslim minorities (Stratejik Boyut, 2008; Zaman, 2008; Samanyolu Haber, 2008)³². Likewise, the current president of the Turkish Historical Association, which was established by Atatürk in 1931, argues that Kurdish Alevi³³ are actually converted Armenians, and Kurds are converted Turcoman (Bolat, 2007). In this way, he claims that the Kurdish terrorist organisation PKK is actually composed of Armenians, not of Muslim Kurds. This example is illustrative of the Turkish state’s inherent suspicion and surveillance of ethnic minorities. It could be argued that the fear about minorities in Turkish state

³² As Bali warned in an e-mail, there is only one original source of the Andıç scandal, the *Taraf* newspaper. All the references above used this source to report the scandal. In this regard, although it has been news on national level and created discussions, it could not be taken at face value. However, even the space it occupied in the national media may be indicative of how an idea of state lists could be seen as something probable by people.

³³ The Alevi are a Muslim religious minority, close to Shiaism, numbering in millions in Turkey.

ideology is a central and persistent fantasy. It is also reflected in the memories of a Jewish soldier, who served in the 1921 war against Greeks:

Going along the road toward Erzurum, we were passing through some villages. Seeing us the women assumed we were going to war, So they began to cry, saying, 'My boy!' But when the gendarme who was accompanying us said to them, 'Don't cry. These are infidels [*gavur*],' the same women who had been crying began to insult and to stone us (Neyzi, 2005: 183).

The dramatic change in the behaviour of the women after the official warning of the gendarme could be seen as the state manipulating hostility towards minorities in Turkey. In other words, while the state attempts to accept everyone as secular citizens, it is also able to channel hatred towards minorities. A similar example could be given from the murder of the Armenian journalist Hrant Dink in 2007. The friendly pictures of his teenage murderer Ogün Samast with military officers after his capture created controversy in which the officers were accused of treating him like a hero (Radikal, 2007; *New York Times*, 2007).

To understand the function of paranoia in the Turkish state ideology, we could utilise the discourse theory on ideology (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985; Laclau, 1990). According to Laclau and Mouffe (1985), a master signifier retroactively fixes the floating signifiers into a nodal point, which organises the meaning of any given signifying chain. In that way, it hegemonises a specific content over others. Nodal points are the central parts of ideologies through which the meaning of the world is organised. Paranoia about minorities, in this perspective, could be a nodal point in Turkish nationalism, as it organises the meaning and approach towards minorities. It may fix the meaning of minorities through mistrust, paranoia and conspiracies, which shaped some of the policies towards these groups.

The exclusionary character of Turkish nationalism was challenged in the 1990s, when the repressed minorities started to gain their own voice, especially along with the reforms of the 2000s, which were necessitated by the European Union candidatureship. Turkish nationalism has been contradicted by the contemporary transformations. Dursun (2006: 170) claims that "Kemalism has since the 1990s

become one of the ideologies that continue to struggle for hegemony.” This power vacuum led to another wave of ontological insecurities and conspiracy theories about minorities. For example, CHP Izmir Deputy Canan Arıman accused the president Gül of having Armenian ancestors (Radikal, 2008). She was suspicious about Gül’s liberal policies towards the Armenian state and therefore claimed that: “When some people agree with or support the claim that we committed the crime of genocide against the Armenians, the others would ask them if they were Armenians. People would ask this question even if that person is a president” (Çakır, 2008). In this sense, Arıman re-articulates the Turkish nationalist paranoia about dismemberment, through conspiracies by the minorities in 2008. That is why she seeks the origins of the president within minorities to discredit his liberal policies. Similarly, a former minister of internal affairs, Meral Akşener, referred to Abdullah Öcalan as “Armenian sperm” in 1997, meaning that he is actually an Armenian (Aktan, 2007). These uses provide important examples to Turkish politics’ susceptibility to the paranoia about minorities. In other words, Turkish mainstream politics has a deeply embedded reflex to blame the minorities for its ontological insecurities.

In this context, Bauman’s distinction between liquid and solid modernity could be utilised to portray the basic tenets of both Turkish modernisation and nationalism. Bauman sees history as a struggle between the ordering forces and the forces of escape, where structures want to shape social life, but culture always escapes from these attempts (Varcoe, 2003: 39). Accordingly, Bauman explains postmodernity as an escape from the structures of modernity. On this basis, he differentiates between solid and liquid modernities. *Solid modernity* is an age with the idea of progress, central power mechanisms and institutions, repressive state ideologies, panoptical control mechanisms, “till death do us part” marriages, the power of intellectuals and a job for life (Bauman, 2000). In this era, nation states created ethnically homogenised nations by repressing minority identities (Bauman, 1989a).

However, in the liquid age of modernity, all of the above-mentioned securities and promises of solid modernity are exhausted (Bauman, 2000). Today, nation states are in decline, and the nation-state repression on minorities is no longer tolerated. Instead, there is an increased sensitivity and emphasis on multiculturalism. Although this does not mean that postmodernity is an age of freedom, Bauman celebrates the

failure of the insecure promises like the repressive state. As discussed elsewhere (Nefes, 2006), this structure may help us to formulate the political transformations in Turkey. The solid modernity approach was influential in the early stages of the Turkish republic, and there has been a pluralistic trend in Turkish politics from 1990s onwards. In the following section, I will aid this perspective by discussing the conspiracy theories about Dönmes.

4.5.3 The Culmination of the Internal and the External Factors

The conspiracy theories about Dönmes first appeared in the early twentieth century during the establishment of the Turkish republic. It could be argued that the fluidity of the Dönme identity contributed to those theories, because no matter if the group was willing to assimilate or not, the state did not have any sympathies for fluid identities in this age. In other words, the Turkish state, like a gardener, tried to keep the good weeds - the non-fluid identities. Baer explains this as follows:

The nation that was the direct successor of the empire was unable in its first decades to sustain the pluralism that had accommodated separateness and multiple identities. The modern nation state requires transparency to rule. No matter what approach the Dönme pursued, their identity could no longer be an open secret. The logic of Turkish nationalism ensured it had to become a 'mysterious page of history' a disappearing relic of the Ottoman past (Baer, 2004: 705).

The content of the Karakaşzade affair, in which the group was accepted with the sole condition of assimilation, exemplifies this logic. Moreover, the group's inclusion to the Capital Levy along with other minorities in 1942 illustrates the ongoing mistrust of Turkish nationalism. Both the public and the state did not trust the fluid Dönme identity in an age of secular transparency. The state ideology has rarely challenged the conspiracy theories on Dönmes. Accordingly, I argue that the paranoia about minorities in Turkish nationalism has provided a base for these theories. The conspiracy theories have existed along with Turkish nationalism but have never dared to transgress its boundaries. Although some of them imply that Atatürk was a Dönme, the right-wing theories do not openly challenge the state ideology, as it

would not bear with such accusations by law. In this regard, the conspiratorial perspective could be read within the nationalism framework and its repression of minorities. However, this does not mean that they were in line with Turkish modernisation. They opposed modernisation, but their paranoia was partly shared by the state ideology.

Today, the liquid modernity framework does not tolerate the repressing mechanisms of the solid modernity. With Turkey's passing to this stage, the Dönme identity finds more spaces for expression. Nonetheless, there is a strong movement against the current liquid modernisation of the country. Those alienated by the new cultural transformations create conspiratorial accounts in which Dönmes are blamed for those changes. Hence, the popular left-wing writers of the Dönme conspiracy theories today long for the early years of the republic or the solid modernity (Yalçın, 2004; 2006). These theories constitute attempts to move away from the liquid modernity. This illustrates that many conspiratorial accounts are in line with the ontological insecurities of Turkish nationalism.

In parallel, there is a strong opposition to the current AKP - *The Justice and Progress Party* -government, which represents a neo-liberal, conservative perspective. During their first term of office, they achieved EU candidate status for Turkey, which had not been done for the past thirty years. They have also been relatively liberal to the Kurdish minority. For example, they started the first television channel in Kurdish language in Turkey (Today's Zaman, 2008). The party also carried non-secular roots, evolving from the traditional Islamist Felicity party (SP). These diversions from the Kemalist politics created a discrepancy between the bureaucratic elite and the government, which reached its peak in a legal action designed to close down AKP. This demonstrates the reactions of the state bureaucracy – representing the solid modernity - to a democratically elected party with 48% of the votes. The conspiracy theories also include AKP members as alleged Dönmes or their allies (Yalçın, 2006; Poyraz, 2007a; 2007b). Therefore, many of the contemporary conspiratorial accounts are in line with the solid modern institutions of the state. Bali illustrates this tension on the European Union candidanship example as follows:

Both Yalçın Küçük and Soner Yalçın's bestsellers have come at a time in which Turkey itself is making great efforts to transform itself from an insular, mono-cultural society into the type of tolerant, multi-cultural society that would qualify for EU membership; this process has tended to divide Turkish society along pro-EU and anti-EU lines. Thus, by re-emerging at such a crucial point in Turkey's history, the Dönme debate has been transformed into a part of a larger polemic between the pro-EU portion of Turkish society, which calls for a redefining and expansion of the concept of 'minorities' in a way that would allow it to encompass not only Turkey's non-Muslim populations, as defined by the Lausanne Peace Treaty, but all of the country's ethnic, religious and linguistic groups in a more inclusive manner, and their opponents, who argue for Turkey's complete independence from all international organisations and thus, the abandonment of effort to obtain EU membership and the perpetuation of Turkey's current monolithic social and political construct (Bali, 2008: 59).

Historically, the conspiratorial accounts about Dönmes seem to be inherently fed by state paranoia on minorities. Even though some of them oppose the secular-modern ideals of the state ideology, they have not been opposed by the state, especially after 1946. The exclusionary character of Turkish state nationalism has contributed to the ability of these right-wing groups to continue allegations about Dönmes. Today, they are joined by leftist interpretations, which voice a reactionary stance against the contemporary social transformations in Turkey. While doing so, they parallel state nationalism, which falls in contradiction with the neo-liberal policies of the current government. It could be claimed that although the conspiracy theories on Dönmes seem to be coming from fringe political groups, their existence has been shaped within the boundaries of the state nationalism. In other words, the existence of paranoia as a nodal point in Turkish nationalism has been a determinant in flourishing conspiratorial accounts.

This picture is parallel to the theoretical framework delineated in the previous chapter. Dönmes seem to provide a stranger figure for Turkish politics, which is offered to be sacrificed in a Girardian sense by the conspiratorial accounts. Concepts like "Sèvres syndrome" point to the existing tension in Turkish politics about the

minorities, and the conspiracy theories about Dönmes tend to exploit these insecurities through blaming the community. They generate a surrogate victim from Dönmes to relieve ontological insecurities. In so doing, they render themselves as semi-erudite narratives, whose uses of reason are heavily biased by a belief in an evil conspirator.

When we consider the two main periods, 1920s and 1990s, that saw a flourishing of these conspiratorial accounts, we see that they were triggered by the alleged community members, Karakaşzade Rüşdü (probably from the Karakaşi sect of the community) and Ilgaz Zorlu. Although they did not mean to create a scapegoat about the community, these discussions were quickly manipulated into the conspiratorial accounts because of the ongoing paranoid beliefs about Dönmes. These alleged members were not understood or even listened to carefully, but they were perceived as the proof of the existence of the ontological insecurities of Turkish nationalism. Therefore, when their claims go parallel to these insecurities, for example the group does not want to assimilate into the society (Karakaşzade), or they constitute the power elite such as the deep state (Ilgaz Zorlu), they were enthusiastically drawn into the conspiratorial tradition. Likewise, the accusations by Nazif Özge, another alleged member, about the group were also taken very seriously by the Islamist journal *Büyük Doğu*, but they could not have taken much advantage of his claims as they did not trust his mental state (Bali, 2002).

This resembles Arendt's (1967) criticism of Benjamin Disraeli, a former Prime Minister of England of Jewish heritage. She accuses Disraeli of internalising all the myths about Jews by representing himself as having those superior and exotic powers. According to Arendt, Disraeli confirms the conspiratorial and mythical language, which creates a superior but dangerous Jewish image: "He [Disraeli] could not make a political reality out of the chimerical power of 'exception Jews'; but he could, and did, help transform chimeras into public fears and to entertain a bored society with highly dangerous fairy-tales" (ibid, 76). Rather (1986) also states that Disraeli's ideas about Jews fed conspiratorial accounts. In the same way, whatever were their real motivations, Karakaşzade Rüşdü and Ilgaz Zorlu produced a similar ground in Turkish politics for conspiracy theories to operate. They did not realise that the symbolic reality (necessary evil) of Dönmes prioritises their empirical

reality. They naively talked about the necessity for the community to dissolve into the Turkish society (Karakaşzade) or the Jewish community (Zorlu). This suggests that the conspiracy theories about Dönmes are more about the ontological insecurities of Turkish politics than the actual existence of the community. This also illustrates that the social constructions of conspiracy theories are not only made by external claims-makers but also need to be affirmed by some alleged insiders for credibility.

4.6 Conclusion

The historical analysis of Dönmes shows that the conspiracy theories about them are linked to specific social and political circumstances. For that reason, there are different types of theories from a variety of claims-makers in miscellaneous contexts. The chapter addresses the differences between the early twentieth-century conspiratorial accounts and the contemporary discourse, which can be observed as a transition from solid modernity to liquid modernity (Bauman, 2000). The conspiratorial accounts of Dönmes took reactionary stances in these two facets of modernity in Turkey. In transition to the solid modernity, they took an anti-modernist stance, and today they oppose the outcomes of the liquid modernity. It could be argued that the conspiracy theories on Dönmes appear in periods of major transformations to be used by alienated political circles to relieve their ontological insecurities.

In this sense, although the conspiracy theories about Dönmes are reactionary texts, they take part in mainstream politics. They are fed by the suspicions and the fears of the Turkish nation-state about minorities. Therefore, they are linked to the paranoid aspects of Turkish nationalism. Similarly, the contemporary conspiracy theories are in line with the nationalist reactions to the ongoing changes. Recent scares about alleged Kurdish-Jews (Kaplan, 2005a; 2005b; Yeğen, 2005), and Jews in contemporary government of AKP (Poyraz, 2007a; 2007b; 2007c; 2007d) could also be seen as the contemporary products of the exclusionary logic of Turkish nationalism. In other words, Dönmes provide a mirror-image of the Turkish state ideology and reflect the elaboration of 'the other' in Turkish politics. The use of the

conspiracy theories by Kurdish circles shows the prevalence of the paranoia about non-Muslim minorities.

It seems that Turkish modernisation has been suspicious of the fluid identity of Dönmes. Still today, this could be the original fear underlying the motives for the nation-state institutions' never-ending gardening facilities. Thus, different constructions of the community illustrate the unresolved character of the Turkish identity, as it unravels the paranoia about the non-Muslim subjects of the country in different contexts. In this sense, the treatment of Dönmes is similar to other minority experiences, such as the Huguenots in sixteenth century France. The Protestantism of the group created mistrust in French society, when Catholicism was seen as a form of loyalty (see Roberts, 2004). The Huguenots, due to "the ambivalence of their position within the French polity", were seen as potential conspirators against the king and the country (ibid, 70). In the next chapter, I will be able to discuss the contemporary reflections of the Dönme debate in more detail, in interviews with the well-known conspiracy theorists on the topic.

Chapter 5. Conspiracy Theorists' Presentations of Themselves: The Tenor, The Journalist and The Islamist

'You are a slow learner, Winston,' said O'Brien gently.

'How can I help it?' he blubbered. 'How can I help seeing what is in front of my eyes. Two and two are four.'

'Sometimes, Winston. Sometimes they are five. Sometimes they are three. Sometimes they are all of them at once. You must try harder. It is not easy to become sane' (Orwell, 1987: 263).

5.1 Introduction

While envisaging cognitive maps, i.e. descriptions of how things really work in society, conspiracy theorists have to have certain vantage points, because they impose definitions of situations from these stances. For example, as the discussion demonstrates, an Islamist conspiracy theorist tends to discover the plots of others that affirm his/her own viewpoint. The semi-erudition perspective in the third chapter also shows that conspiracy theories attempt to describe the world from a specific standpoint. Hence, conspiracy theorists have specific identities from which they propose their theories and by which they justify their efforts. Understanding these identity positions will indicate their reasons for writing these accounts as well as unveiling the viewpoints from which these works narrate politics. As this chapter examines the reasons for penning the conspiracy theories on Dönmes, it will consider the self-presentations of well-known conspiracy theorists on the topic, which will illustrate their roles³⁴ and identities in the debate.

In this regard, the chapter draws on the symbolic interactionist discussion. Symbolic interactionists focus on *self-concept* as a reflection of one's ideas about how others perceive him/her. Mead (1934) argues that self-concept is shaped by *generalised others*, who are significant enough for us to care about their perceptions of us. He points to people's eagerness to know the perspective of a particular reference group

³⁴ "The term role refers to expectations surrounding a given status, or to the patterns of behaviour associated with incumbents of that status. As such, people assume that knowledge of another's roles (mother, doctor, teenager) implies some knowledge of that person's identity" (Walker, 2000: 102).

to show that the presumed opinions of others constitute the basis of an individual's identity. Goffman (1959) states that people reflect on their identities according to the assumed perceptions of significant others. He calls this *impression management*, which is synonymous with self-presentation. Gollwitzer (1986: 157) claims that strategic self-presentation is guided by the goal of winning social approval.

Goffman (1959: 24) proposes that people attempt to control the impressions of others through providing definitions of situations:

[W]hen an individual projects a definition of the situation and thereby makes an implicit or explicit claim to be a person of a particular kind, he automatically exerts a moral demand upon the others, obliging them to value and treat him in the manner that persons of his kind have a right to expect. He also implicitly forgoes all claims to be things he does not appear to be, and hence forgoes the treatment that would be appropriate for such individuals. The others find, then, that the individual has informed them as to what is and as to what they ought to see as the 'is'.

In that view, conspiracy theorists could be seen as people who tend to control others' political impressions by projecting definitions of situations, because they impose rigid definitions of situations due to relying on a specific vantage point. This also suggests that conspiracy theorists' political self-representations should acknowledge their standpoints and reasons to contribute to the literature. Indeed, political self-representations provide insightful information about people's ideological perspectives, as they demonstrate the ways in which people justify their political identities and where they stand in relation to others. Consequently, there should be a relationship between certain ideologies and the ways of reflecting political self-presentations.

However, despite successfully exploring politicians' and people's political self-presentations, the literature (see Eliasoph, 1990; Suleiman et al., 2002; Oktar, 2001; Mor, 2007; Schütz, 1993; Schütz, 1997; Clarke, 2000; Berinsky, 2004) does not give a discerning analysis of the relationship between ideologies and self-presentations. Nor does it discuss the differences between left and right or other ideologies in terms

of self-presentations. For example, Schütz (1993) investigates the self-presentational tactics of two candidates in German parliamentary elections, but he does not question how their self-presentational tactics could be related to their political standpoints.

This chapter will highlight how the self-presentational strategies of conspiracy theorists reflect their political standpoints. In that way, it will be able to draw on the reasons for producing conspiracy theories and the meaning that conspiracy theorists attach to these accounts. It will underline why and how authors decide to take on the Dönme issue, what identities they assign to themselves, which self-presentational strategies they use, and what kind of impressions they intend to give to the generalised others: i.e. their audience. It will outline the political and methodological differences of these theorists, and how these differences shape their perspectives on Dönmes. It will also explore issues such as how they differentiate themselves from each other, how their political self-presentations and standpoints influence their theories, what methods they use, how these methods justify their self-presentations, and what they think about the significance of Dönmes in Turkey. The chapter consists of a rarely-explored area of study that analyses the ways in which conspiracy theories are produced.

The study undertook semi-structured interviews with three aforementioned popular authors, namely Yalçın Küçük, Soner Yalçın, and Abdurrahman Dilipak. In a variety of ways, all respondents repeat the same classic conspiratorial view on the community despite their different political backgrounds. Yalçın Küçük is a well-known left-wing professor, who has recently contributed to the topic. Soner Yalçın is a journalist and a best-selling author with secular, anti-imperialist and left-wing leanings. His books on Dönmes seem to play an important role in popularising the subject. Abdurrahman Dilipak is a well-known Islamist writer and intellectual, who co-authored a book on Dönmes with Ilgaz Zorlu.

The chapter will first clarify the method used in the research. Second, it will analyse the interviews with the authors. Third, a discussion section will comparatively evaluate their stances. The chapter will also demonstrate to what extent the theories

proposed in the third chapter can explain these authors' identities in the discussion. Finally, there will be a conclusion, where the findings will be summarised.

5.2 The Method

The reason for choosing interview as a method is that the technique would enable a conversation with the interviewees, in order to understand the ways in which they elucidate their ways of thinking about their worlds, experiences and observations (Charmaz, 1991). Besides, conspiracy theorists have to engage in self-presentations in interviews, as they need to present and justify their standpoints. Hence, I guided the respondents to reflect upon their works and stances. The main questions I asked were as follows: How did they get interested in the Dönme subject? What methodologies do they follow in studying the issue? How do they differ from the other authors in the literature? What is the political significance of the Dönme community in Turkey? What is the relationship between Dönmes and Jews? Although the conversations were oriented towards these questions, they were not asked in a strict order. Regardless, the informants explained their perspectives on the issue clearly.

The interviews were conducted in agreed places with the interviewees. The interviewer allowed them to suggest the location in which they would feel the most comfortable. These places were either the houses or the offices of the informants. The respondents were also assured that they could leave the interview at any moment they wanted. Each interview took approximately half an hour, sometimes slightly longer, which allowed the respondents enough time to elaborate on their views on Dönmes. They were informed well about the aims of the study. Therefore, there were not any problems in terms of directing the respondents towards the research questions. Nevertheless, the interviewees at points inquired about the results of the study. In such circumstances, the interviewer pointed out that his project was still unfinished and told them they would be sent copies of the work, if they required. Only Dilipak requested such a copy. There were not any major difficulties in the interviews.

Below, the chapter will briefly mention the biographies of the writers and give an account of the interviews, i.e. the reception and the environment. These will provide supplementary evidence in describing the self-presentations of these writers. Goffman (1959) claims that people give and give off impressions. The former is communication as we know it, but the latter signifies the non-verbal, presumably unintentional messages that individuals convey. The descriptions of the interview venues and the biographies of the writers are attempts to provide more insight about the writers to catch the impressions that they give off. The interviews will be outlined in three main sections. The reception contains the writers' biography and the description of the interview environment. Then, the identity and the methods of the writer part will describe the ways in which the theorists elicit their identities in the discussion and how they legitimise their identities with the methods they use. Finally, the 'significance of Dönmes' section will explore the political and social importance that these writers attach to the community.

5.3 Yalçın Küçük: The Tenor

5.3.1 Reception

A prominent figure within the Turkish left, professor Yalçın Küçük studied at the Political Science Faculty of Ankara University and graduated with the best grade point average in his term. During his undergraduate studies, he was the president of left-wing Marxist organisations such as the Federation of Socialist Thought Societies, Revolutionary Youth (Dev-Genç), and the political society that later became the People's Liberation Party of Turkey (Türkiye Halk Kurtuluş Partisi). He played a role as a student leader in demonstrations preceding the 1960 military *coup d'état* in Turkey. Subsequent to his graduation, he worked in the State Planning Organisation (Devlet Planlama Teşkilatı) and left it for an undergraduate study at Yale. In 1966, he started working at the Middle East Technical University and published his research on Sovietology. He was sentenced to eight years in prison for this work. After the military *coup d'état* in 1980, he was expelled from universities and was sentenced again. He left Turkey in 1993 for France, when Süleyman Demirel, a right-wing liberal leader, became the president of Turkey. He interviewed Abdullah Öcalan, the leader of PKK. He also published a few left-wing journals and

returned to the country in 1998. Subsequently, he was sentenced for two more years. A week after this interview, Küçük was arrested in connection to a conspiratorial plot called Ergenekon, but was released shortly afterwards (Hürriyet, 2009). His recent works, especially on Dönmes, have become very popular among the public (Yalcinkucuk.net, 2009). They have been published by several publishing houses in countless editions. In parallel, Küçük has appeared in many recent television programmes, in which he often claimed to decipher the hidden Jewish and Dönme backgrounds of well-known politicians, writers and celebrities.

Thanks to his willingness and kindness, professor Küçük was the first to accept the interview request. I contacted him through e-mail, and he agreed to give an interview in his house, which he called 'our home', in Fener, Istanbul. Fener-Balat is a very historical district in old Istanbul, which used to be a home for religious minorities such as Jews (around Balat) and Greeks (in Fener). It is a very traditional district with wooden houses, currently under regeneration, with churches and synagogues representing the old cosmopolitan spirit of Istanbul. As Mills (2006) also shows in the Kuzguncuk example, there is a contemporary trend in the gentrification of the old neighbourhoods in Istanbul, especially the ones previously populated with religious minorities like Fener and Balat. She associates this tendency with nostalgia for a friendly, cosmopolitan neighbourhood, where Turks and other religious minorities live peacefully. Indeed, the interview place was a three-floor wooden house, a rather nostalgic phenomenon in heavily populated Istanbul, a few streets away from the Eastern Orthodox Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople.

Professor Küçük was very welcoming, hospitable and provided a very friendly atmosphere for the conversation. The nostalgic air of the district was incorporated within the interior architecture of the house. Küçük welcomed me in a sports outfit with a red scarf that he often wears in television shows. He also wears a fur cap (kalpak) in most of the television programmes, which gives a retro-left-wing intellectual image in Turkey by having symbolic connotations to Russian revolutionaries. This ambience was accompanied with the professor's elegant and friendly attitude.

The first half of the interview was conducted in the kitchen on the ground floor, with classical music playing (Vivaldi, Four Seasons: Spring). Later on, a few people, probably adherents, followers or friends, who called him “Hoca- Hodja” (the teacher – or the professor), showed up, and after that we continued the second part of the interview in the basement. Some of these people were PhD students, who also showed hospitality and interest in my research. Calling professor Küçük *hoca* indicated a respect for his knowledge and experience. *Hoca* also signifies an open-ended meaning by differing from a more common way of referring to people “hocam- my teacher”, because it seeks a wider recognition: *hoca*, a teacher, is for everyone, not only for me. To sum up, the reception of the interview gave the impression of a visit to a house of a left-wing intellectual with his friends/followers/adherents.

5.3.2 Küçük’s Identity and Methods in the Dönme Discussion

The conversation started with Küçük’s questions about my research. He inquired whether my supervisor was Jewish or not, which directed him to an onomastic analysis. Hence, the following could be seen as an introductory sample to his radical scepticism and leaps in thought. Besides, the interruptions and directions of Küçük could be showing his determination for an analysis of people’s origins:

Küçük: Which languages do you speak?

Nefes: English. I am also learning Spanish nowadays.

Küçük: Wonderful, very good! How? Do you devote the whole thesis to Dönmes, or?

Nefes: We can see the thesis as a piece of political sociology. It is about...
(interruption)

Küçük: Do you have a supervisor?

Nefes: Yes

Küçük: Who?

Nefes: Frank Furedi

Küçük: Is he Jewish?

Nefes: I think so, he originally comes from Hungary, but I am not sure if he is a believer. He is leftist.

Küçük: Is he a Trotskyist?

Nefes: I think so.... [interruption]

Küçük: How old is he?

Nefes: In his 70s probably [A terrible overestimation].

Küçük: Now then, we can start in two ways. If you notice, I call him Trotskyist and you Troçkist. This is relevant to our topic. In Hebrew and Russian there is a character, konson, sadik in Hebrew. It is really hard to pronounce this character. You are educated in English. We call Çar, they have difficulties in pronouncing it. They write it in many different ways: with cs, like Csar. The right way is with ts, Tsar... Sabbatai Sevi's name also starts with that character, so if you read a bit, you would see that they call him Cebi, Zevi, Zvi, Tsivi. People, who lived in the Italian influenced parts of Salonika, call this character ç. It has two examples in my books. The first one, which I understood after discovering this formulation, is about Çiller's³⁵ name. It is actually Tziller, and she is Jewish. The second is about the former president of the Central Bank of Turkey, Gazi Erçel. Write in your notebook Hertzal; write it there (direction)! Take the H off, speak without H, Ertzel.

³⁵ A former prime minister of Turkey.

Change tz to ç then, you can find Erçel. What am I doing now? I am doing a brand new science; onomastics is a science.

This can guide us to Küçük's methodological preferences. He places a central emphasis on using onomastics as a scientific method in his research on Dönmes. While doing so, Küçük complains about the ignorance of the Turkish academia and problematises the lack of onomastics in Turkish historiography and linguistics:

Onomastics is a part of history and linguistic disciplines, and there are conferences about it. There is no real academic research on history in Turkey, as they do not even read tombstones³⁶... The linguistic research in Turkey is Saussurean, and it is rubbish. We need a comparative diachronic linguistics.

He also regards an earlier attempt to bring onomastics to Turkey as incomplete, due to lack of knowledge and enthusiasm:

Köprülüzade Fuad claimed to bring onomastics to Turkey in 1950s. This was a good effort, but I also wrote in my books that Köprülü did not speak any foreign languages. I was hesitating while claiming this, but Rıza Nur also notes this in his memoirs. Köprülü pretended to speak Arabic and Persian, but he did not. If you do not know many foreign languages, you cannot do onomastics. Besides, you have to be very curious.

Then, Küçük reflects on himself and seems to give more credit than the preceding carrier of the method:

I used to know many languages, but I forgot most of them. This is a parenthesis do not take notes [directing the interviewer]! İlber³⁷ is my friend, and he does not forget the languages he learnt. He always travels, looks around. I learnt Kirmanci and Sorani [Kurdish dialects]. Kurdish people were feeling humiliated, when they were speaking Kurdish with me. You know that someone, who learns a language later, always speaks it better, because

³⁶ He uses onomastics to read tombstones in his works.

³⁷ İlber Ortaylı is a well-known Turkish historian.

s/he solves all the secrets of that language. But I forgot them, as I did not speak or read in those languages. We have started like this. I am trying to do a science [onomastics]. It has a theory, which develops surprisingly well.

Küçük mainly uses onomastics to research the backgrounds of the people he suspects. In other words, if he judges that somebody is in a prominent position but does not deserve it, Küçük employs onomastics to look for the family tree of the person to test whether s/he is Jewish or Dönme in origin. He postulates that thanks to their networks, Jews and Dönmes can become powerful in Turkey without necessary qualifications. He explains his method in the following lines:

As a researcher, I take someone who does not deserve his or her prominent position in society. The surprise I get from the unfair position of that individual leads me to conduct research on his or her family tree. This is the method! For example, Zülfü Livaneli, he does not have a good voice, but how come is he a singer? Livane comes from Livni, Livi in Hebrew means white... If somebody without a talent rises in society, s/he has to have Jewish origins. This is the theoretical claim, which I test on different cases. Yılmaz Erdoğan³⁸ does not have any talent or genius for drama. I confidently give this example, because I know this boy. He came to my group and presented himself as a leftist person. As he does not have anything to do with the left-wing anymore, he stopped the printing of a critical book on one of his earlier works. In consequence, this [onomastics] is a theoretical science.

He makes similar sensational claims with confidence relying on the same method:

Not every Jew is like Einstein! Some of them, like Orhan Gencebay³⁹, were born poor. For example, Yavuz Bingöl does not have a good voice. All the reality is in details. *Three Monkeys*⁴⁰, how come did this man become an actor with Jewish Mehveş? There is only one reason! The onomastic analysis is the method which can explain this. Only among Jews, because of the

³⁸ A Turkish film director, scenarist, actor and poet.

³⁹ A well known Turkish musician and *bağlama* virtuoso.

⁴⁰ A Cannes award winning film in which Bingöl acted.

Küçük's confidence in telling people who they are and where they stand reflects a political bias, because his methods do not only affirm his academic identity but also provide a weapon against political enemies: "I have developed a gun [onomastics] with which I am shooting the people from Jewish origins, who are not *millici* [nationalist but not right-wing]." Accordingly, Küçük protects his political allies, when they are subject to similar conspiratorial allegations:

When the Excellency, İlker Pasha, took a religious photo in front of the Western Wall (also referred as the Wailing Wall) in Jerusalem, they claimed that he was of Jewish background. Fethullah⁴³ supporters were trying to prevent him becoming the commander of the Turkish Armed Forces, like they had done to Yaşar Pasha. At that time, I said in several television programmes that a photo in front of the Western Wall would not prove a Jewish origin.

Küçük accuses and mocks some others, who do not agree with his political ideas, for being Jews:

Çetin Altan, Mehmet Altan, Halil Berktaş do not like my understanding of socialism. Özkök is from Jewish origins. Can Oral be a Turkish name? This is either used in sex or while asking for a pill in a pharmacy. Özkök's father-in-law is called Hüdai Oral. It is disgraceful! Oral, as al means god, and or means light, means the light of God [in Hebrew].

The following quote also demonstrates that Küçük pragmatically uses his research to threaten political opponents in the same confident style:

Küçük: Deniz Baykal⁴⁴. Soon, I will reveal in a television programme. Deniz, you will see if you are a Jew or not. He will see!

Nefes: Do you think Baykal is also Jewish?

⁴³ Fethullah Gülen is an Islamic preacher, who has a worldwide movement.

⁴⁴ Deniz Baykal has served as the leader of the Republican People's Party (CHP) for around 16 years by 2009. He is currently the main opposition leader in the Turkish parliament.

Diaspora, the birthplace can become a surname⁴¹. Onomastics is such a science.

When I asked to what extent this method was reliable, because it might be quite subjective to determine who deserved what place, Küçük responded that you needed to know the subjects you were talking about. He claims that the intellectual should be able to judge whether a person deserves to be an actor or a musician:

Nefes: How can we empirically test who deserves what place in society?

Küçük: You have to know the subject. Otherwise, you cannot construct a hypothesis.

It could be argued that Küçük presents himself as a confident intellectual who combines his knowledge in different fields to produce a meta-theory. The confidence can be seen in his following remarks as well: "Our rules are laws in the Marxian sense, which is a tendency. 95% of the cases fit the hypothesis. If one does not fit, it does not devalue our laws." He emphasises his self-assurance in his scientific methods by mentioning his allegedly accurate estimations:

By using science, I argued that AKP would appoint a person from Jewish origin to the European Human Rights Court (EHRC). They appointed Işıl Karakaş⁴²; they never fail my guesses.

Küçük further underlines his credibility by referring to the letter sent to him by the current president, Abdullah Gül:

You know that Abdullah Gül's origin is being discussed now. Gül sent me a letter, have you heard? It was printed in *Milliyet* from the first page. I urged him to send me all his documents! I will use them in my new book.

⁴¹ He refers to Bingöl, whose surname coincides with a name of a southeastern city in Turkey.

⁴² A Turkish professor of law.

Küçük: Baykal is my friend; he will see! When I say he will see, he will see! He is lying a lot! I read in newspapers yesterday; he says I studied law and my wife, Olcay, was studying politics, and I used to attend lectures with her. I, by coincidence, know that this is a big lie! I entered the university with the best grade, I came first throughout my degree, and Olcay was in the same class. I came first in the classes, so I was very popular. I never saw Deniz at any lecture. My friends are still alive. These are small things, but he will see.

Küçük's thorough-going doubt about people's origins was also reflected in relation to my own identity. In different moments of the interview, he voiced doubts about my background. For example, he wrongly reflected upon one of my first names that I got from my father: "Only Jews give the name of the father to children." Moreover, having learnt my supervisor's Jewish-Hungarian origins, he out of the blue stated that: "Hungarian Jews are also very important for our research." In addition, he commented on my name as follows: "Türkey is a bisexual name, Pınar as well." At the end of the interview, he also said that: "people from Jewish origins have got the posts at the Middle East Technical University's Faculty of Economic and Administrative Sciences. You can go there after you finish."

His confidence and scientific attitude provide Küçük the intellectual identity through which he can differentiate himself from the other writers in the Dönme debate. For example, when I told him that I would see Dilipak as an interviewee, he reacted by saying: "Why will you see him? He does not know anything!" Aside from the hostility to the Islamic writer, Küçük suggests that Dilipak is not a man of knowledge. Likewise, he distinguishes himself from Soner Yalçın in the same confident manner: "Soner does not have any theory; he is rather listing Dönmes. I am doing science; mine is a scientific theory."

Küçük provides a confident intellectual figure that develops a meta-theory through knowledge in many different areas. In this regard, he resembles Bauman's (1989b) description of the legislator type of intellectuals, who assume enormous responsibility and agency in the organisation of society, with knowledge in various areas. Like a legislator type of intellectual from the Enlightenment, Küçük attempts

to come up with a new paradigm that would revolutionise Turkish politics and history. Complementary to the nostalgic gentrification of the interview venue, Küçük devotes himself to the classic vanguard role of the legislator intellectual. Therefore, he likens his role to a tenor: "I like tenors most in opera. As you know, he comes to the stage and makes a solo. Then his voice disappears in chorus. I would like my voice to disappear in chorus too."

5.3.3 Küçük's Ideas on the Significance of the Dönme Community

While describing his methods and stance in the discussion, Küçük's views on the significance of Dönmes in Turkey have been obliquely illustrated. Küçük's political stance reflects the direction of his research. Having situated himself on the Turkish Marxist left, he accuses many mainstream political party leaders and bureaucrats of being Jews. For example, the leaders of the main opposition in the parliament, Deniz Baykal and Devlet Bahçeli⁴⁵, have Jewish origins according to Küçük: "There is no hope in people like Baykal and Bahçeli, because these men are also Dönmes, Jews!" Küçük raises suspicions about former prime ministers because of their relations with Israel: "Erbakan made an agreement with Israel... Tansu Çiller is a Zionist. She is not a mentally stable person, but she is the first prime minister who went to Israel. She said that this was the Promised Land, but then, she took it back." Interestingly, Erbakan is well-known with his anti-Zionist stance. In addition, Küçük repeats the well-known accusation that Dönmes control the foreign ministry of Turkey:

As I claimed, the origins of the foreign ministers in Turkey are very clear. For example, Tevfik Rüşdü Aras, who is called by the Turkish left, of which I am a member, Atatürk's foreign minister, is not only of Jewish origin but also a Zionist. Selim Sarper, another foreign minister, is a Zionist. There is not any foreign minister in Turkey who is not a Dönme.

Küçük also accuses the Islamic groups, which make claims of Dönme conspiracies too. In that sense, he differentiates himself from the other anti-Dönme perspectives. He suggests that Islam itself has been diluted by Dönmes in Turkey:

⁴⁵ A Turkish politician and the current chairman of the far-right Nationalist Movement Party (MHP).

Küçük talks about Jews and Dönmes as contributors to the Turkish republic for their own ends, who after 1967 took an opposite direction to destroy the republic. Thus, Küçük echoes the omnipotent, hidden and conspiring Jewish/Dönme figure in Turkish politics. Küçük's depiction of the Dönme power is not only confined to political sphere but also exists in academia:

For example, if you are not of Dönme origin, you cannot be a professor in SBS [University of Ankara Political Science Faculty]... I have heard this recently. Some professor women, I can give a name, Erhan Çağrı or Çağrı Erhan. They are always angry at Yalçın Küçük. While having tea, one of them says that Küçük calls us Dönmes. Another, a new professor woman, replies: 'what are you talking about? Aren't we Dönmes?' This is very clear! As simple as this [said in English]!

Küçük claims that the Dönme power in academia supports the community's post-1967 position. He gives an example from a well-known private university in Istanbul:

There are documents about the population exchange in Bilgi University. They are destructive documents for the republic. To be a professor in that university, you have to have a Jewish origin: Murat Belge⁴⁸, Mete Tunçay⁴⁹.

In order to understand Küçük's leftist stance in more detail, I asked him whether seeing Dönmes everywhere was closing the possibilities of a Marxist class analysis. His answer characterises his political stance:

Excluding you, this is a statement of the stupid leftists. There are many Jews among them. For example, Baraner, they are scared of him. It is a misjudgement, because socialism is to show that rulers and ruled are from different classes. There is a concept called Brazilianisation. You can understand the upper classes as a tribe. There is nothing more leftist than showing the ethnic origins of the upper class in Turkey, and I am delighted to

⁴⁸ Murat Belge is a well-known left-liberal intellectual, academic and civil rights activist.

⁴⁹ Mete Tunçay is a well-known Turkish historian.

Islamic circles dislike Dönmes, but Islam itself is Judaised today. When we look at the Islamic orders, we see that they are mostly populated by Dönmes. Therefore, the Islamists' research on this subject is very limited. There are not any studies on Dönmes in Islam.

Likewise, Küçük believes that the conservative AKP government, as disguised Dönmes, aims to destroy Islam: "For example, AKP will demolish Islam." He claims that there is a hidden network between Israel and Turkey through AKP: "The Prime Minister had a meeting with Olmert⁴⁶ for five-six hours. There is a strategic-psychological partnership with Israel. In 1990s, Turkey and Israel were moving towards becoming one state." Küçük overrides the differences between Jews and Dönmes and claims that there is a secret network between the two. I asked whether he was losing the distinction between Dönmes and Jews:

Nefes: Aren't you neglecting the differences between Jews and Dönmes? During the population exchange of 1924, Dönmes wanted to remain in Greece, but they were not allowed to convert back to Judaism by Jewish authorities.

Küçük: I point to the differences between Jews and Dönmes. The Dönme movement shook Judaism, and there is an opposition between the two. Beyond that, there is a historical and political relation... In the population exchange, the Greek-Orthodox population leaves, and Muslims return. There are rumours about Venizelos-Benizelos⁴⁷. He could also be a crypto-Jew. Afterwards, Jews and Dönmes coalesced in the Lamb Festival of Dönmes. The main target was to establish a Judaic homeland. Moiz Cohen – Tekin Alp, people from Jewish origins wanted to establish a republic [Turkey] and live in it. If you remove Dönmes from that picture, you will not see anything... After 1967, Dönmes and Jews have agreed and allied to demolish the republic.

⁴⁶ The Israeli Prime Minister of the period.

⁴⁷ The Greek Prime Minister of the period.

Valley of the Wolves and *Sağiroda*. Yalçın has also been a producer of a journalism programme on CNN Turk channel for ten years. After starting to produce television programmes, he signed a contract with the Doğan Book Publishers, a subsidiary of Turkey's most powerful media conglomerate, the Doğan Media Group (DMG)⁵¹ (Bali, 2008: 112). He also writes for one of the most popular national daily newspapers of the DMG, *Hürriyet*.

Convincing Yalçın to take part in an interview was not as easy as it was with Yalçın Küçük. I e-mailed him a few times during the first two years of my research. After not receiving a response, I phoned his secretary a couple of times as a last resort. As Arman (2004) mentions, Yalçın is not willing to give interviews, and his secretary repeated that to me. However, through further e-mails, I persuaded him to give an interview by highlighting the importance and centrality of his work for my thesis. Henceforth, he kindly spared time for my questions. The interview took place in his journalism agency in one of the central districts of Istanbul, Taksim. The agency, *Oda TV*, was at a very convenient place right in front of the German Embassy. The door of the flat was opened by one of the employees in the agency, who took me to Yalçın's office. It was a big, modern office, and I met Yalçın while he was reading newspapers. Unlike the nostalgic and cosy outlook of Küçük's home, Yalçın's office was a professional's workplace. However, Yalçın was wearing sports clothes, glasses and also a beard, which associates him with an intellectual image rather than a stereotypical professional. Likewise, Yalçın was friendly and informal throughout the interview.

5.4.2 Yalçın's Identity and Methods in the Dönme Discussion

Our conversation began with my question on how he got involved in the Dönme topic. In response, he provided me a genealogy of his curiosity and how he moved from one book to another in his intellectual history:

⁵¹ DMG's holdings own television stations such as *CNN Türk*, in partnership with AOL Time Warner and, *Kanal D*, *Bravo TV*, *Star*, *Cine 5* and *Euro D*, and the radio stations *Hür* ('Free') *FM*, *Radjo Foreks* and *Radjo D*, as well as the print dailies *Hürriyet*, *Milliyet*, *Radikal*, *Posta*, *Fanatik*, *Referans*, *Star* and *Turkish Daily News* (Bali, 2008: 212).

unveil that. Those leftists pretend to be involved in class struggle. Sami Evren supports the European Union candidateship and prays for plutocracy. Süleyman Çelebi is a name, commonly used by Jews.

Küçük takes the anti-imperialist stance against the EU processes outlined in the last chapter, which voices dissent to the changes such as multiculturalism and neo-liberalisation. As quoted above, he claims that Turkey will appoint a Jewish representative to the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR), which, as an institution, is seen as a part of the changes brought by the contemporary changes: “By using science, I argued that AKP would appoint a person from Jewish origin to the European Human Rights Court. They appointed Işıl Karakaş; they never fail my guesses.”

Although Küçük appears as a nostalgic left-wing intellectual figure with a cosmopolitan taste, his description of Dönmes as a hidden danger contrasts his self-presentation. In other words, by claiming a Dönme conspiracy, Küçük contradicts the cosmopolitan nostalgia of living together peacefully. He frames his political opponents and well-known people, who in his view do not deserve their positions in society, as Dönmes. In the end, he reproduces the classical conspiratorial theme that Dönmes secretly govern in a left-wing frame by his use of scientific methods.

5.4 Soner Yalçın: The Journalist

5.4.1 Reception

The second interview was conducted with the well-known Turkish investigative journalist Soner Yalçın, who has written several books on Turkish politics and history⁵⁰. He and Yalçın Küçük are the most well-known authors of the conspiracy theories on Dönmes today. In addition, Soner Yalçın was the concept adviser of popular television series with conspiratorial themes, such as *Kurtlar Vadisi - The*

⁵⁰ *Hangi Erbakan* (Yalçın, 1999), *Binbaşı Ersever'in İtirafı* (Yalçın, 1996), *Bay Pipo, Bir MİT Görevlisinin Sıra Dışı Yaşamı: Hıram Abbas* (Yalçın, 2000), *Teşkilat'ın İki Silahşörü* (Yalçın, 2001), *Behçet Cantürk'ün Anıları* (Yalçın, 2003); *Reis Gladio'nun Türk Tetikçisi* (Yalçın, 2003); *Efendi: Beyaz Türklerin Büyük Sırrı* (Yalçın, 2004), *Efendi 2: Beyaz Müslümanların Büyük Sırrı* (Yalçın, 2006); *Siz Kimi Kandırıyorsunuz?* (Yalçın, 2008).

I started journalism in 1987. It coincided with a period in Turkey when the Kurdish problem was at its peak. While working as a journalist, I met the army major Cem Ersever, who served in the southeast region, where high populations of Kurds live. He started telling me about the unsolved crimes, *faili meçhul cinayetler* [often referred to as alleged state-sponsored murders], in the region, and he was killed because of that. I wrote a book about this afterwards. When I was getting death threats, the Islamist movement was flourishing in Turkey, especially in the southeast region, as I know it. There was not any biography about Necmettin Erbakan in that period, and I wrote his biography.

Subsequently, I wrote the biography of half Kurdish, half Armenian Behçet Cantürk. He was the biggest mafia boss in Turkey, whose name was mentioned in a politics magazine and mafia triangle. Later on, in my book called *Reis*, I wrote the biography of an *ülkücü* [right-wing militant] Abdullah Çatlı to illustrate how Gladio used the *ülkücü* movement in Turkey. Following that, I wrote *Bay Pipo*, which talked about the *ülkücü* group and the Turkish intelligence.

I have mentioned all these, because I actually see myself as a person who narrates what he witnesses in Turkish history. I learn these subjects through writing, and I always proceeded to one higher level in my research. Consequently, the book chain, which started from the lower level unsolved murders, arrived to the upper level intelligence services⁵². It attempted to understand the historical reality of these issues. In my *Teşkilatın İki Silahşörü* book, I observed that Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa's⁵³ important figures such as Yakup

⁵² Yalçın was the concept adviser of the famous mafia series, *The Valley of the Wolves*. Interestingly, the series follows a similar path in unfolding the conspiratorial structure of politics and mafia in Turkey. The protagonist of the series starts from the lower level mafia to destroy the big conspiracy at the top. Every year, he upgrades to one upper level until he achieves his task. The parallel structure between Yalçın's intellectual curiosity and the scenario of the series might acknowledge his contribution to it.

⁵³ Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa was the intelligence service established by the Committee of Union and Progress in the Ottoman Empire.

that there is science as long as there are questions. That book, therefore, was written to be a sourcebook for scientific researches.

Like Küçük, Yalçın criticises the ignorance of the Turkish academy, which does not ask the important questions regarding history. He also mentions that Turkish academia does not see the importance of the economy for the history of the country. He states that the Dönme topic is not only ignored by social scientists in Turkey but has also been used pejoratively by Islamist and nationalist groups:

For me, Dönmeism is this. Not as a journalist but as an intellectual, I think that we do not consider economics in the discipline of history, because Marxism has not been brought to this country. Marxism has not dominated the Turkish academy yet; the Marxist faculty has been expelled from universities. The reason I am saying this is that in 1492 a very qualified population of Jews was brought to the Ottoman Empire from Andalusia. We just report this as persecuted Jews came to the Ottoman Empire. This is unacceptable as an explanation, because we do not know how this well-qualified group affected the Ottoman political, cultural and economic system. This is not mentioned in our history... Second, although Dönmes do not exist in our history, if you go to the Jewish museum in Germany, you will find a corner for a Sabbatai house. We do not even have Sabbatai Sevi in our history. The Dönme issue was used as a pejorative political jargon against the Committee of Union and Progress earlier. Later on, it was used as a derogatory word among radical Islamists and nationalists. What attracts my attention here and what I try to ask or underline in my books is that how come Sabbatai Sevi, who is very important for the history of Judaism, does not exist in our history. Why aren't we seeing it?

He proposes that Jewish and Christian communities in the Ottoman Empire shaped the history of the country through market competition, and we do not have any studies on such important processes:

Jews and Christians in the Ottoman Empire had a market competition, which even caused changes in the political structure. Dönmeism is a part of

Cemil and his grandson were all used against ASALA⁵⁴. Even though many institutions changed from the Ottoman Empire to the Turkish republic, the intelligence service and its methods remained the same.

Henceforth, I decided to investigate the intelligence service, Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa. In order to do that, I wanted to write the biography of Dr. Nazım, one of the prominent names of the institution and the Committee of Union and Progress. While looking at his life story, I found the Evliyazade family from Izmir to which he joined through marriage. The family membership of Evliyazades stretched from Fatin Rüşdü Zorlu⁵⁵ to Tevfik Rüşdü Aras, from Adnan Menderes⁵⁶ to many well-known names of the Turkish public: beauty queens, mayors, members of parliament. While investigating the family deeper, I discovered the Dönme issue. In consequence, although I started my work to look at how the state institutions from the Ottoman Empire to the Turkish republic remained unchanged, I ended up with Dönmeism. In other words, I did not begin writing to research about Dönmeism. That is how I met Dönmeism.

Yalçın researches the subjects that he is curious about and attempts to learn about them through asking questions and writing books. In this regard, his questions are the driving force of his intellectual endeavour. He explains the reasons for writing the second book of the *Efendi* series along these lines:

In *Efendi 2*, I started from a question... a big question... These families converted to Islam; we do not know any more than that. *Efendi 2* elaborates on what they did after the conversion. To what extent did they change the Islamic rituals? Did they set up new religious lodges for themselves? How did they transform the existing lodges they went to? How did they contribute to the Islamic traditions? These are not analysed. These are untouched subjects. The *Efendi 2* asks these questions. I am a journalist who believes

⁵⁴ The Armenian Secret Army for the Liberation of Armenia (ASALA) was a Marxist-Leninist militant organisation (in operation between 1975 and 1986), which often targeted Turkish diplomats in order to avenge the Armenian deportation in 1915.

⁵⁵ A former foreign minister of Turkey.

⁵⁶ The prime minister of Turkey (1950-1960).

the ideological/pejorative uses of the subject, as he claims that he and Küçük produced the only objective and scientific accounts on Dönmes. In this regard, he highlights his difference from what he calls the conspiratorial literature, the pejorative uses of the right-wing circles, in terms of relying on evidence rather than ideological distortions:

Like *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, the Dönme topic has always been used in a derogatory framework in religion and politics in Turkey. First Yalçın Küçük and then I, by reaching wider audiences, attempted to show that the Dönme community is a subject of science. We will see how successful we are a hundred years later... I see my work as a piece of journalism.

After underlining their common difference from the rest of the literature, Yalçın also distinguishes his stance from Küçük's. Yalçın believes that onomastics might not be the best method in searching people's origins, despite having praised it in his books. In the following, he first indicates his distance from the right-wing theories and then from Küçük's approach:

Everybody writes according to their own ideological perspectives. I respect anyone, who unveils new data. However, I am against the derogatory uses of the Dönme subject. I oppose the speculations about it. For me, a Dönme is equal to anyone, an Alevi or a Kurd... I also hesitate about onomastics, as it is very difficult to explain Dönmeism with that method. Except a few elitist families, the proportion of the population who could read and write was very low in 1934, when the law about surnames was passed. People, at that time, did not know what a surname was. The state prepared surname lists. If that list was done by Dönmes, all our surnames are originally Dönme. We can explain Judaism and Christianity in terms of names, but in our context the names are given if fancied, not according to some rules or history. The Ottoman system of naming children according to abjad⁵⁷ was abandoned in the Turkish republic. People give names to their children when they hear

⁵⁷ Abjad is an Arabic writing system in which letters refer to numerical values.

Judaism, a subgroup in terms of cooperation. The Dönme-Jewish relationship is a subject for a PhD thesis; this is not even looked at. We do not know what happened between the two in history. We just believe that they do not like each other. Ilgaz Zorlu, a Dönme, attempted to convert back to Judaism. I do not know, if he was accepted or not. How was it yesterday? How is it today? Was there a conversion back to Judaism? We do not know these things. We do not know anything.

In a similar manner, Yalçın rejects the claims that the Dönme belief is diluted today and therefore the community's existence is not significant anymore:

Nowadays, it is said that the number of Dönmes has drastically decreased, and this issue is closed. It can be closed for you; there can be a few families, but this is our cultural heritage. Are the numbers the only criteria here? Aren't we going to research, if there are a few families? Are we going to look at it when they reach three hundred thousand people? Some families are small in numbers but have a great impact on society. Most Dönmes might have been secularised by the Enlightenment and lost their beliefs, but this does not mean that we will not investigate this topic.

While criticising the existing scholars, Yalçın unveils his identity in the Dönme discussion. He is a left-leaning intellectual and a journalist, who asks questions about the Dönme topic in a scientific manner. However, he does not claim to be associated with any academic discipline: "It is without doubt that I am not a historian investigating the Dönme community. I am a journalist. My journalist curiosity continues, and I still see myself as a journalist asking questions to understand some issues."

Yalçın distinguishes his inquisitive and professional journalist attitude from his ideological stance by suggesting that he does not aim to criticise the Dönme community, but only to understand their reality: "I try to comprehend rather than to criticise; that is where I am. I did not write those books from my political perspective but with my journalist identity. I think facts are revolutionary, and the Dönme subject should be approached objectively." This position also fits his disapproval of

5.4.3 Yalçın's Ideas on the Significance of the Dönme Community

Yalçın depicts a powerful Dönme figure by claiming that they were important and valuable members of Turkish modernisation, as they were the early supporters of modern ideas in Turkey. He states that they had remained dominant in politics until 1990s, when political Islam gained power. According to Yalçın, this change rendered Dönmes one of the important lobbies in Turkish politics today. He summarises this as follows:

Today, I see them as a lobby. It should be underlined that Dönme families are originally from Salonika, Istanbul and Izmir, the trade centres of the Ottoman Empire. In addition, Dönme families were vanguards of the Turkish modernisation. In the 18th, 19th, 20th century, which one, whatever... They made textiles; they had factories in Manchester, in Rome. They led the international trade and modernisation. After other minorities, such as Greeks and Armenians, left, they controlled the market. Their family members had good education, and they became the first prosperous families of the Turkish republic. These families contributed to the origins of the Turkish republic. They cemented the foundations. They were rich and influential in Istanbul and in Izmir. They also used their economic power in politics. However, in the 1990s, when the Islamic movement became powerful enough to win elections, the distance between the political power and Dönmes grew but not disappeared. Their economic power was challenged by the Anatolian capital, and therefore their political power decreased. We can even claim that it decreased drastically. They are not in the dominant position today... They lost some of their powers, but they still exist in TÜSIAD⁵⁸.

Yalçın explains the decrease in Dönmes' power according to sociological changes, which mark a turn from cosmopolitanism due to rural migration:

There were a lot of social transformations in Turkey after the 1960s. Especially from the 1950s onwards, the migration waves towards big cities,

⁵⁸ TÜSIAD (Turkish Industrialists' and Businessmen's Association) is the most powerful business association in Turkey.

them on television. The main principle in giving names is whim. In this sense, although I believe onomastics is very important, it is very hard to apply it in Turkey.

In addition, Yalçın emphasises his difference from Küçük in terms of methods, while talking about his first book on Dönmes: “The book covers until 1960. I did not only propose it as a thesis [difference from Küçük] but also gave the names of the people, e.g. from the DP cabinet, to reveal the power of the Dönme lobby.” Elsewhere, he underlines that he does not build meta-theories but just investigates the phenomenon as a journalist:

My difference is that I am a journalist. I approach the issues as a journalist and try to analyse through questions and empirical data. I do not develop big hypotheses over theses [difference from Küçük]. I do not propose theories; I do not have these. I only have data and questions, and my work is a study of a curious journalist.

Yalçın adds that he is a best-selling author as a part of his difference: “The Dönme debate, through my best-selling books and Küçük’s work, has become an important issue in our history and moved away from the pejorative language around it.” Hence, Yalçın is aware and self-reflective on his popularity as an author. After the interview, he acknowledged that his books had already been popular before he wrote on the Dönme topic, but the *Efendi* series sold much more than the others. His intellectual identity combines with a professional attitude of a best-selling author, which actually could be observed in the style of his office, a big, modern professional space inhabited by an intellectual. The key aspects that shape Yalçın’s methods, identity and stance in the discussion are: first, he is an enquiring journalist, who attempts to use scientific methods objectively to understand the significance of the Dönme community in Turkey. Second, he is a professional journalist and a popular author interested in the topic. A scientific attitude, intellectual curiosity and professional authorship seem to mark Yalçın’s stance in the field.

The community does not subscribe to any particular ideological perspective in Turkey according to Yalçın. They rather shift political sides in different contexts depending on their interests. For example, being secular does not prevent them from allying with the contemporary conservative government of AKP:

They [Dönmes] do not constantly exist in the same ideological framework. In the Ottoman Empire, they took part in the Committee of Union and Progress against dogmatism, and they continued this attitude in the Turkish republic for a while. To some extent, they followed the Kemalist principles, but they have recently been influenced by neo-liberalism and... They always follow global changes. As the economy in Turkey was always dependent on politics and the state, and as we do not have a strong market economy, Dönmes have always cooperated with the governments. This cooperation continues, and therefore they support AKP today. However, we can underline that they are secular.

On the one hand, Yalçın approaches the Dönme community as a very powerful, decisive lobby group that influences the ways in which politics is conducted in Turkey. On the other hand, this group does not coincide with a specific political side. They are scattered among a variety of ideological groups. This does not mean that the group members are dissolved into Turkish politics. It rather implies that the group secretly manipulates Turkish politics from different angles. For example, Yalçın speculates about the different political choices of the community members in terms of their inner religious sectarianism. Although being unsure about it, he mentions that the main divide between the liberal and the social democratic approaches in Turkey (CHP-DP) is due to the inner groupings in the community:

Yalçın: When you research the subject, you see that there are three different Dönme groups: Kapanizades, Karakaşis, (Ya)Kubis. They have a struggle among themselves, and there is not a social cohesion. The Dönme community experienced subdivisions because of the variety of beliefs. These smaller groups do not even inter-marry, and they are isolated from each other. We can see that division in politics in terms of CHP-DP rivalry.

the development in media communication technologies, the deformation of the cosmopolitan city culture by rural migrants, the disappearance of the political left and the increasing power of political Islam resulted in Dönmes' loss of power to Islamists. In response, Dönmes attempted to penetrate Islamic orders and secretly dominate them.

Yalçın thinks of the community as an important, conspiring lobby group in Turkish politics: "Dönmes have important influence in politics, like the Jewish lobby in United States. We see them having dinners with the Prime Minister Erdoğan and all the rest of it." He also links the community with the most powerful business association in Turkey: "Putting it crudely, although they exist in many other organisations, you can see them as TÜSİAD to understand their lobby power." Yalçın refers to the Dönme lobby as a sociological necessity rather than a hidden evil. In this sense, he, as a secular and left-wing writer, does not attach any ideological or religious stigma to the community:

I know a few families still pursue the Dönme religious belief. However, I know that Dönmeism exists in a wider circle as a lobby in Turkey. It is basically a lobby activity. It is like fellow townsman relationships, *hemşerilik*. For example, people from Erzurum meet and support each other, when they come to Istanbul. It is like Alevis or Suryanis knowing each other; it does not have to signify any religious companionship. I believe most of the Dönmes have such a relationship as a lobby group from the same roots. However, there are still a few families that pursue the original religious rituals.

Yalçın suggests that despite their power being undermined by the Islamist-conservative politics, the Dönme lobby does not carry any political grudge or religious hostility. In contrast, they cooperate with them:

Some of them support AKP. They do not oppose AKP because of religious reasons. A number of Dönmes are sympathetic to AKP's trade reforms and European Union policies.

Indeed, when you closely examine CHP and DP, you will not find a lot of dissimilarities. They just vary on superficial and populist subjects.

Nefes: Do you relate the division between DP-CHP to the divisions in the Dönme community?

Yalçın: I am not sure about this, as I do not know much about it. Many Karakaşis are in DP and many Kapancıs are in CHP. There is such a thing when we look at the families, but this is rather a subject of speculation. We do not know much about this. Dönmes have recently become a topic for social sciences in this country, so we do not know many things.

To understand the significance of the Dönme community, Yalçın relies on a professional journalistic attitude, not on any political belief. For example, after being asked to what extent he sees Dönmes and Jews as being related, Yalçın claims that: "I cannot say such a thing as a researcher. However, seeing it closer to Judaism is like seeing Alevism closer to Islam than Christianity." He does not see a necessary relationship between Jews and Dönmes, whereas the general conspiratorial literature proposes a hidden network between the two. Instead, he approaches them more within the confines of his studies, and he is very careful about the boundaries of his research. He seems to differ from Küçük in this respect as well. While Küçük develops a political analysis and meta-theories, Yalçın focuses on the members of the Dönme community. Nevertheless, this does not suggest that Yalçın does not have any political criticism towards the group. He just professionally separates his research and political ideas:

Nefes: Do you disapprove of the amount of power Dönmes have in Turkey?

Yalçın: Instead of disapproving, I would rather try to understand the issue. I did not write those books with my political identity, but as a journalist... However, if you want me to answer politically, Dönmes, who played a crucial role in Turkish modernisation, have brought the country to a dark point because of their trade and relationships with the AKP government today. Because of their power fetishism, they deny their historical role

Turkey, but today they shifted their role as a result of neo-liberalisation. Thus, he does not feel the same sympathy today that he has for the community's past. He appreciates the modernist and cosmopolitan attitude of the group in the past and carefully distinguishes it from their contemporary neo-liberal stance.

The lines between Yalçın's research and political stance seem to be rather ambiguous. His dissociation from the conspiratorial literature and onomastics in the interview contradicts his use of both in the *Efendi* series. On the one hand, Yalçın is pulled by his intellectual identity that seems to scapegoat Dönmes for what went wrong in Turkish politics. On the other hand, he refrains from meta-theories due to his professional journalist identity. Overall, Yalçın repeats the omnipotent Dönme conspiracy and suggests a semi-erudite narrative that inherently makes a scapegoat of the community. For example, he attempts to read the main political divisions in Turkish politics through the inner struggles in the Dönme community. Although he keeps reiterating that his political stance is different from his research, it does not prevent him echoing an anti-Semitic conspiratorial theme. This is an important aspect of the conspiratorial literature, because it constitutes a certain way of narrating, which generates a specific ideological stance. Hence, even if you do not share that political perspective, repeating the same theme might render the significance of the narrative conspiratorial.

5.5 Abdurrahman Dilipak: The Islamist

5.5.1 Reception

The respondent, born in 1949, is a well-known Islamist writer and a human rights activist in Turkey. He has been writing in different, predominantly Islamist, journals and newspapers for around thirty years. He has published approximately forty books. He was an adviser to the Islamist political party MSP, National Salvation Party, between 1978 and 1980. He also made television programmes with political content on national channels such as Channel 6 and NTV. He received several awards for his human rights activism, in 1996 from Gazeteciler ve Yazarlar Vakfı (the association of Journalists and Writers), in 1997 from Kombassan, and in 1998 by Human Rights

despite the two hundred years of the modernisation struggle. They alienate themselves from their bourgeois tradition. They became corrupt and degenerated. Consequently, I do not feel the same respect for contemporary Dönmes that I have for the ones who modernised the country from the late Ottoman period.

Yalçın condemns the group for not holding onto modernist values and allying with non-secular conservative political parties such as AKP. Therefore, like Küçük, Yalçın has a negative attitude, especially towards Dönmes' contemporary political activities. However, this does not lead him to claim a politically demonised figure of Dönmes in the interview. He refrains from a scapegoating language about Dönmes because of his professional journalist identity and his ideas on their contribution to Turkish modernisation. This denotes where Yalçın stands politically. He has left-wing, modernist and Kemalist tones in his political perspective, not far away from Küçük. This could be seen in his criticism of the contemporary Turkish universities:

Universities turned their backs to this question, as if someone ordered them to do so... Unfortunately, because our universities turned a blind eye to social reality, they have a republic of fear in the Turkish academy. Therefore, they cannot research on Dönmes. The only thing they do today is to criticise Kemalism and swear at the republic.

Yalçın frames his work as a collection of empirical evidence on the group's role in politics until 1960s. While doing so, he carries an objective researcher attitude. He raises academic questions on the significance of the Jewish-Christian market competition in the Ottoman Empire. At the end of the interview, he mentioned that he was in academia ten years ago: "If I see another aspect of Dönmes, if I was a person working in the academy like ten years ago, or if I stopped journalism, I would look at 1492. I would investigate how the Jewish immigration influenced the Ottoman Empire, but I do not have any project about Dönmes in my mind at the moment." He avoids using pejorative language like nationalists and Islamists or developing meta-theories like Küçük. Nonetheless, his engagement with the community is not entirely uninformed by Dönmes' alleged role in politics. He believes that Dönmes were the first carriers of the modernisation movement in

Watch. He currently writes for an Islamist newspaper, *Vakit*. Abdurrahman Dilipak also paints.

Dilipak was very helpful in allocating time in his schedule for the interview. It only took a few phone calls to decide the time and the place. The interview was conducted in his house in Ümraniye, a large working-class district with a population of 630914 by 2007 (Ümraniye Municipality, 2009). Unlike the other respondents' closeness to the city centre, Dilipak was in a more distant and less wealthy area. Regardless, he was living in a modern building with a large gate that was closed and locked – an uncommon feature during daylight in Istanbul. Someone had to hit the buzzer to release me when I was leaving the premises. Dilipak's apartment had a Palestinian flag on the window, a sign of support to Palestine during the Israeli invasion of Gaza in January 2009. Actually, a few days before the interview, Dilipak had been on television condemning Israel's military operation in Gaza. The interview took place in his guest room for forty minutes. The venue was no different than any other middle-class guest rooms in Turkey, which always have the newest furniture in the house and are kept clean for visitors. Dilipak was wearing a beard associated with Islamists and pious Muslims in Turkey.

5.5.2 Dilipak's Identity and Methods in the Dönme Discussion

To start the conversation, I asked why Dilipak became interested in the Dönme community. He responded that he first got to know Ilgaz Zorlu, who initiated the Dönme discussion in the 1990s. Dilipak also wrote about the group on different occasions and was sued in some cases. All these led him to the debate:

I was not directly interested in the topic. There was an article by Ilgaz [Zorlu]... about the Şemsi Efendi School that Atatürk attended. It made me think about who was Ilgaz, because the article was giving some hints about Atatürk's family history and days in Salonika. Later on, I think Ilgaz wrote the book *Ben Bir Selanik'liyim* - I am a Salonikan. These works made me aware of Ilgaz. Subsequently, Ilgaz found me, because I am a human rights activist. He said that I was a Dönme, but I had been brought up by a Muslim father in a Muslim family, and I had spent my youth among Islamic groups.

find the answer of the Dönme topic with only one question. They focus on a limited historical period, and they produce too politicised, magazine accounts on the community. They do not seem to need documents, i.e. they lack documents...

This emphasises Dilipak's Islamist identity in the discussion, as he considers the problem in religious terms, not just as an empirical matter. Thus, he does not delve into a scientific and detailed analysis of the topic. He also shares the conspiratorial doubts of the Islamist and right-wing circles about the Dönme-founded school that Atatürk attended and the overthrow of Abdulhamid II at the beginning of the twentieth century: "I am trying to understand why Abdulhamid II was forced to leave for Salonika, Şemsi Efendi School... Are these all coincidences?" His Islamist stance and radical scepticism about the 'Western' international system also lead him to doubt about democracy as a conspiracy: "They played with the DNA of the voters. There is an insincere voter now. Democracy is a spectacle, and they play with it." Dilipak refers back to the classical conspiratorial themes of the right-wing rather than developing new theories with scientific connotations. In this regard, his Islamist right-wing stance denotes his identity and methods in the discussion.

5.5.3 Dilipak's Ideas on the Significance of the Dönme Community

To start with, Dilipak states that the group is a powerful lobby, which has connections in all important institutions in Turkey and with global networks. Thus, the members of the community can become rich without effort:

Certainly, they have power as a lobby. On this topic, Mahmut Çetin wrote two books, *Boğazdaki Aşiret – The Tribe in Bosphorus* and *X İlişkiler – X Relations*. They talk about the power of the members of this group in media, universities, law, military, finance and a lot of other strategic institutions, which shows the influence of Dönmes. Besides, as they are the natural allies of the American and global capital in Turkey, they all become representatives global corporates. Therefore, they are rich without any effort, and their community is extremely cohesive. We know about the effects of the Freemasonry; we also know about the 'deep state' discussions, and Dönmes

Ilgaz was complaining that Muslims excluded me, because I was a Jew, and Jews excluded me, because I was a Muslim. He said that I was a Jew but on my identity card it was Muslim, what could I do? I advised him to convert to Judaism. He said that the Jewish community would not accept this. I told him the processes in law about how to change his identity from Muslim to Jew. After a long and demanding process in courts, I got him to change religion on his identity card, and the Jewish community also registered him as a member. This is how we met.

Before that, I had read about Dönmes in Ertuğrul Özkök's book and in Mustafa Müftüoğlu's book, *Yalan Söyleyen Tarih Utansın* – Shame on the History that Lies. After listening to Ilgaz as well, my interest grew. Subsequently, there were negative and positive reactions to the articles I wrote on the topic, which led me to a more scrupulous research. Then, I was sued five times for this research, and therefore I needed to learn more about it. In this process, I became more familiar with the Dönme issue.

Dilipak was drawn into the discussion not only by his acquaintances from the Dönme community, but also by dint of being sued. He did not develop any systematic method to study the community like Küçük and Yalçın. He learnt more about the group through secondary accounts. In addition, Dilipak did not write a book by himself on the topic like the others but collaborated with his friend Ilgaz Zorlu. Furthermore, Dilipak's perspective is fed by his political and religious stance. He locates Dönmes in his reading of international politics. He differentiates himself from the leftist writers by claiming that their analyses are limited with the tangible reality. They do not provide a deeper understanding, according to Dilipak, as they only look at the empirical reality without noticing the religious background of the subject:

The man who likes to talk about these issues [meaning Yalçın Küçük] is in jail now [laughing]. He does not question the theological paradigm but solely looks at the actual reality. He stresses upon the existing actors, but what is its theological paradigm, final purpose? Rational, determinist, pragmatist, they look at the empirical reality, and they think in a shallow way. You cannot

are the natural allies of these groups in Turkey. I am not saying all Dönmes are like that, as I also have friends from them like Ilgaz. However, I know many Dönmes, who gained power through these networks.

Then, I attempted to compare Dilipak's approach to Yalçın's depiction of the Dönme lobby by asking to what extent Dönmes' relations differed from the townsman networks of people, *hemşerilik*. Dilipak does not agree with Yalçın's approach of seeing the support-network of the community as a sociological consequence. He rather thinks that their relations are much more deliberate and conspiratorial:

No, it is indeed more professional. It is not like people from the Blacksea region lobbying to control the construction industry in Istanbul. It is interconnected like Olympic spirals. When you hold one of them, it seems independent, but it actually is a part of a chain. They can give the same coordinated response to the same strategic events. Moreover, there was a junta of Dönmes in the Committee of Union and Progress. Dönmes also constituted the CUP group in the early years of the republic. After every *coup d'état*, freemasons were in the majority in temporary governments, and we see many Dönmes among them. They have interesting relations with *coup d'états* as well. They can be anywhere! They are in the democracy discussion; they are the leading members of socialism, liberalism and even of religious groups.

Similar to Küçük and Yalçın, Dilipak draws an omnipresent image of the group. He argues that Dönmes take parts in different political movements, although they are still well connected as a community. He supposes that they appear in different discussions, but their community membership is much more significant. The reason behind this, Dilipak claims, lies in the fact that the group members are secretly coordinated by a global movement. Their distribution to different political groups is just to create an illusion, as they are controlled by a third conspirator party. Therefore, he contextualises the significance of the community in a global conspiracy:

As I said earlier, they can exist in any political movement. They can easily take place in any popular ideology. Hence, they would be the allies of Soros⁵⁹. They would be the fascists, like Tekin Alp [a Jew], whose origins are well-known. You can see them both for and against the *coup d'état*. You can see them as warmongers and as peace activists at the same time. It is not a professional division of labour. It has always been like that. Let me explain it to you like this: you go to pharmacy to buy glycerine, which is very innocent. You might also need hydrochloride for your washbasin. Two people can buy them individually without a problem, but if they walk together, it is dangerous, because when you combine the two, it is trinitro-glycerine, a bomb. When you look at Dönmes individually, you will not see any problems. Anyone has a right to be leftist or rightist. However, if there is a system behind them, which can secretly coordinate their behaviour, then it is dangerous. If I ask you to send me glycerine from England and another guy to buy some hydrochloride and a third person to put them together and bring it to me, who will know what I am up to?

Dilipak develops a conspiratorial understanding of the community, which claims that Dönmes are secretly pawned by a global conspiracy. The allegory about making a bomb symptomises the complexity of the manipulative system, because even Dönmes do not have agency to understand their real roles. Dilipak reiterates that as follows:

Everyone goes in their own ways; leftists manipulate the left. They can be genuinely leftist; they do not have to be professional in disguise. However, there is someone in the system who controls the role of the leftist. I am funding you, and you are the representative of Vichy in Turkey. You earn a hundred thousand dollars per month without much effort. You are a real leftist. If I ask you to do something, you will do it! If I ask you to send me glycerine, you will send it. There is no problem. These are relationships in an organised network. If you catch them individually, they will say, 'what is my fault? I sell cosmetics, and I have tons of glycerine in my depot'.

⁵⁹ George Soros is a well-known American currency speculator.

Dilipak describes a well-articulated system that is used by the white man by which he refers to the Western capitalist system. He relates the working of the conspiracy with the international financial system as follows:

All these White Turks are good! The evil is blamed on the stupid, who combines the nitric acid with glycerine. White men are always good, honest and honourable! They are always benevolent despite the Nobel peace award being given by a man who produced explosives. In other words, the system is very sophisticated. The business in the international financial market is also performed on the same principles. There is an architect, who manipulates the system. I can earn a lot of money by withdrawing my money from the exchange market on the day you send money.

This illustrates that Dilipak's stance on Dönmes is predominantly shaped by his perspective on capitalism. In this regard, he refers to the community as a natural ally of the conspiratorial system. He points out that Dönmes constitute only one of the small groups in the conspiratorial network:

Dönmeism is a pretty small, easily manipulable module that is used very often. If you are a Dönme and a leftist, you can do anything you want, because what you do is in my interests, as I know what you can do... It does not have to be a Dönme. On the street outside, there are a lot of kids who can play football well or become an actor, but they are in coffeeshouses without any jobs. If they had a connection [like Dönmes], they could be more successful.

Dilipak also mentions some conservatives, such as the current Prime Minister Tayyip Erdoğan and the religious leader Fethullah Gülen, as collaborators in the global network: "that is why Tayyip Erdoğan or Fethullah Gülen all of a sudden reacts harshly to some issues." This also suggests that Dönmes are not the sole problem. They are rather an outcome, because Dilipak sees the Dönme power as a by-product of the global conspiracy. In order to lead him to explain the function and

the significance of Dönmes for the global system, I asked the main reasons that make Dönmes natural allies. The following is his response:

Dönmes live in the neighbourhood, where the market is. They are on the right side of the Bosphorus at the right time... If you want to employ an advertiser, you would not choose it from the back streets of Ümraniye. Although, someone can jump from here to there; it is always possible, but Etiler⁶⁰ is easier to find an advertiser. That is why we need to read Mahmut Çetin's *Boğazdaki Aşiret* – The Tribe in the Bosphorus. They do not have to be very intelligent. They just have the right connections. If you are given the position of representative of Microsoft or Scotch whisky... Aydın Doğan is not a very intelligent man, but he became a media boss. If you were him, you could be as well [laughing]. The Dönme community is a local partner of the global system.

Dilipak claims that Dönmes become the partners of the global power because of their proximity, by which he mainly refers to the cosmopolitan character of the community. According to Dilipak, this convenience gives them an advantage over others in Turkey, and they are powerful without deserving. In this regard, in contrast to Yalçın, Dilipak condemns the modern, cosmopolitan characteristics of the Dönme community. This could be seen as a difference of his Islamic perspective, which denounces modernisation as Westernisation. Dilipak expands his criticism to other non-Islamic minorities, which ally with foreign powers:

The local partners of the global network always have problems with the people of those countries. It is the same in Georgia, Ukraine. Whenever they want to create a problem... Russians in Ukraine or in Turkmenistan are like their Dönmes; they serve the Russian Federation's interests in manipulating those countries. They are the natural allies of the Russian state. If Muslims in Turkey do not produce enough allies for the international system, then the network will search partners among Alevis, seculars, atheists, drug addicts, homosexuals. In other words, it will recruit from people outside the Islamic

⁶⁰ A relatively wealthy, central district in Istanbul known for its cosmopolitan appearance.

morality, people who choose a secular life. It does not have to be Dönmes. The system is more important than different identities, but they prefer people from similar mentalities [a non-Islamic morality]. For that reason, they have invested in Dönmes since the collapse of the Ottoman Empire. They were the allies of the West during the Ottoman Empire as well.

Dilipak sees the groups that collaborate with the international system as problems in different contexts. He mentions that when Muslims do not provide enough collaborators, the international system searches for people outside Islamic morality in Turkey. Dönmes along with other non-Islamic groups compose a weed that is used by the international system to control the country. Thus, Dilipak sees Dönmes, i.e. White Turks, as a “problem in Turkey.” This stance also implies that people outside Islamic morality could easily be manipulated by foreign powers:

The problem lies in the ‘deep reality’, a system beyond the apparent. Dönmes, its allies, are close to that system, and if Dönmes are not good enough, there are freemasons or other actors. There are people, who join the system from outside, who can be organised, controlled and manipulated. If Dönmes were a larger community, it would be harder to control them. Their inner cohesion and mobility are higher. There are not rivalries in the Dönme community. They do not have risks in terms of sharing the resources... These people do not bear bad will against Turkey. They say I choose to be a socialist; I cannot do anything about my family background. As I said, if you go and buy glycerine alone, there seems to be no problem!

Nonetheless, when I asked about his opinion on the pejorative connotations of the group in Turkish politics, Dilipak changed his tone. The fact that he is a member of human rights organisations seems to direct Dilipak to a more politically correct attitude. In other words, seeing Dönmes as a part of foreign conspiracy does not result in an open support of the demonisation of the community. While believing that the Dönme power is unfair and parasitic, he re-states that he is a human rights activist:

I look from the human rights perspective. Dönmes attract a lot of suspicion and anger, because they appear everywhere! They are appointed to the right places; these things do not have to be right! That is it!

Subsequently, I inquired about what Dilipak meant by the international system to which he referred as the deep reality: "It is a universal truth. In particular, the deep reality is around where the masters of the world geographically reside. It starts from the United States and England and goes to the East. Israel is certainly very important for that system." However, the system has a much wider historical and religious significance than contemporary geo-political coalitions, as it is embedded in history and religion:

To understand the deep reality, you need to know how the prophet Suleyman's temple was constructed, and what kind of personality Hiram had, because the deep secret begins there. If you go earlier, you need to look at the Sarut-Marut event, magic, jinn, theology of the future. It is a bit of mythology, a bit of history, a bit of theology and a bit of hermetic world. You also need to mention the politics to force the god for the Armageddon. It is something beyond virtual. It is about the ontological architecture of the world. It is also about the end of the world. When Fukuyama or Huntington describes the clash of civilisations, they do not only analyse the empirical reality but also talk about the hermetic reality. The end of the world is the Armageddon. We live in the period preceding it. The clash of civilisations is the Armageddon.

Dilipak reaches an eschatological understanding through which he explains the deep reality. He believes that it aims to bring the end of history and prepare the world for the Armageddon. In this regard, the deep reality is not just one conspiracy but the umbrella for all. He refers to many different historical epochs and agents while portraying the deep reality:

The Dönme belief is the most magical part of Judaism. You need to look at the background of the Knights Templar and the reality they defend. What will they reconstruct and how? How will the hierarchy be organised in the

temple? There is Egypt, there is Greece, and there is mythology. It is a bit like the film *Matrix* [laughing]. Jewish hermetism, and yes there is eschatology, hermetism as well. On the one hand, there is the ontological reality about the beginning and the end of history. In this process, we have who we are and what we are doing questions... Rothschild is also in this project. The American Dollar is an amulet, especially the one dollar bill. It is an amulet, which signifies a hermetic political project based on a theological paradigm. The Dönme belief, among all of these, is an Anatolian version of Judaism. It is related with the establishment of Israel etc. It is a strange structure, which includes Vatican, Evangelists and Protestants. It is the deep reality of the deep world state.

He repeats his idea that the ordinary Dönme is not aware of this, due to the complex manipulations of the system:

Dönmes prepare the world for the end. They prepare for the Armageddon. When it does not come, they try to force the god to it. The Dönme on the street does not think like that, but I repeat that s/he does not have to think like this at all. Even if s/he is a hippie, there are no problems. S/he can contribute as a hippie. The important thing is the theology and the hierarchic structure behind all this. I am saying that they are the natural allies of the deep world state. The theology, the hierarchical structure...

All in all, Dilipak approaches the Dönme question as an important one not in itself but as a part of a wider problem about the deep reality, because for him, Dönmes are the local agents of an international conspiratorial network. On the one hand, Dilipak refers to Dönmes' undeserved, enormous power through lobbying like the former writers. On the other hand, he distinguishes himself by claiming that the others do not see the deep reality, which is predominantly embedded in the religious domain. Dönmes constitute a group susceptible to the manipulations of the deep reality, as they do not share much with the Islamic morality. This might inherently be suggesting that the solution to the problem could be lying in Islam, although Dilipak did not openly claim this. He, nevertheless, gave me a Koran before I left.

5.6 Discussion

The self-presentations of the authors reflect their ways of involvement in the Dönme literature and the ways they narrate politics, as they all justify their theories from their own viewpoints. This affirms that political self-presentations are symptomatic to ideological standpoints. Küçük is a confident left-wing professor, who attempts to develop a scientific meta-theory. Yalçın is a professional journalist and a popular author, who documents the existence of Dönmes in prominent positions. These self-presentations shape their places and differences in the literature. For example, Küçük and Yalçın, who present themselves as secular left-wing thinkers, seek credibility in science, while Dilipak, who presents himself as an Islamist, justifies his account with religious explanations. In fact, Dilipak is different from the other two mainly due to his Islamist stance. Hence, the borders between Dilipak and the others are the most underlined. Dilipak rejects the left-wing theories for focusing too much on the empirical reality and develops a more metaphysical account of Dönmes. He considers the community's actions as a local aspect of global conspiracies, while the left-wing writers focus particularly on the alleged Dönme conspiracies and how they relate to global ones. In other words, whereas Dilipak's main focus is on global conspiracies, Küçük and Yalçın discuss the Dönme case.

Moreover, the differences in the self-presentations of the writers point to the differences in their rhetoric. Küçük and Dilipak are more politically directed, and they associate Dönmes with wider political issues and events. They develop meta-theories in which they associate the alleged Dönme conspiracy theories with the political events or circles they oppose. In contrast, Yalçın underlines the difference between his research and political stance. He claims that we do not have much empirical data about the community and refrains from developing meta-theories. The differences in self-presentations also denote the diversity in their concerns about the significance of Dönmes' power. Küçük and Yalçın mainly criticise the departures from the modernist and republican characteristics of the country. They do not share the right-wing conspiratorial accounts' anxiety about the cosmopolitan, modernising character of the community. However, they reflect a fear about the loyalty of the community to the country. They reiterate the Sèvres paranoia, which refers to the ontological insecurities of the Turkish republic about the commitment of the

minorities. They disclose a fear of minority conspiracies, which may cause the disintegration of the republic. Therefore, their hostility towards certain universities, EU processes and neo-liberalisation is a kind of state-defensive response to the contemporary transformations. Indeed, Küçük was a suspect in the Ergenekon trial for this state-centred stance.

Dilipak's anxiety is about an anti-Islamic global conspiracy that he calls the deep reality. He delegitimises the modern and the cosmopolitan character of the Dönme community, because they are outside the Islamic morality. He states that Dönmes are the natural allies of the global conspiratorial network. In that way, his account does not much delve into the Sèvres paranoia but condemns the community's existence outside Islamic morality. Dilipak does not much worry about the disintegration of the Turkish republic or the erosion of the modern, cosmopolitan values. He rather considers a more general anti-Islamic plot in which Dönmes are only pawns. His anxiety is not much rooted in Dönmes but rather on what they represent for him. All three writers see the community as an influential lobby group, and they use the Dönme discussion as a venue to problematise their political doubts and verify their political identities. The community, as a perfect stranger figure, provides them with a common scapegoat around which their political anxieties could be envisaged.

It might be suggested that the writers' self-presentations draw a parallel conclusion to the main theoretical framework of this research. First, their ontological insecurities, like the Sèvres paranoia, seem to lead them to conspiracy theories. The authors, especially Küçük and Dilipak, pragmatically use the conspiracy theories on Dönmes to substantiate their political ideas and explain what went wrong. Their ontological insecurities are resolved through the Dönme discussion. Second, the writers scapegoat the Dönme community to reflect the blame of political and ethical transgressions. In this regard, the Girardian notion of sacrifice could be observed in their perspectives. The Dönme, as a sacrificial figure, is offered to avoid a sacrificial crisis. Through channelling the anxiety towards the community, the general society is offered a reconstruction of its lost 'organic harmony'. In the leftists' case, this harmony is sought in the modern Turkish republic, and in Dilipak's case in an Islamic community. Third, the authors fall into semi-erudite fusions of reason and belief, since they demonstrate that their researches and methodologies are heavily

informed by their political/religious concerns. Dilipak's framework achieves this more openly than the others, as he more often refers to occult phenomena and the global conspiracy literature. The left-wing writers are rather involved with how conspiracies concern Turkey.

The authors' political/religious standpoints/beliefs are predominantly affirmed by leaping into a description of an omnipotent, hidden and evil Dönme figure in which the reason fuses with the belief to imagine the demon. In this sense, the chapter demonstrates that the main line of distinction among the theorists and the direction of their works could be summarised in their self-presentations. Küçük, as a leftist professor, intends to establish a new paradigm in Turkish politics and academia. Yalçın points out who Dönmes are as a professional writer. Dilipak sees them as the tip of the iceberg. Thus, he attempts to comprehend the invisible bottom through metaphysical readings.

This difference also underlines the basic qualitative distinction between left-wing and right-wing conspiracy theories. Although both views use conspiratorial accounts to affirm their standpoints, they present them in significantly different manners. Right-wing accounts scapegoat a community because of their belief system or ethnicity, i.e. *de facto* aspects of their identity, while left-wing theories accuse them as ideological opponents. In other words, left-wing theories do not get involved with the *de facto* characteristics of a group but the *de jure* functions. The left-wing treatment of conspiracy theories is characterised by Marx's account of Judaism. Marx equates the spirit of capitalism with Judaism by arguing that they are both founded on egoistic self-interest. Therefore, he considers bourgeois society as a manifestation of the Jewish spirit (Marx, 1844; also see Avineri, 1964; Greenblatt, 1978; Johnson, 1987). He states:

What is the secular basis of Judaism? Practical need, self-interest. What is the worldly religion of the Jew? Huckstering. What is his worldly God? Money... Money is the jealous god of Israel, in face of which no other god may exist. Money degrades all the gods of man – and turns them into commodities... Money is the estranged essence of man's work and man's existence, and this alien essence dominates him, and he worships it. The god of the Jews has

become secularised and has become the god of the world. The bill of exchange is the real god of the Jews. His god is only an illusory bill of exchange (Marx, 1844: 25, 28).

As Marx sees the essence of capitalism as the essence of Judaism, he believes that human emancipation from capitalism also means emancipation from Judaism: "Emancipation from huckstering and money, consequently from practical, real Judaism, would be the self-emancipation of our time." Marx does not pose a conspiratorial account which sees Jews as necessary evil that dominates through capitalism. In spite of that, because he equates capitalist values with Judaism, he opens the way for secular, left-wing conspiracy theories that do not accuse Judaism of religious deviance but of economic and social crime. Accordingly, the chapter shows that the left-wingers propose secular conspiracy theories, which accuse Dönmes of being the local agents of capitalism in Turkey.

5.7 Conclusion

The conspiratorial vision affords a scapegoat for the writers to reflect their political anxieties. They all point to a harmony diverted by conspiracies of Dönmes/Jews on different levels. In parallel, the self-presentations of the authors, which are shaped according to an opposition to the demonised Dönme figure and what it signifies, heavily inform their ways of engagement with the topic. Dilipak, the only Islamist, is fundamentally different from the others, as his political standpoint is significantly different. He proposes a rather metaphysical theory that combines various elements from the general conspiratorial literature. On the contrary, Küçük and Yalçın engage with the empirical significance of the community and seek legitimacy in scientific methods. Symptomatically, Küçük and Yalçın criticise Turkish universities for being ignorant and inadequate on the topic. Unlike Dilipak, left-wing theorists are more hesitant in expanding the topic to the general conspiracy literature. One of the reasons could be that leftist theorists seem to share the Sèvres paranoia, and therefore their accounts focus more on Dönmes' influence in Turkey. In addition, their left-wing identity could be effective in their hesitation to become involved with the conspiratorial literature, which is traditionally seen as a right-wing phenomenon in Turkey. For example, Yalçın (2006) claims that he cannot produce anti-Semitic

accounts because of his leftist stance. The writers' responses also acknowledge the qualitative distinction between left-wing and right-wing conspiracy theories, as while Dilipak focuses on the *de jure* non-Islamic identity of the group, Küçük and Yalçın accuse their *de facto* political alliance with capitalism.

Last but not least, the interviews demonstrate Yalçın's careful separation between his ideological stance and scientific research. However, it also shows that repeating the conspiratorial themes promotes the same political significance despite the intentions. Therefore, it verifies that conspiracy theories constitute a specific political tradition, which has explicit ideological implications. This will be more clearly illustrated in the frame analysis of the *Efendi* series in the next chapter. In this way, the thesis also hopes to disclose the disparities between the content of the conspiracy theories and the writers' intentions.

Chapter 6. The Framing of a Conspiracy Theory: The *Efendi* Series

6.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to analyse the two most popular contemporary conspiracy theory books on Dönmes, *Efendi 1: Beyaz Türklerin Büyük Sırrı* [Efendi 1: The Big Secret of the White Turks] (Yalçın, 2004) and *Efendi 2: Beyaz Müslümanların Büyük Sırrı* [Efendi 2: The Big Secret of the White Muslims] (Yalçın, 2006). The chapter will mainly study the *Efendi* series' political frames to investigate the ways in which power relations are described in the Dönme conspiracy theories. More specifically, it will provide a comparative analysis of the content, the methodology, the literary devices and the social/political significance of the series.

There are several reasons for choosing the *Efendi* series. First, *Efendi 1* (Yalçın, 2004) and *Efendi 2* (Yalçın, 2006) are best-sellers and the most widespread Dönme-themed conspiracy theories. *Efendi 1* has made 75 editions and sold 170,000 copies, which is an extraordinary market success in Turkey. As Bali (2008: 212) notes: "In a country in which most research books rarely sell more than 2,000 copies, such a figure for a book which retails at the almost unheard of price of TL 25 (10 Pounds) must be considered a major publishing event." Likewise, 100,000 copies of the first edition of *Efendi 2* were printed, which shows the confidence in the book's popularity. By the beginning of 2009, *Efendi 2* had sold 114,000 copies⁶¹. During *Efendi 1*'s boom, there was also a wide illegal market of photocopied books. Hence, the ownership of the book is likely to be more than the official numbers. For example, all personal acquaintances of the writer of this thesis had replicas due to the high prices of the licensed copies.

Second, the series created a bigger impact than any other books on Dönmes in Turkey. There were a variety of responses from different groups. It was also mentioned in the popular television series, *The Valley of the Wolves* (Medyatava, 2004). In this regard, the books constitute the most visible, read and discussed example of the Dönme-themed conspiracy theories. Third, the *Efendi* series' content

⁶¹ The numbers were taken from Soner Yalçın during the interview.

does not vary significantly from the other conspiracy theories on Dönmes. Tayfun Er, another contributor to the literature, even accused Yalçın of plagiarising from him (Hepkon, 2007: 209). Thus, the books are representative of the conspiracy theories about the community.

Last but not least, popular books with political themes, like the *Efendi* series, can have political influence. For example, in the United States the best-selling book *The Terror Network*, which claims a network coordinated by Moscow secretly controlling all terrorist groups from Baaden-Mainhoff to the IRA, impacted upon on the American foreign policy in the early 1980s (Curtis, 2004)⁶². Another example arises from Furedi's (2007) discussion on terrorism, where he remarks that the book *Cobra Event* (Preston, 1997) influenced Clinton's anti-terror policies.

The chapter will first discuss the frame analysis approach in detail and illustrate the main political frames in Turkey. Second, it will summarise the content of the series. Third, it will describe the literary style and devices of Yalçın. Fourth, it will investigate the methodology of the books. Fifth, the responses to the series will be scrutinised by looking at the reception of and the reactions to the series in the media. The chapter will conclude by outlining the main findings.

6.2 The Method: Frame Analysis

Goffman (1975: 10) describes frames as follows: "I assume that definitions of a situation are built up in accordance with principals of organisation which govern events [...] and our subjective involvement in them; frame is the word I use to refer to such of these basic elements as I am able to identify." According to Goffman, people "locate, perceive, identify and label" everyday events through frames (ibid, 21). For example, queuing is a frame with its own rules and logic. Goffman uses the

⁶² According to Curtis (2004), the CIA initially denied the book as a fantasy of conservatives. However, William Casey, the conservative head of CIA was convinced by the book and attempted to prove the existence of this hidden network; the analysts replied that it was impossible, because it had been made up. Melvin Goodman, the head of Soviet affairs in the CIA during this period, stated that Casey did not believe any of the the analysts. Finally, Casey found a university professor, who confirmed the hidden network. Then, the report was given to Reagan administration (ibid). As a result, it changed the foreign policy. In other words, they believed in their own fiction. Sterling's book and its influence on Reagan administration was also criticised by other authors (Gunter, 1997; Stohl, 1983; Bundy, 1981; Ege, 1982).

concept "to isolate some of the basic frameworks of understanding available in our society for making sense out of events and to analyse the special vulnerabilities to which these frames of reference are subject" (ibid, 10). In that sense, he attempts to discover the frameworks of social interaction. Koenig (2004: 1) notes that there has been a variety of uses of the frame analysis (see D'Angelo, 2002; Fisher, 1997; McLean, 1998). Benford and Snow (2000) use the method to study social movements, while some others (Maher, 2001; Scheufele, 1999) use it in media and communication. As Triandafyllidou and Fotiou (1998) inform, the method has also been utilised in disciplines such as psychology and psychiatry.

The frame analysis can describe the individuals' use of political frames and political interaction. It can analyse political communication by focusing on the ways people make sense of the world. Snow and Benford (1988) discuss how social movements construct political frames, and how these frames are perceived by individuals. They regard frames as a 'conceptual scaffolding' by which social movements construct and modify political messages (ibid, 213). In this respect, political frames are often confused with ideology, and they are used as synonyms. Oliver and Johnston (2000) underline the difference between ideology and frame by claiming that ideology is a system of ideas, while frames are interactive processes that can combine various ideological messages:

... as a substitute for ideology, frames are woefully incomplete: they offer too shallow a conception of what is involved in developing ideologies and a one dimensional view of how others develop them... While a framing effort may successfully persuade someone that a particular issue can be explained by an ideology, framing processes do not persuade people to adopt new ideologies. At best they may initiate the journey (Oliver and Johnston, 2000: 46-47).

Frames are not as substantial as ideologies; rather, they are complementary. Hence, conspiracy theories can combine different political frames, whereas it is relatively more difficult to fuse many ideologies because of their normative boundaries. Likewise, the series' readers might align anti-Semitic frames to their political stances. The frame analysis will be helpful in understanding what kinds of political

movement has a distinctive leftist emphasis. In that sense, while having Kurdish nationalists in their ranks, it does not merely represent an ethnic movement.

These five ideological streams are represented in the parliament by different political parties, which will be analysed in the eighth chapter. In the following section, I will attempt to delineate the political frames of the *Efendi* series in relation to these political perspectives.

6.3 The Summaries of *Efendi 1* and *Efendi 2*

Efendi 1: Beyaz Türklerin Büyük Sırrı (Yalçın, 2004) describes political life in Turkey, roughly from the second half of the nineteenth century until the mid-1950s, by narrating the story of an alleged Dönme family, the Evliyazades. Yalçın starts by introducing some powerful families in the nineteenth-century Ottoman Empire, where the reader meets the Evliyazades along with Uşakizades. He argues that the members of these families tend to get married to each other and sees that as intra-group Dönme marriages; he relates Dönmes' intra-marriage rule to these marriages between rich families. Furthermore, Yalçın presents the existence of these family links as a proof of a Dönme conspiracy. For him, the powerful people, predominantly Dönmes, stay at the top through these family arrangements.

Yalçın talks about the members of Evliyazades, who were influential in politics. He particularly focuses on Dr. Nazım, a prominent member of the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP), who entered the Evliyazade family through marriage. Dr. Nazım is portrayed as an idealist patriot, who does not hesitate to put his life in danger for his country (ibid). He is the protagonist of the *Efendi 1* until he is executed. Afterwards, the book focuses more on two other influential members of the Evliyazade family, Adnan Menderes and Fatin Rüşdü Zorlu, who were in power until they were executed in 1960. In short, *Efendi 1* mainly depicts the power and the significance of the Dönme sect in Turkish political history through conspiracies.

Efendi 2 (Yalçın, 2006) broadens the scope of the first book by focusing on the alleged roles of Dönmes in Islamic sects such as Rifais, Mevlevis, Bektashis, Melamis and Halvetis. It outlines the roles of these sects in politics and contends that

frames the *Efendi* series uses while describing a conspiratorial account. In order to do that, I need briefly to identify the basic political frameworks in Turkey.

6.2.1 Main Political Currents in Turkey

We can mention five significantly different streams of political ideologies in modern Turkish politics:

- 1. Kemalism-Republicanism**
- 2. Liberalism**
- 3. Turkish Nationalism**
- 4. Islamism**
- 5. The Kurdish movement**

Kemalism is the secular-modernist state ideology, which suggests equality for all citizens regardless of their ethnic or religious identities. It stresses the secular character of the state. It proposes a top-down modernisation of society, in which the ethnic and religious belongings are melted. Kemalism represents the centre in Turkish politics and opposes the Islamist and Kurdish movements, which challenge its secular vision (see Insel ed., 2006). Liberalism in Turkey is the political vision, which suggests development and prosperity through integrating into the capitalist market. The liberal view, compared to Kemalism, is more flexible in terms of minority identities (see Yılmaz ed., 2005). Turkish nationalism emphasises preserving Turkish culture while modernising the country. It opposes the left-wing and the minority movements and defends the secular state view (see Gültenkil and Bora eds., 2003).

Islamism, in this work, refers to the movement which supports progress in Islamic character. Like Turkish nationalism, it is not against liberalism or progress but the cultural changes they bring. It propagates the view that prosperity and justice should be achieved through an Islamic project. It prioritises a Sunni-Turkish-Muslim identity and counters the secular character of the Kemalist view (see Aktay ed., 2005; Oktar, 2001). The Kurdish movement suggests a more democratic and multicultural society in which all the minorities will be treated equally. The

Dönmes have been influential in politics through secretly dominating these Islamic groups. Hence, *Efendi 2* basically explores Dönmes' alleged influence in Turkish politics through Islamic sects. It explains that all these sects are associated with *tasavvuf*, or Islamic mysticism. Therefore, Dönmes, whose beliefs rely on Jewish mysticism, found it easy to join them. As a proof, Yalçın points to the distinctively modern character of these religious groups: for example, the leader of Rifais, Kenan Rifai, was more of a Western intellectual than a religious sheikh. Accordingly, Yalçın calls these Dönmes, who secretly penetrated into Islamic sects, White Muslims to refer to their elite character. He sees their version of Islam the faith of 'the deep state' (ibid). In other words, he claims that the deep state propagates a Dönme version of Islam. This implies that the deep state is also under the influence of the community.

According to Yalçın (2006), Dönmes gained religious authority because the Turkish society was uneducated. People used to communicate religious knowledge not through books but oral culture. Besides, the corruption in the Ottoman Empire was so common that people bribed officers to get the title of Seyyid⁶³ (ibid). Moreover, *Efendi 2* maintains that Jews have inherent abilities to fake conversion (ibid, 255, 385). Therefore, they were successful in penetrating religious sects and influencing politics through Islam.

There are a few minor differences between *Efendi 1* and *Efendi 2*. First of all, *Efendi 1* depicts the nineteenth century Ottoman politics until 1950s and is focused on the story of the Evliyazade family. In this sense, Turkish political history is narrated along with the family story. *Efendi 2* is composed of various sections, explaining the ways Dönmes penetrated Islamic sects. Second, while *Efendi 1* is about Turkish politics, *Efendi 2* also talks about a global conspiracy network in which Israel and the United States have important roles. Nevertheless, *Efendi 1* and *Efendi 2* both document Dönme conspiracies behind important religious and political changes in Turkey.

⁶³ Seyyid is a title given to descendents of the prophet Mohammed. Seyyids were given some economic and bureaucratic privileges in the Ottoman Empire.

6.4 The Framework of the *Efendi* Series

The books take as their premise the idea that the Turkish public is unaware of the Dönmes' real power. In so doing, the *Efendi* series echoes the classical right-wing conspiratorial accounts, which propose that the modernisation movement of CUP was controlled by Jews and Dönmes⁶⁴. In parallel, *Efendi I* labels Dönmes as *White Turks*⁶⁵, the hidden powerful elite. For example, Yalçın (2004: 228-229) maintains that during the transition from the Ottoman Empire to the Turkish republic, all the economic subsidies were going to Jews and Dönmes. The belief in the power of Jews/Dönmes is also obvious in references to prosperity throughout *Efendi I*. Table 6.1 below shows that Turkish-Muslim families are described as affluent only twice. In contrast, Dönmes are mentioned as wealthy seven times, Jews three times and the foreign minorities five times.

Table 6.1 Mentions of Wealthy Groups in <i>Efendi I</i>	
The Wealthy Group	Number of Times Mentioned
Merchants	8
Dönmes	7
Foreign Families	5
Jews	3
Turkish-Muslim Families	2

This theme can also be read in the blurb of the book, where the writer asks whether the readers have any relatives who were Prime Minister, Miss Europe or a president of major Turkish football clubs like Fenerbahçe or Galatasaray (ibid). Although Yalçın does not give the obvious answer 'no', he underlines the class difference between lay people and the Evliyazade family/Dönmes. He states that Evliyazades have such wealthy relatives and share a secret, their Dönme origins. In parallel, Yalçın complains that "some key positions" are transferred "from fathers to sons" (ibid, 462), and he questions the 'coincidence' that "some families always bring up

⁶⁴ As mentioned in the fourth chapter, the right-wing and Islamist circles opposed the secular-modern character of the Turkish republic by seeing it as a Jewish/Dönme conspiracy.

⁶⁵ 'White Turks' is a term first used by Güldemir (1992) to refer to upper classes in Turkey. It can be seen as the local version of the American concept, 'White Anglo-Saxon Protestant' (WASP).

politicians" (ibid, 409). In this way, he reiterates that being a Dönme is a determinant factor for being rich and powerful.

Elsewhere, Yalçın (ibid, 416) mentions an active Jewish lobby in the Ottoman Palace, which assists Jews in getting prominent positions. Yalçın also implies that Sabbatai Sevi was not executed by the Empire because of the powerful Jewish lobby (ibid, 418). Furthermore, he states that after the First World War some Dönmes established the *Wilson Prensipleri Cemiyeti*⁶⁶ [the Wilson Principles Society], as Wilson was a Zionist (ibid, 245). Yalçın links this with the false claim that ninety percent of the United States ambassadors in Turkey are Jewish in origin. He states that leftists of Dönme origin in Turkey did not support the Arab left in 1960s because of their attachment to Israel (ibid, 487). He also accuses Jews of conspiring in the problems in Cyprus between Turks and Greeks. He supports his thesis by proposing that Cyprus is close to Israel, and there were alleged attempts to create a Jewish kingdom there in the Ottoman period (ibid, 476).

Yalçın builds a historically omnipotent, hidden and active Dönme/Jewish network. He visits classical and contemporary anti-Semitic stereotypes in *Efendi 1*. They create hostilities, constitute the elite of Turkey, do not share the fate of the country, and live in a parasitic manner. Yalçın also negates the differences between Dönmes and Jews and frames them as a power-block. The book echoes the conspiracy theories about Jews, although it is about Dönmes. The frequency of the religious identity mentioned in *Efendi 1* suggests a similar pattern (see table 6.2). Mentions of Jews are two-fold more than the references to Dönmes. One could infer that while the author aims to investigate the role of Dönmes in Turkish history, he talks more about Jews. Nevertheless, Yalçın does not claim that all Dönmes are bad but repeats that they are most often powerful people and only a few of them really work for the country (ibid).

⁶⁶ The society aimed to save the Ottoman Empire from the invasion of foreign powers after the loss of the First World War. Their solution was to accept American mandate on the principles of Woodrow Wilson. They proposed that the Empire could appear as a member of the United Nations under American mandate. Some members of this society were Halide Edip Adivar, Celalettin Muhtar, Refik Halid.

Yalçın, the Turkish azan benefited the Turkish public by helping people to understand the religious texts. However, it was inappropriate for the interests of foreign states, so Dönmes (DP government), as local agents, banned it. As in the first book, Israel is accused of intervening and conspiring in Cyprus (ibid, 135).

Table 6.3 Frequency of the Foreign Countries Mentioned in <i>Efendi 2</i>	
The Foreign States	Number of Times Mentioned
United States	140
Israel	47
England	37
France	32

In parallel, Yalçın blames Dönmes for misrepresenting the historical accounts to create a dislike of Arabs (ibid, 145). The Arab figure in school history books in Turkey is generally presented as a traitor in the Ottoman Empire in the First World War (Çandar, 2002). Yalçın rejects this and believes that Dönmes create these myths to generate an antipathy towards Arabs in order to alienate Turkish people from their neighbours and religious companions. This is given as an illustration of part of the divide and rule strategy of Dönmes, who also do not allow anyone to research their community (ibid, 31). Yalçın protests: “we have to accept that there is a ‘Dönme history writing’ in Turkey. We have to change it!” (ibid, 51)

Yalçın thinks that some members of the contemporary liberal/conservative *Justice and Progress Party* (AKP) government such as Bülent Arınç (ibid, 358), Cüneyt Zapsu (ibid, 301) and the Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan (ibid, 329) could be Dönmes. In addition, he suspects that the owners of the multi-national corporate Ülker, who are known as conservative Muslims, are Dönmes (ibid, 422). Yalçın assumes that the company’s success in the international market is due to its strong ties with the international Jewish community (ibid). He incorporates the contemporary success of Islamic political movements and capital in Turkey with an alleged Dönme/Jewish network by claiming that these movements are secretly led by Dönmes. He reveals his suspicions in the following statement: “the trade is in the

Table 6.2 The Frequency of the Religions Mentioned in <i>Efendi 1</i>	
The Religious Group	Number of Times Mentioned
Jews	378
Dönmes	187
Muslims	104
Christian	1

Efendi 1 frames Turkish politics in a similar way to the classical right-wing conspiracy theory of the role of Jews/Dönmes in the CUP movement, which accuses Dönmes of dominating Turkish politics behind closed doors. However, Yalçın uses this frame in a modernist-secular stance, unlike the right-wing and Islamist accounts, which attempt to delegitimise Turkish modernisation. He accuses Dönmes of being the local agents of capitalism, and his charges concentrate on Islamists, capitalists and liberal governments such as the Democrat Party. Thus, he transforms a classical right-wing conspiratorial frame into a leftist-secular one.

Yalçın underlines his political perspective more boldly in *Efendi 2*. He associates himself with the left wing and denies the accusations of anti-Semitism in *Efendi 1* by reiterating his leftist stance (Yalçın, 2006: 30). He also talks favourably of the policies of the one-party, or the solid-modernity, period in Turkey in which the strong centre-left government of CHP was in power (ibid, 381, 383). Yalçın suspects foreign states, such as the United States and Israel, of being potential agents of capitalism. As the word count of the countries in table 6.3 shows, the United States and Israel are the most frequently mentioned foreign states. Yalçın claims that the United States and Jews have always been intervening in Turkish politics and changing the natural course of history. He argues that Turkish prime ministers, such as Erdoğan, need first to get consent from the United States (ibid, 357). He also accuses the U.S. of sponsoring a capitalism-friendly Islam in Turkey and states that the mixed-gender praying movements in Islam were originated in America (ibid, 77, 127, 128, 428). Likewise, the alleged Dönme government of DP (Democrat Party) banned the Turkish azan⁶⁷ and brought back the Arabic version (ibid, 383). For

⁶⁷ Call to prayer from mosques.

genes of the Ülker brothers” (ibid, 423). Yalçın neglects the differences between Jews and Dönmes in *Efendi 2*. He supposes that they constitute a unified power bloc and repeats the same accusations about both groups. As table 6.4 points out, Jews are mentioned more often than Dönmes in *Efendi 2*.

Table 6.4 Frequency of Religions Mentioned in <i>Efendi 2</i>	
The Religious Group	Number of Times Mentioned
Jews	633
Dönmes	462
Muslims	285
Christians	0

Efendi 2 frames Turkish politics under the influence of Jewish/Dönme conspiracies. While doing so, Yalçın borrows the paranoid aspects of the state ideology, e.g. the Sèvres paranoia. He argues that many Islamic sects as well as liberal political parties were secretly led by Dönmes (ibid). In that way, he amplifies the conspiratorial frame on Dönmes to a left-wing secular perspective. He broadens the legitimacy ground of the conspiracy theories on Dönmes, which have historically been a part of the marginal right-wing politics. This frame transformation also links the *Efendi* series’ content to the aforementioned new anti-Semitism, the popularisation of anti-Semitic frames among various groups.

All in all, the *Efendi* series depicts a hierarchical structure in Turkish society in which Dönmes constitute a hidden elite network. This structure dates back to the origins of the Turkish republic, as founding fathers of the modern Turkey are argued to be Dönmes. Besides, Yalçın associates many crises in Turkish politics, such as the Cyprus problem, to the secret plots of this group. Dönmes are held responsible for establishing the republic and unjustly ruling it. These claims are traditionally voiced by the marginal right, conservative circles and Islamist groups in Turkey. Yalçın’s works transform this right-wing conspiratorial frame to left-wing. In so doing, he does not accuse Dönmes of a moral degradation in the same manner. He does not stress on the *de jure* ethnic, religious characteristics of the community but their *de facto* political influence. This affirms the qualitative difference between the left-wing

and right-wing conspiracy theories in the previous chapter. The next section will focus on the literary ways the author disseminates his views.

6.5 Literary Devices and Style in the *Efendi* Series

Yalçın writes in the first person and has an informal style throughout the series. For example, in *Efendi 1*, Yalçın (2004: 79) states that: “Bali... gives information about Talat Pasha that I have never heard of and read about until today.” His style can also be observed in the following sentences: “There are some secrets which cannot even be solved by the writer of this book” (ibid, 250). Elsewhere: “I would have gone into that relationship between... But you readers would say ‘We are so confused’” (ibid, 336). At the end of the book, he states that: “If I know the truth why would I be silent” (ibid, 435). This not only demonstrates his informal style but also a confident tone. As the series claims to reveal a conspiracy, Yalçın has the attitude of deciphering a mystery, which would be very confusing for an ordinary man. One of the most repeated claims is that: “there has to be a secret or there is always a secret” (ibid, 144, 192, 216, 346, 366, 456, 559). Likewise, in *Efendi 2*, Yalçın (2006: 58) uses expressions such as “there has to be a secret” or “I like to get surprised” (ibid, 426). In so doing, Yalçın assumes that the political reality is beyond the reach of ordinary people, and he takes up the role of Hermes, who translates what Gods say to lay people.

Yalçın (2006) begins *Efendi 2* with a personal story about why he wrote the second book. Someone, whose name is kept confidential, encouraged him to do more research on Dönmes. Yalçın claims that otherwise he would not have done it, because it was very tiring to write *Efendi 1*. This introductory anecdote has the flavour of Mike Hammer stories in which the detective is often unwilling to take the case but is convinced by a mysterious visitor. However, he provides another reason in the interview in the last chapter of the thesis, so this story could be a part of the literary devices the author uses. In *Efendi 1*, Yalçın (2004) uses journalistic literary devices, stressing the private lives of famous people to keep readers’ attention. He talks about who was the best painter in the Evliyazade family (ibid, 107), why Rıfki Pasha was angry at her daughter’s wedding dress (ibid, 125), who Enver Pasha fancied more as a potential wife (ibid, 146), that Sevinç was blonde with blue eyes

(ibid, 162), the feelings of Aydın Menderes when his father was arrested in Göreme (ibid, 513), and that Güzide Zorlu was always attending to the court (ibid, 529).

The private details about celebrities are also abundant in *Efendi 2* (Yalçın, 2006). It can be seen in the titles of the sections: the uncle of Tarkan⁶⁸ (ibid, 139), the Italian grandfather of İlhan İrem⁶⁹ (ibid, 366), the grandfather of Okan Bayülgen⁷⁰ (ibid, 388). These titles do not really say anything about the content of those discussions. While the reader expects to read something about Tarkan, s/he only finds the uncle of Tarkan or the grandfather of İlhan İrem in minor details. Yalçın admits that this is his deliberate literary choice: "I need to use a strategy to get your attention: Hamdi Yazır of Elmalı was the grandfather of the naughty child of television, Okan Bayülgen" (ibid, 388).

Yalçın's references to private lives are also irrelevant to his main discussion. For example, he mentions that Hüseyin Rahmi was a very colourful person, who was sometimes dressed in women's clothes (ibid, 53). In another instance, he states that: "Abdullah Ziya influenced a few generations with what he wrote, but not his son and granddaughter" (ibid, 143). Towards the end, he talks about a flirtatious woman who did not agree to marry (ibid, 399). At one point, he pauses to tell a love story (ibid, 39), and he also narrates two football games (ibid, 183, 232). All these remain rather irrelevant to the general discussion on Dönmes. They function as spectacles for the readers' entertainment. It can be said that Yalçın's titles are not informative, but they aim to keep readers' attention. Bali (2007) claims that Yalçın's informal style decreases readers' level of knowledge, because it normalises plagiarism and does not direct people to qualified sources.

It could be argued that Yalçın uses the 'infotainment' approach, which fuses information with entertainment formats. He edits interesting bits of history and patches them into a conspiratorial explanation about Dönmes. While doing so, he links different events and people by intelligent guesses. He commits semi-erudition, as he dwells on a bulk of data and makes guesses to promote an alternative

⁶⁸ Tarkan is one of the most famous pop singers in Turkey.

⁶⁹ İlhan İrem is a famous Turkish pop singer from 1980s.

⁷⁰ Okan Bayülgen is a famous Turkish actor, talk show host and comedian.

the group as a cohesive one in power. However, he does not provide enough evidence for his claims. He mainly speculates about the alleged network of Dönmes. He uses links as causal relations, and his methodology is shaped by his determination to link events and people. It could be claimed that Yalçın's methodological choices are shaped and biased by his effort to unveil a Jewish/Dönme plot. Many factual mistakes denote this aspect.

For example, Yalçın (2004: 105) claims that the Ottoman Jewry was opposed to Zionism, which is an over-generalisation of the political views of Jews. In addition, Yalçın (ibid, 57) falsely asserts that the language Ladino, fifteenth-century Spanish influenced by Greek, Turkish and French (see Bali, 2008; Kerem, 1996), is a mixture of Spanish and Hebrew. Moreover, Bali (2008) refers to twenty-four factual errors in *Efendi I*. While trying to establish links between Protestantism and Jewry to claim their shared capitalist background, Yalçın (2006: 427) argues that Martin Luther was a friend of Jews, and he might even be a 'crypto-Jew'. However, Luther did not really sympathise with Jews. His pamphlet *On the Jews and their Lies* (Luther, 1971) propagates the extermination of Jews, and it is seen as one of the classical pieces of anti-Semitism (John, 1996; Johnson, 1987). Yalçın also states that:

Alright, who was leading the politics and the economy of England: Jews. I would like to remind you that a Jew, Benjamin Disraeli, was the Prime Minister of England twice (Yalçın, 2006: 173).

The only Jewish-born Prime Minister of England, Disraeli, is used as an example to show the alleged Jewish power. Yalçın does not mention that Disraeli converted to Christianity at the age of thirteen (Pearson, 1951) and resumes calling him a Jew throughout the book.

These factual errors are also apparent in Yalçın's use of onomastics. In one occasion, Yalçın (2004: 105) talks about a man who borrowed money from Zionists. The man's name is Ahmed Reşid Rey, and Yalçın warns that 'Rey' means 'King' in Spanish. He implies that since Sephardic Jews speak a form of Spanish, Ahmed Reşid's surname is coming from a Sephardic background. Yalçın suggests a Jewish background by showing a surname, which has a meaning in Spanish. Similarly,

Sultan Mehmed IV's head physician was Moses Rafael Abranel or Hayatizade Mustafa Feyzi Efendi [his name after converting Islam]; the man who helped him to have a bath was, the grandfather of Dönme Bezmens, Osman Çelebi. His head of porters was Sabbatai Sevi or Mehmed Aziz Efendi [his name after converting to Islam], and his head fortune-teller was Derviş Ahmed Dede of Salonika! We provide an alternative thinking; this cannot be a coincidence (Yalçın, 2006: 353).

Above, he mentions a collection of people in the Ottoman Palace: two converted Jews, one potential Dönme and one person from Salonika, and concludes that they could not be coincidentally working in the same palace. He refers to this as an illustration of the alleged Jewish network in Ottoman politics. In addition, Yalçın uses footnotes to give a scientific and serious appearance to readers. DeCerteau (1988: 188) mentions that citations are powerful means to convince readers: "Citation thus appears to be the ultimate weapon for making people believe. Because it plays on what the other is assumed to believe, it is the means by which the 'real' is instituted."

Overall, this analysis shows that Yalçın's interpretation of the data is not adequately supported by facts but seems to be shaped by his guesses and an *a priori* acceptance of a secret Jewish network. Yalçın, in a semi-erudite manner, combines a scientific appearance with story-telling devices. Indeed, the writer calls his work a collection of essays on history (Yalçın, 2006: 108). Although this statement was in the second book, it concerns both books, as they do not significantly vary in terms of methodology and literary style. The next section looks at the methodological choices of the writer, to understand better the semi-erudition of the series.

6.6 The Methodology of the *Efendi* Series

Efendi 1 and *Efendi 2* are similar in their methodological choices. Neither of them uses a clearly identified and established research method. It is rather that Yalçın employs onomastics, guesses and looks at personal diaries, family trees and biographies to find bonds among people to explain their political acts. While doing so, although he shows evidence of individual hostilities among Dönmes, he refers to

"Today, as yesterday, people believe that marriage would solve illnesses of young women. Therefore, Hacı Ali Paşa had to have a different reason to refuse the marriage demand of Ibrahim Edhem." He criticises the description of events by guessing that there has to be another explanation, related to the alleged Dönme background of those people.

Elsewhere, Yalçın (2006: 352) states that: "Missionary is not an unfamiliar feeling for Dr. Resid Galib. He was educated at Israelite Universelle in his birth place Rhodes." He labels the *Alliance Israelite Universelle*⁷¹ a missionary school and guesses that Dr. Resid Galib had to be aware of the feelings of missionaries. Yalçın (2004: 20) explains Hochepeid family's move to the Netherlands in a similar way. He claims that the Dutch ambassador of the period was Jewish, and Hochepeids could have been Jewish as well. Hence, the ambassador helped them. In *Efendi 2*, Yalçın (2006: 118) asks: "Didn't they talk about the prophet Mohammad in their [religious] meetings? If yes, why would Mr Levon need a 'new prophet'?" He questions somebody's faith by guessing what they should talk about in religious gatherings and infers that they did not really speak of Islam. About a Turkish politician, he suggests that: "It is surprising that he was not a leftist at a time when the whole world was shaken by the left wing" (ibid, 356). As he looks for a conspiracy, Yalçın gets surprised by an ordinary fact. Another example of his guesses is the following:

Fazıl Verdi, traded with English... Ali Ferruh Verdi [his son] was the honorary ambassador of Ireland for a long time. It seems the friendship with English never ended (Yalçın, 2006: 399).

Yalçın assumes that the trade with the English would provide a friendship to the Verdi family. He also infers that his son's being honorary ambassador of Ireland signifies the continuity of the friendship with the English. In this case, the writer confuses Ireland and England probably because of their geographical proximity. He also suggests that:

⁷¹ An organisation established in 1860 for protecting human rights of Jewish citizens around the world and giving a modern education to Jews in different countries. (See Rodrigue, 1990).

explanation. He shows his willingness to guess as follows: "As far as I know, the [study of] history is not only about a bulk of data; it demands reasoning, interpretation; not banality" (ibid, 31). The following description of events illustrates this attitude:

The question without an answer: Dr. Aras, Makbule and the 'fellow wife' lived twenty five years together. Dr. Aras, who strongly opposed the divorce of his daughter, acted in the same manner in his marriage. He married Bahire [the fellow wife] only after the death of Makbule! So why didn't he divorce Makbule and marry Bahire years before? Why is it so difficult for them? They grew up in a culture like Ottomans in which divorce is between the lips of the man! I always say: the divorces and the marriages in the Evliyazade family are very hard to understand! (Yalçın, 2004: 519)

Similarly, in half a page, Yalçın (2006: 25) talks about Heraclitus, Hegel and Marx in relation to Kabala and Islamic mysticism. He gives too few details about each thinker, so he does not actually provide sufficient information to make an adequate analysis. The number of people mentioned in *Efendi 2* is 2,133 (Aygündüz, 2006), and the book is 435 pages long. A simple mathematical calculation could count that Yalçın on average mentions five people per page. As it would be impossible to describe that many people adequately, this may indicate Yalçın's semi-erudition in data interpretation. Likewise, he speculates on the contemporary Prime Minister's alleged Dönme background as follows:

... the journalist Ali Kırca interviewed Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. Right next to the sofa the Prime Minister was sitting on, and under the portrait of Atatürk, there was a seven-branch candlestick (menorah) of Jews. Who put that sacred seven-branch candlestick of Jews there, and why? It cannot just be a setting, there has to be a reason. But what is that? There was no explanation from the office of the Prime Minister (Yalçın, 2006: 329).

Yalçın relies on biased guesses through which he often finds a Jewish or Dönme finger in events. Hacı Ali Paşa's reaction to the demand of Ibrahim Edhem, who wants to marry his sick daughter, is a good example of this attitude (ibid, 191):

about a former minister of coordination, Sebati Ataman, Yalçın remarks that: "It is not really related with the subject, but I just remembered! Gersom Scholem in his book, *Messiah or a fake Prophet*, in 1971 wrote the name of Sabetay Sevi as 'Sabatai Sevi'" (ibid, 123). He means that Sebati may be a Jewish/Dönme name, i.e. a minister in the cabinet of Adnan Menderes (another alleged Dönme) could be a Dönme. The name, Sebati, may well come from the Turkish word *sebat*-perseverance. In that sense, Yalçın ignores the other possibilities. Another example could be seen in the following:

Why did the Menderes family give the name of Mutlu-Happy to their children? Is it because of the fact that it means the same thing as 'Sevin-Be Happy!?' (Yalçın, 2004: 374).

He implies that Sevin sounds close to Sabbatai Sevi and Mutlu means Sevin in Turkish. Thus, Menderes' alleged Dönme background may have been effective in naming the child. He makes similar allegations throughout *Efendi 1* (ibid, 125, 140, 172, 362, 372). In *Efendi 2*, he continues using onomastics as well. Yalçın (2006: 434) also remarks that the same Dönme/Jewish network, which manipulates the practice of Turkish history writing, is responsible for not starting onomastic studies at universities: "It is a job of crazy people in Turkey to use onomastics! Who does not allow onomastics studies in universities and why?" Another example of Yalçın's use of onomastics and guesses in *Efendi 2* is the following:

According to his closest disciple Moses Pinheiro of Livorno, Sabbatai Sevi used to sign his letters with a nickname 'Turco'. Gershom Scholem, says that Turco could signify 'the mountain of God' in a Kabala interpretation (John Freely, *Kayıp Mesih*, 2001, s. 212.) Who taught the slogan of 'Turk as much as the mountain of God and Muslim as the mountain of Ilira' to the right-wing youth? Who found it? (Yalçın, 2006: 148).

Yalçın employs a complex onomastic analysis to establish a connection between the right-wing movement in Turkey and the Kabala interpretation of Dönmes. The coincidental use of the terms Turco and the mountain of god by Dönmes and the Turkish right leads him to assume a conspiratorial relationship between the two

calls it a racist approach towards the history of the Turkish Republic. Lapalı (2004) argues that Yalçın tries to create sympathy for Dönmes by presenting them as nationalists. As Bali (2008) also mentions, most of these criticisms defend Atatürk against *Efendi 1*'s argument that the origins of modern Turkey are actually Jewish. Accordingly, they warn that the discussions on Dönmes target the legacy of Kemal Atatürk (Mengi, 2004b; Çiçek & Erkin, 2004).

Many critiques point to the methodological problems (Cundioğlu, 2004a, 2004b; Su, 2004; Kamış, 2004; Altaş, 2004; Başar, 2004). Some others talk about the anti-Semitic content (Polat, 2004; Mert, 2004a; 2004b, Şahin, 2004; Alpay, 2004). Polat (2004) calls the work a product of new anti-Semitism. Hakan (2004) states that Dönmes' identity is their personal business, and we should not create anxieties about their beliefs. Koloğlu (2004) and the journal *Aydınlık* (2004) argue that MIT – the Turkish intelligence service - wrote the book and gave it to Yalçın to publish under his name. In addition, Bali (2008: 216) stresses that *Efendi 1* was discussed in the following television programmes: Press Conference- *Basın Toplantısı* (SkyTurk, 2004), Conspiracy Theories- *Komplo Teorileri* (Habertürk, 2004) and Frank and Honest- *Açık Açık*. In most of these programmes, conspiracy theories were generally praised for providing new perspectives. While the criticisms of *Efendi 1* were mainly from the secular-Kemalist stance, the praises came from Islamists, because the book claims a conspiracy behind the origins of modern Turkey and the secular republican regime. In the meantime, the nationalist right wing kept its distance from the leftist Soner Yalçın.

Efendi 2 also earned tributes from some of Yalçın's colleagues in the media, (Eğin, 2006; Semercioglu, 2006; Apaçe, 2006a; Apaçe, 2006b; Kömürcü, 2006; İnce, 2006). They claim that the book contains an interesting research, which will scandalise our perception of politics. The Islamists drastically changed their sympathetic approach towards the series after the second book, since *Efendi 2* is about the penetration of Dönmes in Islamic sects. Thus, the Islamist media mainly criticised the series (Salihoğlu, 2006a; Salihoğlu, 2006b; Salihoğlu, 2006c, Kekeç, 2006; Muradoğlu, 2006a; Muradoğlu, 2006b; Yilmazer, 2006a; Yilmazer, 2006b; Kıvanç, 2006a; Kıvanç, 2006b; Kıvanç, 2006c; Demirci, 2006). Akyüz (2006) states that although Soner Yalçın is a good researcher, he was too much into conspiracies

groups. Therefore, he suggests a Dönme conspiracy theory behind the rightist youth in Turkey. It could be summarised that Yalçın's methodology is an example of semi-erudition due to his bias and reliance on guesses. This provides a significantly different attitude when compared to Yalçın's claims on objectivity and onomastics in the interview provided in the last chapter of this thesis, where he raised doubts about onomastics and was keen on empirical analyses. Yalçın might have changed his attitude due to the responses to his books, or he was, at least, careful about these points in his self-presentation.

6.7 The Responses

The books' success in the market popularised the conspiratorial perspective on Dönmes. After *Efendi 2*, a few books that further elaborate the series' claims on the alleged Jewish origins of the leaders of AKP were published: *Musa'nın Çocukları Tayyip ve Emine* [The Children of Moses: Tayyip and Emine] (Poyraz, 2007a), *Musa'nın Mücahiti-* [Moses' Fighter] (Poyraz, 2007b); *Musa'nın Gülü-* [The Rose of Moses] (Poyraz, 2007c); *Musa'nın AKP'si* [Moses' AKP] (Poyraz, 2007d). In these books, the current speaker of the Turkish parliament, Bülent Arınç, the current president Abdullah Gül, and the Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and his wife, are claimed to have Jewish origins. Tayfun Er (2007) also started publishing his work on the topic after the *Efendi* series. Two novels, one ridiculing the Dönme mania (Erdem, 2004) and the other having a Dönme protagonist (Gelardin, 2006) were also published. As seen in the *Efendi* case, the subject is proven to be a good seller in the contemporary Turkish book market.

The popularity of the books led people with a variety of political views to respond. *Efendi 1* was praised on different occasions (Dumanlı, 2004; Çölaşan, 2004; Yılmaz, 2004; Turgut, 2004a; Turgut, 2004b; Atikoğlu, 2004; Davran, 2004; Çetiner, 2004; Ilgaz, 2004a; Ilgaz, 2004b; Özdemir, 2004). These writers mainly appreciate the series' unveiling of an important but undervalued topic. However, criticisms of the book were more prevalent (Aydınlık, 2007; Koloğlu, 2004; Bulut, 2004; Bulut, 2007; Gürkan, 2004a; Gürkan, 2004b; Gürkan, 2004c; Mengi, 2004a; Zeybek, 2004; Kanditan, 2004; Kurt, 2004a; Kurt, 2004b; Kurt, 2004c; Kurt, 2004d; Altan, 2004; Kömürcü, 2004). Uluengin (2004) dismisses *Efendi 1* as a conspiracy theory and

Second, Yalçın tends to associate liberals and some religious sects more with the Dönme power. He focuses on liberal political parties such as DP and AKP and the Islamic sects as Dönme-controlled groups. Yalçın's left-wing bias could be influential in his tendency to relate the conspiracy theories to those circles.

Third, Yalçın's writing style and methodological choices demonstrate that the books make sense of a vast data through conspiracy theories. The books attempt to prove a conspiracy about Dönmes by binding many different issues in an unconvincing manner. While doing so, Yalçın proposes links that serve as causal relations. Yalçın also utilises a journalistic approach throughout the books by employing infotainment techniques to attract readers' attention. He uses irrelevant but interesting information about celebrities' lives. It could be argued that Yalçın's fusion of entertainment with information and other methodological problems illustrate the semi-erudite character of the series, as semi-erudition provides means for Yalçın to fill the gaps in interpreting the vast data through anti-Semitic stereotypes. It could also be suggested that the popular infotainment techniques are susceptible to conspiratorial accounts because of their semi-erudition. This relationship will be discussed in more detail in chapter nine.

Fourth, as Yalçın frames from a left-wing standpoint, he extends the use of the Islamic-right-wing classical conspiracy theory on the origins of the Turkish republic to a more leftist, anti-imperialist stance, which unlike the right-wing theories praises secularism. This supports the claim that there is a qualitative difference between left-wing and right-wing conspiracy theories. Yalçın popularised the conspiracy theories on Dönmes. Thus, *Efendi 1* was appreciated by the Islamists in Turkey, whereas they criticised *Efendi 2*, as it claims a secret penetration of Dönmes to Islamic sects. Yalçın's extension of the Islamist-rightist frame to a leftist standpoint also coincides with the concept new anti-Semitism, which refers to the popularisation of the Jewish themed accounts among different political circles. The next chapter will take the frame analysis of the books to another level by attempting to understand how the *Efendi* series' political frames influence the political attitudes of readers. It will demonstrate the ways in which the above-mentioned conspiratorial frames influence the audience.

in *Efendi 2*. Saruhan (2006) adds that the theories about the Dönme ancestry went too far. Nasır (2006) contends that conspiracy theories should not be produced by leftists like Küçük or Yalçın, because they present an omnipotent Dönme figure, and in that way they serve the interests of Dönmes. Moreover, one of the well-known Islamic leaders, Fethullah Güven, sued Yalçın for giving wrong information about him (Gezici, 2006: 21). Binark (2007) wrote a book to refute Yalçın's accusations on the Rıfai sect. It was also claimed that the *Efendi* series was plagiarised from the internet (Karasu 2006; Gezici, 2006).

The positive reactions to the *Efendi* series focus on the importance of the subject and praise Yalçın for daring to talk about such a taboo. The criticisms mainly highlight the weaknesses of Yalçın's research and its anti-Semitic messages; few also propose conspiracy theories about the book and Yalçın. Overall, the discussion on the series involved secularists, liberals, far-rightists and Islamic groups to different extents. Various groups frame the Dönme theories according to their ideological perspectives. Thus, Bali (2008) suggests that these discussions on the books routinised the anti-Semitic theme about the hidden Jewish control in Turkish politics. It is also important to note the change in the general tone of the Islamist press. *Efendi 1* was praised, as it repeats the Islamists' phobia of Dönme domination. However, as *Efendi 2* shows some Islamic sects under the control of Dönmes, the Islamist circles mainly criticised it. In other words, the left-wing conspiratorial accounts remain detached from the right-wing theories. This confirms the qualitative difference between right-wing and left-wing conspiracy theories, which is also illustrated by the conspiracy theorists in the previous chapter. It also shows how conspiracy theories could be used pragmatically by different political groups in different ways, as they did not engage in conspiracism but just used conspiratorial frames to affirm their beliefs. It should not go without stating that *Efendi 2* did not reach the popularity of *Efendi 1*. Therefore, the first book created a bigger impact.

6.8 Conclusion

The analysis of the series illustrates a few important points about the conspiracy theories on Dönmes. First, the books depict a Dönme conspiracy as a part of global Jewish conspiracies and describe Dönmes as local agents of a secret global network.

Chapter 7. The Effects of Conspiracy Theories on the Political Perspectives of Readers: The *Efendi* Case

The birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the Author
(Barthes, 1977: 148).

7.1 Introduction

Although conspiracy theories have been politically significant texts throughout history, there have not been any empirical studies on the influence of these accounts on the political attitudes of their readers. Hence, we do not have sufficient data on the extent of the effects of *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* on the Holocaust or on pogroms. We do not have any empirical data about how persuasive these theories are in gaining political supporters. This chapter will analyse the influence of conspiracy theories on readers' political beliefs. It will look into the ways conspiracy texts are perceived by people and alter their political perspectives. In other words, the study aims to describe the interaction between conspiracy theories and readers.

In the course of looking at the influence of the *Efendi* series on its readers, I find it useful to introduce DeCerteau's (1988) *On the Practice of Everyday Life*, where he analyses people's everyday relationship with power structures. He attempts to provide answers to questions such as: how do people conceive of and respond to power? In what ways do they negotiate macro-politics in their daily lives? DeCerteau suggests that an individual is not solely subject to political power; instead, s/he manipulates politics into his/her interests. Therefore, people do not merely conform to political power but develop their own uses: "more generally, *a way of using imposed systems constitutes the resistance to the historical law of a state of affairs and its dogmatic legitimations*" (ibid, 18).

DeCerteau differentiates between strategies and tactics to describe individuals' daily resistance. Strategies stand for formal rational attempts of order, while tactics are "calculated actions determined by the absence of a proper locus" (ibid, 37). That is to say, a tactic is an 'art of the weak' to avoid the undesired aspects of power. In this regard, DeCerteau defines everyday life as a political battlefield between

Knowledge cannot be posited without this non-knowledgeable decision. The identity of knowledge is rendered self-identical, is shot through with alterity and decentred because it always already contains non-knowledge (gossip, conspiracy theory and so on) at its heart. It is a mutually contaminating relationship: they are both inside and outside each other at the same time. (Birchall, 2006: 157).

Birchall disagrees with the general denial of conspiracy theories as illegitimate forms of knowledge. She accepts that they may not be reliable but recognises that they are creative texts with their freedom in argumentation. Therefore, she likens these forms of knowledge to cultural studies, which is criticised on the same grounds of not having justifiable methodologies. For Birchall, this aspect of not relying on a 'father' rhetoric is actually the advantage of cultural studies and conspiracy theories:

Yet cultural studies is supposed to be very much open to objects that are different from it, whether this is in terms of other disciplines (cultural studies is based on an ideal of interdisciplinarity or post-disciplinarity...), or non-traditional objects of study (like gossip and conspiracy theory, to be sure, but also pop music, subcultures, street fashion and so forth) (ibid, 156).

The chapter will be able to comment on these discussions in the academic literature by looking at the influence of these theories on readers. It will first talk about the research methods, where the research tools will be justified. Subsequently, it will analyse the content of the interviews. Finally, there will be a conclusion, where the findings of the chapter will be summarised.

7.2 The Method

To understand the political influence of conspiracy theories on people, I used interviews as the data-gathering method. Interviews assist us in understanding "why people do what they do and how they understand their worlds" (Rubin and Rubin, 1995). Hence, I utilised them to explore the effects of conspiracy theories on people's systems of meaning. The interviews were conducted with readers of Soner Yalçın's *Efendi 1* (2004) and *Efendi 2* (2006). As mentioned in the last chapter, the

From this point of view, 'literal' meaning is the index and the result of a social power that of an elite. By its very nature available to a plural reading, the text becomes a cultural weapon, a private hunting reserve, the pretext for a law that legitimises as 'literal' the interpretation given by *socially* authorised professionals and intellectuals (*clerics*) (DeCerteau, 1988: 171).

DeCerteau agrees with the contemporary literature on reading practice, which emphasises readers' freedom in apprehending texts. Barthes (1977: 143) expresses that as follows: "Thus is revealed the total existence of writing: a text is made of multiple writings, drawn from many cultures and entering into mutual relations of dialogue, parody, contestation, but there is one place where this multiplicity is focused and that place is the reader." As written material both contains spaces for tactics and strategies, the degree of belief by readers and its results becomes crucial. Hence, some important questions for this study are: to what extent do these conspiratorial frames convince people to change their political attitudes? How do conspiracy theories influence ideological views? What are the differences between people with different ideological attitudes in understanding conspiracy theories? Who do they affect most? Do conspiracy theories lead individuals to think more freely by introducing a radical suspicion, or do they create more solid forms of political prejudices?

Major divisions in the academic literature on conspiracy theories are also built on such questions. The classical approach regards them as political pathologies, i.e. conspiracy theories are politics by irrational/paranoid means (Hofstadter, 1965; Robins and Post, 1997). The cultural approach refutes this view by arguing that conspiracy theories are an aspect of contemporary society providing alternative ways of thinking (Dean, 2002; Parish and Parker (eds.), 2001). For example, Birchall (2006) criticises the way that conspiracy theories are labelled as illegitimate explanations. She deconstructs that binary opposition by asserting that knowledge always consists of non-knowledge: legitimate forms of knowledge cannot be understood in contradiction to knowledge with less authority:

institutions' attempts at structure and individuals' tactics of avoidance. People play with the rules of a system to 'escape from it without leaving'. He summarises this as follows:

Increasingly constrained, yet less and less concerned with these vast frameworks, the individual detaches himself from them without being able to escape them and can henceforth only try to outwit them, to pull tricks on them, to rediscover, within an electronicised and computerised megalopolis, the 'art' of the hunters and rural folk of earlier days (DeCerteau, 1988: xxiii-xxiv).

The question is whether conspiracy theories function as strategies, which provide totally different ideologies and lead people to deny utterly the legitimacy of a political system; or as tactics by which people legitimise their flight from authority. In other words, do conspiracy theories, as strategies, lead to a rejection of the system and evoke a need of total change, or are they only used to justify individual transgressions of law? For example, if someone believes in a Jewish conspiracy theory, s/he may use it as a strategy or an ideal to support anti-Semitic movements or even join these circles to realise a world without Jews. S/he may alternatively use it tactically to explain his/her transgression – for example, 'I steal because the system is corrupt'.

Furthermore, DeCerteau argues that writing is an exercise of power through which an author claims legitimacy: "Robinson Crusoe sheds light on the situation: the subject of writing is the master, and his man Friday is the worker, who has a tool other than language" (ibid, 139). Modern social systems are justified by written material: "Writing becomes science and politics, with the assurance, soon transformed into an axiom of Enlightenment or revolution that theory must transform nature by inscribing itself on it" (ibid, 144). While writing is a tool of political power, DeCerteau suggests that reading consists of a space for resistance due to its flexibilities. A reader can divert a text for his/her own interests in a variety of ways: "It [reading] transcribes in its attitudes every subject's ability to convert the text through reading and to 'run it' the way one runs traffic lights" (ibid, 176). Thus, DeCerteau calls reading poaching:

Efendi series is the most popular conspiracy theory about the crypto-Jewish Dönme community. Therefore, choosing this series both made it easier to find interviewees, and also analyses the effects of the most significant conspiracy theory about Dönmes. The interviews with readers of the *Efendi* series also complement the frame analysis in the previous chapter by presenting how the content is apprehended by the audience. However, it should be noted that this chapter is confined to the responses to that particular theory, and people's responses to other conspiratorial accounts, for example about the IMF or the Kurds, may differ.

I conducted semi-structured interviews in which the interviewer introduces a topic of discussion and aims to keep the interview centred on that subject. Burgess (1984) calls semi-structured interviews "conversations with a purpose." Semi-structured interview is the most common interview technique due to its flexibility (Gillham, 2005; Mason, 2002). They are helpful in understanding individuals' perception of conspiracy theories, by providing the necessary flexibility for respondents to articulate on the effects of these theories. The question of this chapter is not whether conspiracy theories affect people's opinions, but how they influence their perceptions. In that sense, the semi-structured interviews helped the respondents to describe the interaction between their political opinions and the content of the conspiracy theories.

The study undertook thirty-one interviews with the readers of the *Efendi* series. They were asked about their motives in reading the books, how these books affected their perception of politics, whether they believed in the conspiracy theories about Dönmes, and how they accounted for these conspiratorial accounts. They were selected randomly through adverts in the internet forum sites where the books were discussed, by announcements distributed mainly through the internet, and through the snowballing technique of asking interviewees if they knew more people. While choosing the thirty-one interviewees, a special effort was given to include a diversity regarding political views, education level, age and gender.

The interviewer gave interviewees the choice of venue, to find a place where the respondents would feel most comfortable. Mainly, these places were cafeterias, pubs, shopping malls, houses and the workplaces of the informants. The respondents were

also assured that their names would be kept confidential, and they could leave the interview at any moment. Each interview took approximately fifteen minutes, which allowed them enough time to elaborate on their views on the conspiracy theories. They were informed well about the aims of the study, and therefore there were not any problems in terms of directing the respondents towards the research questions.

Nonetheless, due to the controversial nature of the topic, the interviewees tended to inquire about the interviewer's ideas and the results of the study. In such circumstances, they were politely told that they could learn the interviewer's thoughts after the interview. This was a strategy to avoid engaging in an argument with the interviewee and alter his/her views. There were talks after the interviews with some of the respondents in which the interviewer shared his views to realise his intellectual responsibility. Other than this, there were not any difficulties in the interviews. Thankfully, the interviewees were very kind to meet me in a hot August in Istanbul.

7.3 The Interviews

7.3.1 General Attitudes

In order to understand how people with different political views are influenced by the conspiratorial lines, the respondents were asked to inform the interviewer about their political stances. As seen in table 7.1 below, eight people described themselves as left-wingers, seven people as social democrats, seven as right-wingers and another seven as apolitical. Two respondents stated that they were Islamist-Kurdish or Islamist-Turkish, which could be included in the category of 'right-wing'. These political affiliations were taken according to people's own definitions. Hence, some political views may intersect with others, and the level of involvement in each political view by each individual may vary. For example, one right-winger is a Turkish racist, while others are not. It is worth clarifying the meaning of the social democratic stance in Turkey. As mentioned in chapter six, this signifies a central-leftist secular stance identified with the state ideology of Kemalism. In that sense, social democrats in Turkish context can also be referred to centrists. As can be seen in figure two, the respondent population consisted of nine right wing, eight left wing,

seven centrists and seven apolitical people, which shows a balanced distribution regarding political stances.

Table 7.1 Political Point of Views of Respondents	
Political Stance	Number of People
Left	8
Social Democrat	7
Right	7
Apolitical	7
Kurdish Islamist	1
Turkish Islamist	1

Table 7.2 Simplified Version of Political Views	
Political Stance	Number of People
Right	9
Left	8
Social Democrat	7
Apolitical	7

As table 7.3 shows, among the eight left-wingers, three are convinced by the series' arguments on Dönmes, another three are not convinced and two are hesitant. All the respondents with right-wing identity are convinced by the series' content. Five social democrats are convinced by the books' messages, while one is not convinced and one hesitant. Interestingly, the only unconvinced person in this category is a Jewish citizen. Among the apolitical group, five respondents believe the authenticity of the books' arguments, while two are hesitant. The Kurdish and Turkish Islamists acknowledge a strong conviction about the books' theories.

Table 7.3 Levels of Conviction Among Different Political Views			
Political View	Convinced	Hesitant	Not Convinced
Left	3	2	3
Social Democrat	5	1	1
Apolitical	5	2	-
Right	7	-	-
Turkish Islamist	1	-	-
Kurdish Islamist	1	-	-

Another indicator used in the interviews is the level of education. According to table 7.4 below, six respondents have postgraduate degrees, eleven are university graduates, another eleven are high-school graduates, and three of them have elementary school degrees.

Table 7.4 Levels of Education of Respondents	
Level of Education	Number of People
Postgraduate Degree	6
University Degree	11
High School Degree	11
Elementary School Degree	3

As can be seen in table 7.5 below, while one of the respondents with postgraduate education believes in the books' arguments, two are hesitant and three not convinced. One of the reasons for that could be the political orientation of the postgraduate group, which consists of four leftists and two social democrats. Among the social democrats, one with a Jewish identity is not convinced by these theories while the other one is convinced (see table 7.6). Two of the postgraduates with leftist views are hesitant and two unconvinced. Among the university graduates, eight of the interviewees are convinced by the books, two are hesitant, and one is unconvinced. According to table 7.7, in the university graduates group, all three right-wing people are convinced, while one of the left-wingers is convinced and another is not. Five of the university graduates are apolitical, and three of them are convinced, while two are hesitant. All the high school graduates, regardless of their

political views, are convinced by the theories. Two of the interviewees with elementary school education are convinced, and one is hesitant about the *Efendi* series' messages. Among these three, there are no significant influences of the political view: two social democrats and one Turkish Islamist. Within the social democrat group, one is convinced and the other is hesitant, while the Turkish Islamist is convinced by the books.

Table 7.5 Levels of Conviction Among Different Levels of Education

Level of Education	Convinced	Hesitant	Not Convinced
Postgraduate	1	2	3
University	8	2	1
High School	11	-	-
Elementary School	2	1	-

Table 7.6 Levels of Conviction among Respondents with Postgraduate Degrees

Political View	Convinced	Hesitant	Not Convinced
Left	-	2	2
Social Democrat	1	-	1

Table 7.7 Level of Conviction among Respondents with University Degrees

Political View	Convinced	Hesitant	Not Convinced
Left	1	-	1
Right	3	-	-
Apolitical	3	2	-

In total, twenty-two respondents are convinced, five are hesitant, and four do not believe the books' theories (see table 7.8).

Table 7.8 Distribution of the Belief in Books' Theories	
Level of Belief	Number of People
Convinced	22
Hesitant	5
Not Convinced	4
Total	31

It could be argued that the right-wingers, including the Turkish and Kurdish Islamist respondents, are more likely to be convinced by the conspiracy theories about Dönmes than the others (especially see table 7.3). Following the right-wingers, the apolitical respondents are more sympathetic to the books. There is nobody in those groups who is not convinced by the theories. While the majority of the social democrats think in parallel to the conspiracy theory, the left-wingers have an equal distribution in conviction. In this sense, from right-wing to left-wing the likelihood of the belief in conspiracies is reduced.

A similar trend is evident with regard to education levels. Except for one respondent with elementary school education, everybody below university level is convinced by the books' arguments (see table 7.5). Although a few are not convinced among the university graduates, the majority of the people with postgraduate degrees are not convinced by the books. Therefore, we can observe a negative correlation between the educational level and the level of belief in these theories. Furthermore, all the right-wing interviewees with university degrees trust the authenticity of the *Efendi* series' arguments. While most of the apolitical university graduates show sympathy to those theories, the left-wingers and the social democrats present a more critical point of view (see table 7.7). Hence, if the education level can be counted as an indicator of their familiarity with science, logic and reason, semi-erudition suggests an important factor to explain the spread of conspiratorial accounts. When people are less aware of scientific criteria, they could be more easily allured by conspiracy theories, which often pretend to be scientific. People with higher degrees of education and left-wing political views are less likely to be bought into the conspiratorial accounts of the *Efendi* series. In the next section, I will go into

discussing how different political views are influenced by the conspiratorial accounts in more detail.

7.3.2 The Ways People Understand and Respond to the *Efendi* Series

Before we go into the details of how the *Efendi* series affected people’s political visions, it should be stated that while fourteen respondents indicate no change in their political views, three state a change, and fifteen claim that their views are strengthened by the books (see table 7.9). In this regard, at least eighteen people, who change or strengthen their political views, recognise the books as politically significant texts. This illustrates the books’ political influence, if we also count the fact that only one of the respondents bought the books for reading about politics. Besides, all the respondents with right-wing views mention either a strengthening or a change in their views after reading the books.

Table 7.9 How the Books Influenced Readers’ Political Views	
	Number of People
Change	3
No Change	13
Strengthen	15
Total	31

Among the thirteen respondents, who do not mention any change in their political views, four do not believe in the authenticity of the books. Therefore, they do not incorporate the books’ messages into their own political perspectives. The rest of those, who are convinced by the books, explain that conspiracies are ordinary aspects of politics, and so Dönmes may be dominating Turkish politics. For that reason, they do not change their political views after reading the books. Ahmet A remarks that: “they should be allowed to do it [conspire to win power], but the system should not be shut to the general public too much. At times, we shall be able to question the authority. Somebody will create networks or conspire to gain power anyway. The important thing is that the public should benefit from the results.” Another respondent, Engin, affirms that: “the book taught me that lobbying is an important

aspect of Turkish politics. In the end, such groups also do the same things in Israel or in the United States.”

Seven of the respondents, who did not change their political ideas, do not believe that the books are political. Damla says that: “I read the book like a novel. I did not think those things were real. I was about to forget them, but because I was going to talk to you... I think the books are not convincing.” Another interviewee, Utku, mentions that: “they are different things, the books and my political view.” Eylem states that: “it did not create any reactions in me. I read it like a celebrity column. This one is Dönme or the other one! I look at politics from a different angle.” Although they do not regard the books as political texts, this does not mean that they would not use the books’ arguments in political ways. For example, Damla, who read the book like a fiction, remarks that her approach may change if she doesn’t get what she hopes from life: “I feel neutral about the group at the moment, but if I cannot get what I want because of them, my feelings about the community might be driven in a negative direction.”

Meltem, whose political views are changed by the *Efendi* series, states that: “I questioned my own political ideas. Even if Dönmes are from my political side, I think their politics cannot be innocent. I wonder how much they serve the country and to what extent they work for secret services.” She develops mistrust in politics in Turkey due to the books’ claims about Dönme domination: “I had not known about Dönmes before the books. After reading them, I suspected about the politicians and the elites, and wondered how they became elites, and who was who?” Serdar K, whose political ideas are changed, points out that: “I understand what kind of injustice we are in. It leads me not to believe any event directly, especially in politics. I keep looking for underlying reasons.” Likewise, Fethi, the third informant, who mentions a change in his views, expresses a more paranoid vision of politics:

Both leftists and rightists love this country, but this is among the public not among the rulers... The Dönme society provides an example of this... They lead things and therefore, I always have question marks and stay away from some groups. For example, I don’t even join trade unions... I and my friends

do not join any society, which we are not sure of. I always stay away! This may be related to my beliefs about Dönmes.

The respondents, whose political opinions are changed by the books, are directed towards a paranoid vision of Turkish politics. Meltem with right-wing ideas, Fethi a leftist-Marxist and apolitical Serdar are all alienated from politics, as they see it fixed by Dönme conspiracies.

The fifteen interviewees, whose political perspectives are strengthened by reading the books, consist of eight rightists including two Islamists, two leftists, three apolitical and two social democrats. While seven of those respondents claim that the books are not political texts, they still show the potential political uses of the books. It should also be highlighted that the right-wing perspectives are mainly strengthened by the books, which supports the previous section's argument on the tendency of the right-wing to believe in the Dönme conspiracy theories.

The *Efendi* series creates different impressions and gain different meanings among people with different political ideas. The left-wing adherents are likely to focus on the economic and political power of the group. They associate Dönmes with power and capital: "I see them as threats, allied with imperialism and capitalism. They work against the interests of this country", Fethi claims. Similarly, Özgür associates Dönmes with monetary power as follows: "Jews, Dönmes, who own the money in the United States and in other places, rule." Serdar A also stresses the group's capital: "Nobody had any capital, but the non-Muslim minorities, when the Turkish republic was established. Therefore, they seized the economic power, and it is normal that many of these families were of Dönme origin." None of the leftists is reactive to Dönme identity, even if they believe that they rule the country secretly. Özlem states that: "I would not blame a Dönme. I would only try to understand. I am not reacting to their identity. Many of the people around me can be Dönmes." Some, like Uğur, even sympathises with Dönmes as a minority: "My perspective about Dönmes is positive. Like some other religious sects, they are feared. It is just a sociological fact, and nobody should fear those different identities."

The leftist view is inclined not to react to Dönmes' religious and ethnic identity, whether they believe in conspiracy theories or not. They instead associate the Dönme identity with economic power and believe that a repressed minority might act that way. It could be remarked that the left-wing point of view is empathetic to the minority status of Dönmes, which may be due to leftists' own marginalised situation in Turkey, especially after the 1980 *coup d'état*. Their problem is with capitalism rather than the Dönme identity. Even if they believe that Jews/Dönmes are the main agents of capitalism, they remark that it is not about Judaism. Özgür mentions that: "I have spoken with some people from Israel. They are not happy with such things [capitalism]. The Israeli public is also unhappy." Likewise, Hasan explains his feelings towards Dönmes as follows:

They were influential in certain periods, and this is normal. Most of them are intelligent and modern people. They are not really bad. Even if they have their secret conventions, I will not see them negatively. It is also the case with freemasons, and it is normal.

The rightist respondents, including the two Islamists, present a contrasting response. They mainly object to the alleged political domination of the group due to Dönmes' outsider identity, i.e. they are neither Muslims nor Turks. They do not accept the supposed domination of the majority by a non-local minority. For example, Orçun, a Turkish racist, quotes a well-known racist figure, Nihal Atsız, to summarise his understanding of Dönmes: "My ideas about Dönmes before the book were also clear. Atsız points to our internal and external enemies in his will. He claims that Jews are our sneaky enemies. Therefore, I knew about Dönmes." Cevdet, a conservative, mentions the problem of the Dönme identity as follows:

For example, Yakuzas are Japanese; they defend a Japanese identity. I understand that. They come out of their own culture. Dönmes do not have Turkish identity. They came later. Their cultural identity is Jewish. Therefore, it is wrong. When they speak of Turkey's good, it does not sound all right to me. I think many problems are because of them. I don't think they are innocent.

Murat B calls the alleged Dönme/Jewish rule as degeneration and reacts by retreating into his Islamic faith: "I became more Muslim in this degenerated social environment. Not an Islamist but a Muslim." In that sense, the right-wing adherents conceive the books' messages in cultural, ethnic and in some cases in racial terms. Hakan, who does not see any difference between a Dönme and a Jew, affirms that the *Efendi* series showed him the important aspects of the Jewish race: "I grasped the perfect nature of the Jewish race again. I think they are good for themselves but bad for my country and my religion."

Hence the right-wing approach is shaped by the perception of the Dönme community as ethnic and religious outsiders, who are exploiting the country. It could be assumed that the traditional right-wing paranoia about non-Muslims might have played a role in convincing the readers. In parallel, with one exception, all of the right-wingers' (n=8) previous political ideas are strengthened by reading the *Efendi* series. It could be suggested that the books' political messages lead the right-wingers to hold tighter onto their political convictions and develop a paranoid look towards others, especially Jews. Ibrahim acknowledges that as follows: "Jews only want to dominate the world by working hard, but they are cursed... I am more nationalist now!"

Most of the social democrats (n=6) with one exception, who is not convinced by the books, approach the conspiracy theories on Dönmes as natural events in politics. Six of them believe in Dönmes' secret rule, but they do not react like the right-wing adherents. For example, Engin claims that:

As nothing in Turkey is as it appears, as conspiracies exist in Turkish politics, and as the community did not act like mafia, it did not bother me. In Turkey, even car-park owners support each other, and in big countries secret plots happen, so the conspiracies did not bother me. I even pitied Dönmes' minority status.

Nuray also sympathises with the minority situation of Dönmes: "the books make me realise that it is always hard to be a minority." In parallel, Utku explains the power of Jews/Dönmes in a rational way without reacting: "I have never heard of a poor freemason or a Jew. When we look at their history, they have always been

scapegoated and therefore learnt to protect each other. They worked hard and became powerful.” Tümay, who has the most negative approach towards Dönmes among the social democrats, legitimises her dislike through personal terms rather than ethnic or religious. She disapproves of Dönmes’ hidden identities and believes that they are not trustworthy: “I think they are not trustworthy people... According to the book, they are not... I see them as liars and hypocrites.” In general, the social democrats do not develop enmity towards Dönmes’ religious or ethnic identity. Even if they believe in the books’ claims, they rationalise it in terms of working hard and the hardships the community experienced. Nurettin exemplifies that as follows:

For me, Dönmes don’t pose problems. They are intelligent and hard-working. I wish Muslims would do the same thing, but they are busy with nonsense. They do not try to help the progress of the country or to save it from Dönmes’ rule.

The only social democrat who demonstrates a distinct attitude is from a Jewish background. He rejects all the arguments of the series and sees it as an anti-Semitic piece.

All of the apolitical respondents, in varying degrees, are convinced of Dönmes’ alleged political power. This could be due to their lack of political cognitive maps, which make them more susceptible to any political explanations. In other words, the conspiracy theories in the books could have provided political cognitive maps for the apolitical respondents. Their reflection is a mixture of the tendencies among the right-wingers and the social democrats. They take two distinctive approaches. One is close to the right-wing approach, which recognises Dönme power as a foreign threat. In this regard, some respondents react to the alleged Dönme conspiracies. Serdar K becomes hostile towards Israel: “I think our most dangerous enemy is Israel.” Esra dislikes and fears Jews:

[After reading the book] I don’t have a positive impression of the group, but I can’t be sure without doing enough research. Jewish conspiracies have been mentioned for years, and there are many books about that. We can see that in media as well. I have a dislike of Jews. I hate the idea that Jews are the

superior race. Of course that is what they think... The others as their slaves...
I don't accept slavery.

Orhan, in parallel, worries about Dönmes' secret identity: "I do not blame all Hebrews but being hypocrite is a personal characteristic, and this would be reflected in society. Dönmes appeared as Turks and Muslims and then took us on their laps [a rather sexual explanation of the exploitation]." He approaches the ambiguity of the Dönme identity as a potential threat to Turkish society.

The other sort of response among the apolitical respondents is close to the social democrats' view and claims that conspiracies are unavoidable aspects of politics. Emre declares that: "even if it was Ahmedians [a random name for a group] instead of Dönmes, I would still be reactive. I am against secret societies and their conspiracies." Although he does not want conspiratorial elites to lead the country, he does not explain his annoyance in racial or religious terms. He only dislikes secret groups. In parallel, Ahmet mentions that: "freemasons were also effective in the early years of the republic. The important point is whether they help us or not, not who they are. Sure, if they are exploiting, it is different, but the book did not make me think like that." In a similar line, Murat claims that: "this book taught me how colourful our social structure is. I have nothing against Dönmes. There are always groups with power. Today, it is them, tomorrow there will be others. Since I do not want that power, I do not mind."

Damla states that: "we know that there are different groups. People do not come to their positions by 100% luck. This group can be Dönmes, I do not mind! Unfortunately, I am not one of them!" Nevertheless, as quoted above, if she does not attain her career aims, she may change her ideas. The apolitical response to the books swings between an enmity towards the group and accepting conspiracies as an unavoidable aspect of politics. As will be discussed below in more detail, the *Efendi* series seems to depoliticise the readers. Accordingly, apolitical people use the books to justify their stances.

In addition to the variation among the respondents from different political perspectives in understanding the political messages of the books, there are some

shared features. Firstly, the books lead people to ignore the distinction between Jews and Dönmes. They focus on the Judaic character of Dönmes, whereas the community is not counted as Jewish by religious authorities. Among all respondents, only one acknowledges the difference. Not surprisingly, this respondent is Jewish in origin. The books' conspiratorial line, which negates the distinctions between Jews and Dönmes, is largely accepted by the readers.

Secondly, the books reflect on Dönmes as an omnipotent community, and this message is accepted by nearly all respondents (n=28) in varying degrees. Almost everybody takes it for granted that Dönmes are rich. One of the most repeated claims among the respondents is: "I have never seen a poor Jew/Dönme" (n=8). However, some interviewees also find the books' claims a bit exaggerated. Moreover, many respondents feel that there is nothing else to do to change the situation. Their belief in the omnipotent conspiratorial elite alienates and depoliticises them. Serdar K states that: "I am convinced that they are really powerful, and they can do whatever they want, even if I do not want them to... doesn't it bother you? It bothers me of course... If I am to tell the truth, I do not have any hopes to change the situation, but we will do our best." Yalçın mentions his disbelief in his political agency in the following words: "I and the people around me do not have enough power, mate! If you ask why, because there is no solidarity." Samet claims that after reading the books: "To be honest, I lost my hopes about Turkey and its businessmen, politicians and army. They have exploited us all those years." Hakan explains his political disappointment as follows: "when I first read it, I was shattered. I think there is nothing to do to save this country. Whatever we do, we cannot challenge the Dönmes' control." Emre acknowledges a similar irritation about the allegedly omnipotent character of Dönmes:

I do not think reading books about Dönmes or freemasons will give me much. I already believe the existence of these groups; we are already living the consequences. Reading about them will not give me anything, because although they control our lives, we cannot do anything about it.

Özgür summarises such powerlessness as follows:

The books made me realise that we do not have any power but the people with money. Lay people are just pawns... From the Prime Minister to lay people, we are all pawns... They [Dönmes and Jews] are at the top; we are the puppets, and they hold our strings.

Thirdly, some respondents demonstrated examples of radical doubt and conspiratorial thinking during the interviews. Orçun had asked me where I was from before he agreed to the interview. He first told me that he was from Salonika, where the majority of Dönmes are from, but also added that he was not a Dönme. I replied that I was not from there, and my ancestors came from northern Turkey. Then, he asked me the details of my town. During the interview, after I established a minimum level of trust, he told me that he was also from northern Turkey. I thought that he wanted to determine whether I was a Dönme or not before the interview. Meltem, in the course of the interview, told me that: "I will not be surprised, if you are also a Dönme."

The radical doubt and conspiratorial thinking among interviewees are not confined to their suspicions about my identity. Some also adopt conspiratorial thinking in their attitude towards politics. Murat A is suspicious of the name of a mosque after reading the books: "There is a mosque called Messiah Ali Pasha in Fatih⁷². In Islam, we do not believe in messiah, and if you gave that name to a mosque in Fatih, I would become nervous!" Ibrahim states that: "everything is clear, they do a lot of things to get our country from us. In the events in the Blacksea region... they all, including Dönmes, try to destroy us. Is that enough for you?" Utku also shows his suspicion about the group's capacity: "If we find their trace somewhere, we should investigate it in more detail. These people did a lot of things in history, and there is no reason for them to stop now. The blood is the same blood." Murat B creates more conspiracy theories after reading the books:

For example, Adnan Menderes, a Dönme, even became a Prime Minister. If we do a little brain-storming about the September 6-7 events⁷³ in Menderes' times... Before the events, the grand bazaar and other commercial districts

⁷² A conservative district in Istanbul.

⁷³ For a discussion on the events, see page 104.

were dominated by Greeks and Armenians. After those events, Dönmes and Jews began to dominate the commercial districts. And as we know, Menderes initiated those violent events, and we did it. Do you think the logic is wrong? These thoughts came to my mind after reading *Efendi*.

Likewise, Samet develops a conspiratorial perspective as shown below:

Samet: 'We see Dönmes in every political context. Erdoğan, the Prime Minister of Turkey, before starting an operation in Iraq, asks permission from the United States. Related... He attacks northern Iraq, but he cannot do anything about Barzani... Why? Because there is a religious connection.'

Türkey: 'What is its connection with Dönmes?'

Samet: 'Whatever, isn't what I said true? Did you hear anything bad about Barzani?'

Ali creates his conspiratorial conclusion as follows:

In the contemporary political system, the United States dominates the world and the money. They have the Microsoft software, and its owner is a Dönme as well. Today, the Justice and Progress Party (AKP) is in power in Turkey because of them. In the past, some prime ministers were from them as well.

Mehmet incorporates different conspiratorial lines in the following:

It is interesting that they control the power in Turkey. They meet once a year. It really impressed me. It is from another book. They know each other, when they have dinner together with a third common friend.

Fourthly, the book reading practice seems to be an important indicator determining the level of influence of the *Efendi* series. People who do not have a regular practice of reading are susceptible to believe in conspiratorial lines more than others. Tümay, who does not usually read, tells that: "I learnt the things I had never known before. I

learnt our history. From Evliyazade family until now... I also learnt that most of the powerful people are Dönmes." Damla states that: "It is really hard for me to change my opinion with one book. Usually, I read books." Accordingly, reading the conspiratorial literature appears to give a more critical look about the *Efendi* series' claims. For example, Murat A compares Soner Yalçın's books with Yalçın Küçük in the following way:

The Dönme question attracted my attention but not only through Yalçın. He is like a dessert after a meal. He is very shallow and populist about this issue. He cannot be compared to Küçük and the others. They have an academic discipline. They do not problematise the existence of Dönmes, and they provide an academic perspective, but Soner Yalçın only scares people.

In parallel, Serdar A claims that reading other books gave him a broader perspective, and he warns that only reading Yalçın on the issue may create bias: "If people do not know who Dönmes really are, these books may scare them about their power." It could be claimed that reading other books or conspiracy theories helps people to look at the *Efendi* series more critically. As DeCerteau (1988) mentions, the reading practice opens up new spaces of freedom in interpretation for readers.

Fifthly, people tend to see the lack of disavowal of the *Efendi* series by the alleged Dönme members as a proof of authenticity. Nurettin claims: "I believe the existence of such a group, because nobody from them refuted the book. This proves the books' arguments." Serdar A remarks that: "I think Soner Yalçın did a good study to which nobody objected. Therefore, I believe in the authenticity of the books." Fethi is also surprised that he has not heard the accused people defending themselves:

It is really interesting that the accused people did not speak about the books. They could have stopped the distribution, if they wanted. They constitute the power elite, the bureaucracy, and they can do anything!

Ali A, sharing the same doubt, thinks that Dönmes attempted to show off their power through the *Efendi* series: "this group's firms, such as Aydın Doğan, advertised

themselves through the series. The books are distributed deliberately!" Ilakan claims that they could have stopped the distribution of the books as follows:

Dönmes are so powerful, and if the author writes this book for money, they can pay him a lot more than he can earn to shut him up. They could have done that, or they could have killed him. Think about that!

This attitude is complementary to the idea discussed in the fourth chapter of this thesis, that conspiracy theories often need an alleged insider to be confirmed. In other words, these accounts become more convincing when acts of the alleged insiders support their claims. The readers' responses support that view, as they confirm the credibility of the series due to the lack of Dönme reactions. Indeed, taking the responses of the accused as evidence seems to play an important part in authenticating conspiracy theories world-wide. In the introduction of *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, an attempt to prove genuineness of the text is as follows:

The claim of the Jews that the *Protocols* are forgeries is in itself an admission of their genuineness, for they NEVER ATTEMPT TO ANSWER THE FACTS corresponding to the THREATS which the Protocols contain, and, indeed, the correspondence between prophecy and fulfillment is too glaring to be set aside or obscured. This the Jews well know and therefore evade (Marsden, 2006: 8).

Sixthly, some respondents are impressed by the books' scientific rigour. They are affected by the existence of footnotes throughout the *Efendi* series. Cevdet notes that: "it is clear that Soner Yalçın did research. For example, I am now reading Ergün Poyraz... He just guesses things... Soner Yalçın provides proof. For me, footnotes are very important. I believe the accounts of researchers more." However, people who are familiar with the methods of social science think that the books are pretentious. Barış, who is writing a PhD thesis, claims: "it did not convince me. It was not an academic work. It was more like a celebrity column. If it was a scientific work, it would not deny societal dynamics. There is no economy, no politics but Dönmes. It does not sound convincing to me!" Denis, who wrote a thesis before,

summarises his dissatisfaction in the following: “he [Yalçın] puts irrelevant things together, and he pretends like he is writing a thesis!”

7.4 Discussion

The findings both approve and reject some arguments in the literature on conspiracy theories. To start with, the tendency of the respondents with lower education and/or the ones who do not have a habit of reading to be influenced by the books endorses the aforementioned aspect of semi-erudition. The rejection of the books' methods by people who are familiar with scientific works could also be linked to that hypothesis. The only respondent having an education below high-school level and not fully convinced by the conspiratorial accounts of *Efendi* describes himself as a regular reader of political books. In this regard, the evidence draws parallel to Stempel et al.'s (2007: 364) survey on the belief of 9/11 conspiracy theories, which finds differences in responses between the lowest level of education and the rest. It could be argued that the relevance to books and reasoning tends to defy the belief in conspiratorial lines. It could also be claimed that the books' efforts to look scientific with the use of footnotes can be detected by people who are more familiar with other works. Although this does not suggest that all conspiratorial accounts are false, it points to their semi-erudite aspects of reason-belief fusion and pretension of scientific works.

Moreover, the interviews illustrate that most of the respondents are convinced by the omnipotent depiction of the Dönme community. As a result, they lose belief in their political agency and become depoliticised. This brings us to Melley's (2000; 2002) agency panic thesis on conspiracy theories. Melley (2000: 12) argues that today the agency panic, i.e. the intense anxiety about the loss of autonomy or self-control, drives people to conspiracy theories, which provide integral stories for the shattered personalities. However, in the interviews, I rather encountered conspiracy theories' contribution to agency panic and depoliticisation of individuals. Therefore, conspiracy theories might be fed from agency panic, but they also increase it.

The interviews also show that after reading the series, some respondents develop high levels of political suspicion. This result seems to be parallel to Billig's (1989)

and Byford's (2002) arguments on the conspiratorial tradition, which refers to a cultural baggage of conspiracy theories. In other words, conspiratorial accounts have a distinct historical tradition and promote a highly sceptical way of political thinking. A number of respondents create their own conspiracy theories and read more works in that literature. However, this does not mean that they are numbed by the conspiratorial world, as the literature pathologising conspiracy theories would suggest (Robins and Post, 1997; Hofstadter, 1965). Many other respondents logically integrate conspiracy theories into their political views instead of developing a paranoid suspicion. As the interviews show, in most cases (n=15), people's political views are strengthened, so conspiratorial accounts are predominantly amended to existing political views. Only three respondents change their political views drastically to a conspiratorial perspective. This suggests that the conspiracy theories are rather used as tactics to legitimise people's discontent with authority, not as strategies (to employ DeCerteau's words). It also supports the claim of the previous chapters that individuals or political groups tend to use conspiracy theories pragmatically to affirm their standpoints. In plain words, the convinced respondents did not all become paranoid.

In addition, Pipes (1997) mentions that conspiracy theories are not inherent to right-wing thought, as they also exist within the left. The interviews suggest a similar pattern, because both the leftists and the rightists make use of the conspiratorial claims. It should also be remembered that the leftists' level of apprehension and utilisation of the conspiracy theories vary significantly from that of the right-wingers. The leftists are less likely to be convinced by the *Efendi* series' claims. In cases, where they agree with those claims, they reflect a very different attitude. They associate the conspiracy theories with the working of capitalism and bourgeoisie, and they do not show a racial dislike or hatred like the rightist respondents. Besides from the left-wing to the right, along with the social democrats and the apolitical people, the demonisation of Dönmes increases. In conjunction with that path, the respondents are gradually more hostile to the religious and racial identity of the group. These differences in attitude draw parallels to the qualitative distinction between left-wing and right-wing conspiracy theorists. Left-wing theories tend to associate conspiratorial accounts with capitalism, while right-wing theories problematise religious identity. Thus, the interview results, while partially

supporting Pipes' arguments, demonstrate a need to pay attention to different ways of appropriating conspiracy theories among different political groups.

The cultural approach on conspiratorial accounts (Dean, 2002; Fenster, 1999; Knight, 2000) suggests that these theories exploit social and political insecurities and are symptomatic of their social contexts. For example, the *Efendi* series' conspiratorial depiction highlights the ontological insecurities of Turkish politics and responds to them with an account that can confirm different political identities. Likewise, the readers, despite their dissimilar political ideals, can still believe in the same conspiracy theory. While the right-wing readers emphasise the racial character of Dönmes, left-wingers reflect on how they represent capitalism and the bourgeoisie. It could be summarised that the conspiratorial accounts are specific to their social and political context, as they exploit the ontological insecurities of Turkish society through a semi-erudite fusion of political belief and reason.

7.5 Conclusion

The interviews propose a few important conclusions. First, people with leftist political ideas seem to be affected less by the conspiratorial lines of the books. Moving from the left to right, people's inclination to trust the *Efendi* series increases. One of the most important reasons underlying this tendency could be related to the traditional right-wing affiliation with anti-Semitic theories in Turkey and the left-wing's disassociation from these. Second, the left-wing and right-wing adherents understand the Dönme conspiracy from different angles. While the right-wingers are reactive to the Jewish origins of Dönmes, the left-wingers oppose them as dominant bourgeois figures, which sustains the claim that left-wing and right-wing conspiratorial approaches are qualitatively different. Third, the majority of the readers overlook the differences between Jews and Dönmes, as a result of the books' over-simplification. Fourth, the readers are likely to be convinced by the books' depiction of the omnipotent Dönme figure. Accordingly, they often become alienated from politics, as they feel they cannot do anything.

Fifth, some readers further elaborate the books' conspiratorial explanations and produce their own conspiracy theories. Sixth, people, who generally read books and

the ones who know about the scientific methods are likely to perceive the books more critically. They are also the ones who are not alienated by the books' claims. Last but not the least, the conspiratorial accounts about Dönmes generate a sacrificial figure of Dönmes in Girardian sense through which the respondents can affirm or justify their political identities. Different political views scapegoat the community to channel their inner tensions to the outside. This also demonstrates that Yalçın's aforementioned intention of separating his political stance from his research does not lead the readers to an objective assessment of the topic. The conspiratorial theme of the books seems to lead them to more biased readings. It could be suggested that the content of the books is influential in shaping individuals' political views. However, the readers show a diversity of ways in appropriating and using the books' claims. In the next chapter, this analysis will be taken to a macro-level through the interviews with political parties. Their approaches to the conspiracy theories about Dönmes will provide us with material to compare with the readers' take on the subject.

Chapter 8. Political Parties' Perception of the Conspiracy Theories about Dönmes

8.1 Introduction

As the previous chapter illustrated, the conspiracy theories about Dönmes influence individuals' political views. Yet we do not have any data on how mainstream political parties reflect on these accounts. Fenster (1999: xv) remarks that conspiracy theories have been effective in party politics in the United States: "At particular conjunctures... such as the tenuous association between the John Birch Society and parts of the Republican Party in the 1960s and the mobilisation of the Christian Coalition on behalf of Republicans in 1990s, conspiracy theories can have important effects on major political parties." In fact, there have not been many studies on the relationship between popular conspiracy theories and mainstream political parties, although Lipset and Laab (1978) investigated conspiratorial accounts in relation to right-wing political movements. This chapter will examine the relationship between the conspiratorial accounts about Dönmes and the mainstream political parties in Turkey. It will attempt to answer questions such as: how do the mainstream political parties reflect on the conspiracy theories on Dönmes? To what extent do they take them seriously? What are the differences in their approaches? What are the effects of popular conspiracy theories on party politics? In short, the macro-level political significance of the Dönme conspiracy theories will be scrutinised.

To achieve that, I attempted to conduct semi-structured interviews with members of five political parties, representing main ideological views in Turkey: the Republican People's Party (Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi- CHP) with a social democratic stance; the Nationalist Action Party (Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi- MHP) with a Turkish nationalist view; the Islamist Felicity Party (Saadet Partisi- SP); the liberal-conservative Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi- AKP) and the Kurdish/leftist Democratic Society Party (Demokratik Toplum Partisi- DTP). Although I already explained the major differences between these views in chapter six, I will give brief accounts about them in the following sections.

With the exception of CHP, I interviewed one member from each political party. I will use the reasons CHP gave me in rejecting the interview request as a part of my analysis. While more respondents would have provided a better data set, it was difficult to find people confident about their knowledge on the issue with free time for interviews. In order to interview the most representative respondent, I travelled to Ankara, the capital, to seek members from the central headquarters of the parties, who regularly attended the party meetings and were aware of the general discussions in the party. They could indeed give more comprehensive accounts about their parties' reflections. In the cases of MHP and AKP, I established personal contacts to find an interviewee. With others, I called the party centres. All the interviewees were members of their party assemblies. Two of them remarked that these were their personal ideas, and the parties should not be held responsible. In such instances, I led them to reflect upon what their parties' institutional approach would be. Some parties gave leaflets on Dönmes that I will also use in the analysis.

The interviews took between forty and one hundred minutes. The respondents were given the choice for the location, which was either the National Assembly or the party headquarters. There were a few minor difficulties in conducting the interviews. First, because all the interviewees were experienced politicians, they had a significant amount of political knowledge and a good use of political rhetoric. Therefore, it was difficult to lead the discussions. However, as the study's intentions were made clear before the interviews, they all reflected on the Dönme issue. Second, the interviewer was anxious about visiting the DTP headquarters, which had been attacked twice in the same month. Nonetheless, after being introduced to a relaxed and friendly atmosphere, the interview was conducted successfully. Indeed, it was the longest one.

The main questions that were asked to understand the political parties' approaches on the issue were as follows: Do they find these theories convincing? How does their ideological position interact with the conspiracy theories? How do they account for the prevalence of the conspiracy theories? While trying to answer these questions, I will briefly mention the stories of the interviews to present the political parties' reception of a study on the conspiracy theories about Dönmes. The chapter will first talk about the interviews with the political parties, and the discussion section will

comparatively analyse their responses. Finally, the chapter will summarise the findings.

8.2 Political Parties' Responses

8.2.1 The Felicity Party (Saadet Partisi: SP)

The party represents the historical tradition of Islamist politics and the movement of Milli Görüş (National Vision). In this tradition, from the 1960s onwards, there were political parties such as National Order Party and Welfare Party, which entered the Turkish parliament in different periods (Yeşilada, 2002). As the former ones were closed down by the state, SP is the last political party of Milli Görüş. The party's Islamist stance brings it close to reactionary circles, which have been propagating the conspiracy theories on Dönmes since the beginning of the twentieth century. In this respect, Felicity Party provides an important example on the Islamist stance about the contemporary conspiratorial accounts.

Thanks to their willingness, Felicity Party was the first to accept the interview. It only took three phone calls to find somebody to interview. They welcomed my inquiry on the conspiracy theories about Dönmes and gave me an appointment with Şevket Kazan, one of the most prominent members of the party. After Erbakan, the leader and the founder of the Milli Görüş movement, Kazan could be seen as the second most important man of the movement. Kazan, who has spent thirty-five years in Milli Görüş, served as the minister of justice twice in 1974 and in 1996, and as the minister of labour in 1977. He is also one of the founding members of the Felicity Party. In this regard, the interviewee was capable of transmitting the party reflections on the conspiracy theories.

Kazan gave me a detailed account of how the party approaches Dönmes and Jews before my first question. He began by describing the Jews quoting the Koran: "[Jews] you will create disorder two times, and you will be defeated. You will also be victors two times." Then, he portrayed a cunning Jewish figure, which conspires to get power at all times. Thus, he tends to see Jewish persecutions as a result of their own bad intentions. For example, while explaining the Jewish expulsion from Spain,

he claims that: “probably they betrayed the country when they were in Spain. After Christopher Columbus failed to bring wealth from India, they started to attack Jews, as the minister of wealth was a Jew.” In Kazan’s perspective, Jews are suspected of creating problems. He also defines Dönmes as Jews, who fake conversion to conspire. Kazan describes Dönmes through explaining the emergence of Sabbatai Sevi’s movement in the Ottoman Empire in the following terms:

While the Ottoman Empire was expanding its territory, the Jews approached the palace. They said that you had saved us from Spain, and we would like to return your favour. They said that as we knew the European languages, we could help you in signing peace treaties with Europeans... Afterwards, when there were problems about the interpretation of the treaties, they said that we were good translators, but the clerks failed to write the treaties properly. To stop these problems, if you allowed us, we could be clerks... Then, in the fall of the Ottoman Empire, when the ambassadors feel ashamed in foreign countries as representatives of a losing country, the Jews suggested that they could be ambassadors. This time the Ottomans said no, you were not Muslims. Then, they replied: ‘We will become Muslims!’ [repeated three times in a Jewish accent] Unfortunately, they just appeared Muslims. In their hearts, they kept their former belief. These people are called Dönmes, and Sabbatai Sevi led them this way.

After defining the Dönme identity as a part of Jewish plots, Kazan declares that they continue to influence politics today. He states that the ministry of foreign affairs is still structured according to Jewish interests: “How is this reflected today? The organisation of the ministry of foreign affairs today is as follows: translator, clerk, ambassador. It is likely to be shaped by Zionism!” Furthermore, he claims that controlling foreign affairs ministries is the global strategy of Zionism to dominate international relations: “I will not talk cocksure, but, including the United Nations, all foreign offices are led by the Zionist philosophy, and they support each other.”

Kazan recapitulates a conspiratorial account of Jews/Dönmes through his party’s convictions about Zionism opposition, which shapes the political vision of Milli Görüş. He claims that Zionism constitutes all immoral ideologies such as capitalism

and communism: “Erbakan knows about Zionism more than anyone with the inspiration of the Koran. He draws an alligator to explain. The upper jaw of the alligator is capitalism, and the lower jaw is communism. All these *isms* were invented by Jews. The upper jaw of an alligator moves and causes the main harm, but not the lower jaw. Likewise, capitalism is more dangerous than communism, as it bites a bigger chunk and does not let you notice. Communism bites a smaller chunk.”

The Zionist system, which Kazan relates to a Judeo-Christian tradition, is an enemy of Islam: “European and Judeo-Christian cultures protect each other and oppose Islam.” Moreover, he states that Jews created Protestantism for their own ends: “it is Catholicism and Orthodoxy in origin. Jews established the Protestant church, because they needed to have interests in commerce, which was banned by the Catholic Church. They can even create a religion!” Kazan adds that the United States is ruled by Jews: “The United States was established by Jews. You can see that all presidents of that country are Jewish in origin.”

In parallel, Kazan believes that Zionists rule the world: “first, they dominate with money; second, they control ministries of foreign affairs. Why does the United States support Israel this much?” The picture of an omnipotent Jew is inherent in Kazan’s depiction of Zionism: “they are only thirty million people, but they rule the world as they want.” Thus, he echoes anti-Semitic conspiracy theories like *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. It should be clarified that there is not a racial or biological hatred of Jews, it is rather a justification of detestation through conspiracy theories on Zionism: “Not all Jews are Zionists. There are some Jews against Zionism.” Dönmes, in this vision, is a part of Zionism, and therefore they provoke hatred: “Dönmeism is an aspect of Zionism.”

Zionism, in Kazan’s political rhetoric, refers to a wide range of conspiracy theories from economy to culture and politics. It is the Jewish plot that hinders Turkish society in coming to terms with its Islamic roots. By doing so, Zionists aspire to realise their Greater Israel project, which aims for an Israel stretching from Cairo to southern Turkey: “it is also written in the Koran that Jews want to establish the Great Israeli state from the Nile to the Euphrates. It is their ideal, belief and worship.” In

this view, the Milli Görüş movement represents a political option against Zionism and its deceptions. It promises a return to the natural religious state and defeat of the foreign adversaries. For that reason, Milli Görüş aims to develop Turkey to become independent from foreign exploitation. Kazan summarises this political idea as follows: “contemporary imperialism is a Zionist imperialism, and it is ruling the world. Against this, as a party of Milli Görüş, we aim to get Turkish people to understand that plot. We are paying fifty two billion American dollars interest per year; this is against the development of Turkey!” Seeing Zionists as the prime enemy is also presented in Kazan’s personal memory as follows:

I was involved with commerce in my early years in family business... We traded with Jews for twenty-thirty years; they trusted us. In 1973, when I started my political career, I had to go to see a Jewish merchant, Joseph Ojelvo, as my brother was ill. After we talked about the business, he saw the party badge on my jacket and asked me which party that was, and I replied, MSP. He told me: ‘are you crazy my dear?’ They hated Erbakan, why? Because Erbakan wanted Turkey to develop with its own dynamics, free from export. He established the Gümüş Motor and was giving development conferences. He remarked that Zionism was a political obstacle for Turkey. After that day, we stopped our business with Jews; I told him that you could not talk about my party leader in that manner.

For Kazan, Zionists achieve their aims by corrupting Turkish culture, economy and politics. In parallel, he criticises a cultural Americanisation that is linked with Dönmes: “Roosevelt remarked that the Americanisation of the world is the future! It is happening now: if you go outside, all café and restaurant names are in English. This is a cultural and moral deprivation. People are alienated from their own culture... They are all Sabbatai Sevi, and this is coming from there.” On a political level, he argues that the Greater Middle East Initiative⁷⁴ (Büyük Ortadoğu Projesi-BOP) is an indicator of the Zionist imperialism: “BOP attempts to control the whole

⁷⁴ The Greater Middle East Initiative was introduced by George W. Bush in the G8 summit of 2004. It is a neo-conservative attempt to transform the region politically and economically (see Ottoway and Carothers, 2004). BOP became a key word in contemporary conspiracy accounts in Turkey, as it gives an important role to Turkey in the transformation of the region. Besides, the current prime minister Erdoğan is the co-chairman of the project.

Islamic world from Morocco to Indonesia. What is the U.S doing in Iraq? Okay, there is oil, but the real aim is to protect Israel. Even if they establish the great Israel, these Muslim countries will pose a threat. They made Turkish and Spanish Prime Ministers co-chairmen to this project.”

For Kazan, the current AKP government, as local puppets, serves the interests of Zionists. As a matter of fact, AKP cadres are mainly coming from the Milli Görüş movement. AKP won the elections in 2002, while Felicity Party could not pass the 10% vote quota to enter parliament. After the success of Milli Görüş in 1990s, such a loss generated a need for explanation. Kazan combines his views on Zionism with AKP in the following conspiracy theory:

We were in government, and Erbakan was the Prime Minister. In the U.S, there is an institution called JINSA⁷⁵, which has important Zionist strategists. In Turkey, all prime ministers came to power with American consent, Özal, Demirel and Erdoğan today. When we were in power, JINSA organized a panel on the 18th of July 1997. It was published in Policy Watch. Makovsky asked that where Turkey would go with Erbakan: ‘He has to be stopped, because he is an anti-imperialist. We should refuse him, and he will not be successful. Then, Erbakan’s coalition partner Çiller will realise that and pull out of the government.’ This was the plan A. At that period, our votes were increasing. TÜSIAD, serving to Zionism, made a research and estimated that we would gain 33% of the votes in 2000 elections and 66.09% of the votes in 2005. Then, Americans decided to find some young members of the party to topple Erbakan. They could not have achieved that in Welfare and Virtue parties. Afterwards, they led them to establish AKP and helped them through media to come to power.

Kazan remarks that their anti-Zionism and attempts to establish D-8⁷⁶ to revive the Islamic world against imperialism “panicked the United States.” For that reason, the founders of AKP, who left Milli Görüş, were deceived by Zionists. Kazan argues

⁷⁵ The Jewish Institute for National Security Affairs (JINSA) is a neo-conservative think-tank, focusing on the U.S national security as well as working to strengthen the relationships with Turkey.

⁷⁶ D-8, established in 1997, is an organisation of Muslim developing countries for an economic alliance.

that they gave power to Erdoğan with some conditions: “they took five promises from him: 1. Make the Turkish public accept Annan’s Cyprus plan, 2. Help us in invading Iraq, 3. Work with IMF, 4. Become a co-chairman of the BOP project. I forgot the last one, but he follows the instructions. Turkey is a political satellite of the U.S. today.”

The belief in Zionist conspiracies also led Kazan to quote the conspiracy literature: “Rockefeller, Rothschilds, Agnellis in Italy, Mitsibushi in Japan are Jews.” He claims that: “The American dollar is the money of Rockefeller not the Central Bank of the United States. He lends money to them. There are signs on the dollar, 13 steps... A book called *Secret World Domination*... It is written by Gary Allen (1971), *None Dare Call it Conspiracy*. He was working for Rockefeller. How can you call that a conspiracy? He was working for him for twenty years.” Kazan also links the anti-Zionist conspiratorial accounts with Darwin’s evolution theory: “they believe that the God only created Jews, and the others are monkeys. Darwinism partially relies on that principle; Jews are the masters, and the rest are slaves. They are still working on this.”

Kazan’s political stance is a longing for a return to the Islamic origins of Turkish society, which is being averted by Zionists. He fuses religious belief with reason in order to prove this: e.g. he starts with the Koran and then refers to encyclopaedias such as *Thema Laurusse*. He gave me a document after the interview, which explains that Milli Görüş corresponds to a government style prioritising God (HÜT) in contrast to the governance prioritising the worldly power (KÜT). It supposes that the prophets of the three celestial religions are the pioneers of the HÜT, while Jews, heretics, pharaohs and Zionists are the leaders of the KÜT. Milli Görüş ideology seems to be structured in a semi-erudite fusion between belief and reason, because reason in Kazan’s speech is utilised to justify religious belief. Therefore, the semi-erudition perspective on conspiracy theories also explains Milli Görüş’s stance.

In parallel, his semi-erudite bias leads Kazan to reject all other conspiratorial accounts on Dönmes. When asked about what Milli Görüş thinks of the left-wing conspiratorial accounts, Kazan states that although they may be right, they are half-doctors, as they are not cooperating with Felicity Party: “there is a saying, the half-

doctor will kill a person and a half Imam will kill the religious belief. The struggle should be together and conscious; why don't they join us, if they are against Zionism?" About Yalçın, who has a bold secularist stance, Kazan declares that: "Soner Yalçın is Dönme as well. He claims that Dönmes civilised Turkey."

In summary, Kazan's political rhetoric is shaped by his strong belief in an organic, harmonious state of Turkish society the non-realisation of which is explained due to a Zionist plot. Kazan did not allow me to ask a question in the first half an hour of the interview, and I asked three questions in total. Nevertheless, it was not really an important obstacle, since he summarised Milli Görüş's political view on Jews/Dönmes. It could be argued that the strong religious convictions and a reactionary stance in Milli Görüş thought led the movement to explain the political failures or non-realised prophecies through conspiratorial accounts. This perspective is developed into a more global conspiratorial line by incorporating with the existing conspiracy literature.

8.2.2 The Nationalist Action Party (Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi: MHP)

MHP represents a right-wing ultra-nationalist stance in Turkish politics, which could be seen as a part of the extreme right tradition of Europe (Arıkan, 2002). The party was established by former colonel Alparslan Türkeş in 1969, and since then it has been influential in Turkish politics. MHP, like SP, has historically been close to the Islamist and right-wing stances, which originated the conspiracy theories about Dönmes/Jews. Hence, MHP provides an important case to understand the nationalists' take on these conspiracy theories and to observe the differences from SP. Before I went to Ankara to find a respondent, I had established a contact from the party, who referred me to my interviewee Oktay Vural, a former minister of Transport and Communications. Currently, Vural is a member of parliament from İzmir and a co-chairman of MHP. His closeness to the party centre, his knowledge of Dönmes and his credentials made him an ideal candidate to interview on the party's institutional approach on the conspiracy theories about Dönmes.

Vural, while talking about the conspiracy theories, mainly focused on AKP. He began by arguing that AKP hides its political intentions: "we are really surprised to

see that a so-called conservative party pursues a non-conservative agenda.” According to Vural, AKP’s political style is deceitful; they hide their real motives by creating phoney tensions: “they take a step in a [non-conservative] direction, and when people start to understand their real intentions, they immediately step back. Then, they create a bogus discussion such as the one on Islamic veiling or about the religious identity of the President in order to hide their real agenda.”

Vural is surprised that AKP, despite its conservative stance, supports globalisation, which connotes the western domination: “today one civilisation approach, which imposes the western civilisation, is dominant... AKP implements globalisation policies despite having a conservative appearance.” This poses a threat on the Turkish nation-state for Vural: “they try to erase national identities and reorganise nation states according to international standards. These are the policies of one world order.” In this regard, AKP acts against the national will and cultural values. To show that, Vural reacts to one of Erdoğan’s speeches: “if someone claims that religion and culture are false divisions, and there is only one Anatolian society in which Hellenism and Phrygia meets, we have to learn about whose interests this man is serving, even if it is the Prime Minister.” Vural summarises AKP’s political style as dishonest, sneaky and craftily transforming Turkish values.

Vural defines the Dönme community in similar terms: “Dönmes, the sacred light, represent a thought, which hides real ideas and feelings with a false appearance. This is a political style.” While he is not making any racist remarks about Judaism or Dönme religion, Vural suspects Dönmes’ ambiguous identity as political heresy in the following words:

Dönmeism is a system of thought of someone who changes his/her religious identity. If s/he is not really wholeheartedly converted and trying to alter the new belief system that they were converted to, s/he is a Dönme. I believe that the Dönme belief system is not right. If someone changes his/her convictions, there is no problem. The trouble starts when they serve the previous belief. When belief and appearance contradict, it should be examined. Consequently, if the Dönme thought is dominant in Turkey, it means that Turkey is governed towards different targets than its own.

AKP's alleged political deceptions lead Vural to associate the party with the Dönme identity. He insists that when they analyse contemporary Turkish politics, they find links between Dönmes' heresy and AKP's hindrance of real aims: "the same approach AKP and Dönmes share: to hide their real motives and to convince society to hidden policies. AKP appears to be conservative, but it undermines the traditional values. The Dönme perspective is effective in that political style." He develops this suspicion by collaborating with the global conspiracy literature. He combines elements from the conspiracy theories on Illuminati, *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, Kabbalah and Dönmes. Vural also gave me an anonymous leaflet called "Who are governing us?" about AKP and Dönmes, probably produced by MHP, which makes the same links throughout. Vural proposes these claims as follows:

For example, why is a light-bulb the symbol of AKP? Kabbalah is called light, light bulb. The similarities are surprising on a symbolic level as well as in terms of political style. Why does AKP have seven light beams on its symbol? Does it relate to *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, to the snake with seven heads or to the seven principles of Illuminati? These are rituals; we do not propose these theories. Although, when we investigate the gap between AKP's speech and politics, I believe such a system is influential.

Vural misquotes a book about the Prime Minister Erdoğan and President Gül to support his argument: "Mehmet Akif Beki, the director of communications of the Prime Minister, wrote a book called the *Letters of Erdoğan*... There, he calls Erdoğan son of Moses and Abdullah Gül his brother Harun. When you take all these separate elements and complete the puzzle, a distinctive belief system, feeding our suspicions, becomes clearer." This argument draws parallels with the claim in the previous chapters that insiders' views seem to be used as important evidence by conspiratorial accounts. In fact, the book (Beki, 2003) supports Erdoğan and finds links between him and Moses in an allegorical, not a literal, manner. Vural does not start his analysis with a conspiratorial view, but he meets conspiracy theories after a political analysis. He summarises that as follows:

We are not looking conspiratorially, if not we will not have any space for politics. Therefore, these theories have to be supported by other elements. Instead of following a conspiratorial view, we analyse the current political arena and try to understand what kind of thought systems influenced the ones in power. In that sense, while we also look at conspiracy theories, we do not have them at the centre of our political analysis. We use those theories as means to understand what they are trying to do, where they want to reach, what their next step is. But conspiratorial explanations are not sufficient by themselves.

In that way, he draws the lines between them and Milli Görüş: “we do not see the world as composed of Christians, Muslims and Jews. We look from our own national interests. They [Milli Görüş] think that everything in the world is a Jewish plot, and they act accordingly. We analyse where plots are coming from, and we do not start from an *a priori* stance. We investigate the results.” Vural emphasises that they prioritise the national interests, and their political stance is shaped by “national realism”. MHP supports the nation-state perspective and defends its interests: “we look at the world as a system of nation states and make our analysis accordingly. This is what we call national realism, which is bound up with national identities. We question the liberal and globalisation policies, which can negatively influence the nation-state. How will BOP influence Turkey? Why is our Prime Minister a co-chairman of that plan? Who will BOP serve?”

It could be suggested that MHP voices a nation-state reaction to contemporary neo-liberalisation, multiculturalism and globalisation. It embodies the solid modern approach (Bauman, 2000), and it produces a conspiratorial line about AKP by relating its political style to the alleged Dönme plots. Although MHP does not necessarily represent a racist stance, it is hostile to the Dönme identity. MHP’s strong belief in nation-state ideals creates bias against other stances and links them with the conspiracy theories. In other words, MHP shares the paranoid perspective and the ontological insecurities of the Turkish state regarding minorities, and reacts to current social transformations from that framework. MHP pragmatically uses the conspiratorial accounts rather than shaping its ideological view with them: i.e. in DeCerteau’s sense, it uses conspiratorial accounts as tactics to confirm its stance

rather than as strategies. MHP does not devote a central place to the conspiracy theories like SP. However, like SP, it has a tendency to propose a natural organic state of Turkish society. Institutionally, it does not directly contribute to the market of the Dönme conspiracy theories but constitute a content consumer group.

8.2.3 The Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi: AKP)

AKP was originally established by a group of young members of Milli Görüş in 2001. The party is a political synthesis of conservatism and neo-liberalism. AKP collected former left-wingers, Islamists, liberals and nationalists under a liberal-conservative framework. As Çınar (2006: 472) argues, AKP favours an Islam-sensitive political stance with a more “comprehensive and consistent language of democracy and human rights”. In this regard, it is more liberal than the traditional Islamist view (Turunç, 2007). Nevertheless, some studies reveal that SP and AKP have similar voter profiles (Başlevent et. al., 2004: 10). After its electoral success in 2002 and 2007, AKP has been accused in the conspiracy theories about Dönmes, as also seen in the above interviews. Thus, the party provides an interesting case of how the blamed would respond to the conspiratorial style.

I established a contact from AKP, who was willing to find a party member for the interview. The same person also offered help in finding the members from SP, which could be seen as an indicator of AKP’s ongoing closeness to its political roots. I was accepted by Yaşar Yakış, who is a former foreign minister and currently the Chairman of the European Union Commission in the Turkish parliament. He is also among the first members who established AKP. Although in the beginning of the interview he said: “I am not entitled to represent the whole party”, towards the end, when asked about how he would think about the party response, he stated that: “I have said this is my personal view, but I know the institutional view of the party.” Yakış, due to his central position in the party, was representative of AKP’s institutional response on the current conspiratorial accounts on Dönmes. Besides, he showed a good deal of knowledge about Dönmes throughout the interview.

To start with, Yakış does not agree with the conspiracy theories about Dönme power in politics: “personally, I do not believe that people obtain power according to any

racial principle of being or not being a Dönme.” He states that Turkish society is composed of many different cultures and religions coexisting without a hegemonic relation: “in Turkish society, which is composed of many different cultures and religions, all sorts of ideas are developed freely and are still developing. I do not believe in Dönmes’ domination or in any necessity to stop them.” He suggests that we should be grateful to Dönmes’ involvement: “we should really appreciate Dönmes’ contributions beyond their numbers.”

Yakış explains that the conspiracy theories about Dönmes are due to the success of a minority group, which creates jealousy among others: “Jews were killed and put in pogroms, as they were influential in society beyond their numbers, especially in Germany during the Holocaust. Likewise, Dönmes, despite being a small group, have significant effects on Turkish society, which could be evoking jealousy. But I do not approve of this.” Besides, he does not agree that the Dönme community retains its religious identity and practices. He mentions that as follows:

Even if they are ten thousand people, what would that signify in a Turkey of seventy million? Even if it means something, I believe that the Dönme belief is diluted. I do not think that Dönmes are practising the eighteen rules of Sabbatai Sevi anymore. How many people can read prayers for a couple of times a day, and how can they avoid marrying Muslims? Therefore, I think that the Dönme belief is diluted. If it was not effective in its strongest form in the Ottoman Empire, this diluted form of the Dönme religion would not be influential in the Turkey of the twenty-first century.

In addition, Yakış acknowledges a trust in meritocracy. He accepts that some Dönmes may support each other, because many successful people from similar backgrounds actually collaborate or at least stay in contact. If there is cooperation among some members of the sect, for Yakış the reason should be sought under a meritocratic, rather than a religious, framework. He reflects on the conspiracy theories on the Dönme involvement in the ministry of foreign affairs from this perspective:

I do not know if there are Dönmes in the ministry of foreign affairs or not. I do not remember any cooperation among Dönmes there, and if successful people collaborate, we should see it legitimate. The graduates of Galatasaray high school or Ankara University also cooperate. It does not mean anything. Therefore, even if there is cooperation, it should be seen as a part of meritocracy.

When asked about what AKP thinks on the Dönme conspiracy theories about the party, Yakış states that they do not really concern the party: “it could have upset the accused members of the party, but they are not true. It does not worry the party.” Yakış also claims that the party members’ backgrounds are known: “it is very well known where Erdoğan’s or Gül’s ancestors are from. I do not know how effective it would be to accuse them.” Yakış contends that “there is not any feeling that our party will fade away.” He adds that even if there were Dönmes in the party, it would not really matter: “for a moment even if we think that they are from Dönme backgrounds, it does not mean anything to me. Even if there is someone, a grandchild of Jesus, s/he is not a different person for me. It is about their own merit not the merit of their ancestors.”

Yakış, as a founding member, declares that AKP is in equal distance to every belief: “the party respects individuals because of their humanity; what religion they belong to is a matter between them and their Gods.” In this sense, AKP institutionally demonstrates a liberal point of view in which religious identities are celebrated as individual freedoms. Yakış summarises this approach as follows:

AKP has an institutional identity, which is written as principles in the party programme. I am one of the founding members, and I was among the committee, which wrote the party programme. Including Dönmes, we are in equal distance to every religion. Our Christian member is equal to a Muslim. However, as we live in a country, where 99% of the population is Muslim, we act according to the interests of this majority while protecting the rights of the minorities.

Yakış warns that some individual party members might think differently, which is understandable, as the party background comes from Milli Görüş. He gives an example from a personal memory:

There might be prejudices in the party as it could be in society. Once, in the party, while we were talking about the issue of Alevism, a friend said that: 'it is not a problem for me; I even have an Alevi friend.' This naïve answer puts a distanced approach to Alevis; he talks as if he is sacrificing by having an Alevi friend. I am sure that there are people who have such prejudices in the party and society.

Yakış demonstrates a liberal point of view in rejecting the conspiracy theories about Dönmes. He stresses the freedom of belief, multiculturalism and meritocracy. He acknowledges that his party is composed of different opinions, hinting that some party members might think differently. Nevertheless, as a party that has been a popular target for conspiratorial accounts, AKP distances itself from those theories.

8.2.4 The Democratic Society Party (Demokratik Toplum Partisi: DTP)

The DTP, established in 2005, represents the Kurdish minority movement and a left-wing stance in Turkish politics. The movement has long been seen as the mouthpiece of the Kurdish terrorist group PKK. Therefore, its previous political parties were closed down by the Turkish state (see Watts, 1999). The party envisages a democratic and multicultural Turkey, where minorities will have more freedoms. In that sense, DTP affords an example on how a political party of a minority movement could respond to the conspiracy theories about another minority.

DTP was very helpful in finding a contact. Following my call to the party centre, they came up with two respondents, one of whom I could not interview because of his illness. In the end, I talked with İsmet Şahin, a member of the party assembly. Like Yakış from AKP, Şahin first remarked that his answers do not represent the whole party: "these are not our party views; I will talk about my opinions." However, he was positive when asked if he knew the party's institutional response.

He confidently guessed that: "the party's institutional approach is very similar to mine."

Initially, Şahin rejects the conspiracy theories about Dönme power in politics. He rather sees them as forged scapegoating mechanisms through which minorities have been repressed. He associates these theories with the oppression of Jews all around the world: "not only in Turkey... In many different anti-Semitic discourses, these people have been repressed. Especially, they have been held responsible for the political alienation of lower classes. A non-scientific, non-objective, pejorative political rhetoric blamed these people for such disturbances."

Şahin questions how such a powerful group in conspiratorial accounts has been oppressed so many times: "when we look at Jews, we see that they have always been killed and persecuted in the world history... It is a real naivety to see these people as an omnipotent group after such events, as these views cannot explain the maltreatment of the community." Şahin stresses that if Dönmes were as powerful as described in the conspiracy theories, they would have established their own cultural hegemony: "why would such a powerful Judaist tradition hide itself? Actually, this shows the limits of the Dönme power. Otherwise, they would have established a cultural and political hegemony. It is impossible that they are secretly powerful."

Besides, Şahin argues that such a small group cannot really be dominant in Turkish politics because of the conservative nature of the country: "The Turkish state tradition is Sunni Muslim and at the same time Turkish. When a Jewish person such as Jak Kami entered the parliament, it created a big disturbance. There is such a powerful anti-Semitic tradition." He explains why Dönmes cannot have enormous powers in Turkish politics with a comparison: "Kurds constitute forty percent of Turkey's population and have the fourth greatest party in the parliament. In addition, they can mobilise masses on the streets. While such a powerful political movement does not have a tiny influence on government policies, not even on the state, it is really absurd to claim that the representatives of two hundred families have extraordinary powers."

Similar to Yakış, Şahin underlines that Dönmes with good qualities have been successful and productive members of the society: “these people came under the spotlight because of their good education, intelligence and excellent skills.” For Şahin, Dönmes historically represented the bourgeoisie, who could appreciate the modernisation movement in the Ottoman Empire. Therefore, after the collapse of the empire, they were accused especially by Islamists: “all moderate liberals and Islamists basically argue that the Ottoman Empire collapsed due to Dönme conspiracies, because this group had the capacity to understand the bourgeois culture.” Şahin refutes the Islamist, right-wing view on Dönmes as follows:

If you are going to defend the Ottoman legacy, you have to find a scapegoat for the collapse. These are Dönmes! Islamists associate this group with the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) and its ongoing secularist, modernist stance. Islamists claim that secularism was brought by this mystic Jewish group, which represents Zionism.

On the contemporary conspiracy theories about Dönmes, Şahin provides a different argument. First, he argues that the left-wing conspiracy theorists such as Soner Yalçın and Yalçın Küçük are not really leftists, as they support the state hegemony: “I do not accept them as leftists. I believe in the libertarian left, and any perspective supporting the state’s political hegemony cannot be leftist.” Second, according to Şahin, globalisation weakens the nation-state structure and creates a hegemony problem today. The left-wing conspiracy theorists in Turkey defend the nation state in this political crisis: “the capital accumulation has increased so much that the system cannot tolerate the military-civil-bureaucratic elite of the nation-state. This creates a hegemony crisis, and the left-wing conspiracy theories accuse Israel or the United States for this.”

Şahin argues that the conspiracy theorists exploit the existing anti-Semitic culture in Turkey for their own political purposes: “to use ethnic or racial explanations to accuse someone is easy and common in the chauvinistic culture of Turkey.” In this regard, the conspiracy theories suffer from a biased understanding of political, economic and social dynamics. They create scaremongering about the Dönme community to protect the state: “to blame all these political failures of the state,

military interventions, cultural degradation, poverty, stupidity on Dönmes is nothing but an attempt to defend the state tradition.” In other words, Dönmes are accused of justifying Turkish state’s political hegemony: “it is not only naivety to claim that Dönmes are responsible for state’s failures or dirty business, it is clearly a deliberate political strategy.” He describes conspiracy theories as a mean of nation-state oppression as follows:

It can be any other minority, not only Jews. It can be Christians in Turkey, Muslims in Yugoslavia. Nation-states manipulate masses with racial or ethnic theories and mobilise them against minorities. It is stereotypically a nation-state policy. It is a historical dynamic. There is nothing to do now, but, at least, we can acquit these ethnic groups, which were accused by states. All races and ethnicities should be freely represented in civil society.

Şahin states that DTP also suffers from conspiracy theories and defines the conspiratorial style a political enemy: “the party does not take them seriously, because there are many conspiracy theories about us.” Then, I reminded Şahin of Musa Anter, a former party member, who had produced anti-Semitic material about Dönmes. He replied that individual members would not really change the institutional thought of the party: “he is a person brought up in the anti-Semitic culture of a Muslim society. His remarks about Dönmes are his personal comments.” Şahin adds that DTP cannot be anti-Semitic, as it is a left-wing movement: “different people in DTP will respond differently, but institutionally the party is against conspiracy theories, because it is composed of leftists, feminists and social democrats.”

Şahin approaches Turkish society and state as conservative and repressive. He proposes that conspiracy theories exploit these aspects by augmenting the ethnic and religious conflict without considering macro structures, such as economics and politics: “their analyses do not take into consideration the social, economic and historical facts and stick with a utopia.” For Şahin, this deliberate misrepresentation serves the interests of the repressive nation-state mechanisms. Therefore, he opposes this political system and proposes a more democratic vision of Turkey:

Turkish state with its rightist background, collaborating with international finance institutions and drug cartels, cannot really respond to the needs of the contemporary society. Turkey needs a democratic constitution and a new organisation. The rest are political lies to hide this reality.

It could be concluded that DTP sympathises with the minority situation of Dönmes and rejects the conspiratorial accounts as texts feeding the nation-state oppression of minorities. In this sense, DTP finds the conspiracy theories contradictory to its pluralistic ideal and relates them to Turkish state conservatism.

8.2.5 The Republican People's Party (Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi: CHP)

The party represents a secular-modernist state ideology, which suggests equality among all citizens regardless of their ethnic and religious identities. It accepts its subjects as modern citizens in a secular-progressive society. CHP, the centre-left of Turkish politics, merges Turkish nationalism with social democracy, liberalism and its own version of secular Islam (see Güneş-Ayata, 2002). It opposes the Islamist and minority movements, which contradict its strict modernist and secular vision. Although I do not have any interviews with CHP, I will shortly talk about my experience with the party.

I made a few calls to the party centre. The party secretaries, who were graduates of political science, helped me. As they had studied political science, I did not have any problems in explaining what my study was about. They told me to wait until they found a party member. Unfortunately, they could not find any respondents on the Dönme discussion. They stated that the party did not take the conspiracy theories on Dönmes seriously. They saw those theories as political pathologies and did not think that they worth an interview. In other words, they did not develop a party opinion on the subject.

It is interesting that although two other parties, DTP and AKP, did not also think that the conspiracy theories on Dönmes are genuine political texts, they at least talked to me about their reflections. However, CHP was not eager to find someone who could summarise the party's understanding of these theories. I would speculate that CHP

was not keen on discussing the identity issues due to its modernist-secular stance. This attitude was observed by Zorlu (1994), who stated that a republican newspaper, very close to the CHP line, refused to publish his article, as they were not really interested in promoting different religious and ethnic identities.

Nonetheless, the party itself is not really distant from conspiratorial narratives. In 2008, after one of the party member's talk in the party headquarters was printed in an Islamic newspaper *Vakit*, CHP accused AKP of spying on them by new technological devices (Şardan, 2008). They evoked the feeling of Watergate and urged AKP to respond to that political scandal. However, it turned out to be a mistake on the part of the CHP member, who had forgotten to turn off his mobile telephone after speaking to a reporter from *Vakit* (ibid). It could be claimed that CHP's modernist-secular stance might have been influential in their unwillingness to talk about the conspiracy theories about a minority, as they are quite receptive on other potential conspiracies.

8.3 Discussion

The political parties responded to the conspiracy theories on Dönmes in a variety of ways. SP's ideology has already been shaped by a conspiratorial perspective. The contemporary accounts have only supported their previous beliefs on Zionist imperialism. Their political approach combines the verses about Jews in the Koran with political analyses. In parallel to the development of anti-Semitism in Europe, which originated from Christianity-Judaism relations, SP's political approach justifies itself through a religious interpretation of Jews. In that sense, SP fuses religious and political analysis and, by doing so, gives a semi-erudite account.

MHP, which also sympathises with the conspiratorial accounts, demonstrates a different standpoint. Unlike SP, which starts and ends its analysis with the conspiracy theories, MHP supports its arguments with the alleged Dönme plots. Although MHP begins with a factual analysis of politics, it ends up with the conspiracy theories. Besides, MHP represents a conservative nation-state viewpoint, which sees the crises of the nation state and globalisation as foreign plots. MHP's state conservatism leads to a defence of the nation-state structures by collaborating

with the conspiracy theories. Accordingly, the MHP respondent does not refer to the conspiracy theories on Dönmes from the early twentieth century. He pragmatically stresses on the current ones.

AKP rejects the conspiracy theories on Dönmes as anti-Semitic pieces, which reflect a jealousy towards the successful community members. The party respondent focuses on a meritocratic view of politics rather than a conspiratorial one. The party refuses the conspiratorial accounts as political pathologies, which do not represent the reality. Nevertheless, the respondent stresses that there may be people in the party, who believe in those theories. He illustrates a liberal point of view, which accepts religion as a personal matter rather than a political one.

DTP also opposes the conspiratorial lines on Dönmes. The party sees them as means to blame minorities and to create artificial tensions among different ethnic and religious groups. The respondent acknowledges that these theories today mainly serve to justify the nation-state repression and anti-democratic policies. Thus, DTP's approach contradicts MHP's defence of the nation-state mechanisms. The party sympathises with the Dönme community, as the party is also accused by conspiracy theories. DTP understands conspiracy theories as a part of a scapegoating mechanism, which obstructs a modern and democratic society ideal. It also rejects conspiracy theories, because they contradict its left-wing stance. In this regard, DTP's response provides a more ideological reading than AKP's liberal approach, which denies the conspiracy theories on the basis of their forged character. Lastly, CHP's refusal of the interview could be read as a part of its ideological stance, which avoids discussions on ethnic and religious differences.

SP is sure that Zionists are conspiring to keep Turkey underdeveloped, and MHP reflects its suspicions on globalisation through conspiratorial accounts. These standpoints share a concern about the contemporary transformations. It could be stated that MHP's and SP's uses of the conspiracy theories on Dönmes are part of their reaction to the contemporary social transformations: "we can see the foreign finger not as a paranoid schizophrenic practice but rather as a holistic attempt to interpret and effect change in a social space that is radically interconnected" (Sutton, 2003: 204). This attitude could be linked with Roisman's (2006: 158) account of the

conspiracy theories in ancient Greece, which functioned to restore order “by placing destabilising and unexpected actions in a logical sequence of cause and effect, and to clarify events that otherwise seem inexplicable and uncontrollable.” Due to its liberal vision and the conspiratorial allegations against the party, AKP rejects the conspiracy theories about Dönmes. DTP also opposes these plots as an aspect of state repression. They share a pluralistic view and welcome ethnic and religious differences as an essential part of a democratic society. Thus, their pluralistic vision contradicts the monistic explanations of the conspiratorial style.

The ontological insecurities of Turkish nationalism about the minorities, particularly about Dönmes, seem to generate a resonant demonological theme in Turkish political culture. SP and MHP’s use of Dönme conspiracies to counter the contemporary transformations and AKP and DTP’s acknowledgement affirm that Turkish political culture has a silent recognition and tacit agreement on Dönme plots. It exists as an unofficial underlying theme and is used in different circumstances. Like the conspiracy literature’s classical themes, such as Illuminati and Freemasonry, Dönmes constitute a social group in Turkey onto which the politics of fear could be attached. The conspiracy theories remain unchallenged, because Dönmes do not respond to those accusations. Hence, the conspiratorial accounts create their own discourses and histories of Dönmes, which at times could be exploited by political parties to gain support. The political parties’ uses of the conspiracy theories on Dönmes provide an account parallel to the theoretical framework of the third chapter, which claims that conspiracy theories produce scapegoats/sacrifices in Girardian sense to relieve the ontological insecurities of a group or a nation.

8.4 Conclusion

The right-wing political parties use the Dönme conspiratorial accounts to justify their reactions to contemporary transformations. It could be stated that their ideological views, which have been challenged by contemporary ambiguity, plurality and multiculturalism, express their alienation through conspiratorial accounts. As Hofstadter (1965: 39) states: “catastrophe or the fear of catastrophe is most likely to elicit the syndrome of paranoid rhetoric”. In parallel, MHP and SP have historically been close to the right-wing circles, which originated the Dönme conspiracy

theories. The parties with liberal and left stances, which do not oppose the current transformations and pluralism, refuse the monistic explanations of the conspiracy theories on Dönmes. The differences among the political parties are to a large extent in line with the attitudes of the readers and the conspiracy theorists, as from the right to the left wing the belief in conspiratorial accounts decrease.

The discussion also demonstrates that the conspiracy theories on Dönmes have not only been a fringe aspect of Turkish politics, which only concerned the marginal political circles, as some of the literature would argue (Pipes, 1999; Robins & Post, 1997; Popper, 1966). They also prevail in mainstream politics. Davis (1969) points out that conspiracy theories help political parties to externalise the fears of the public into an imagined enemy and to propose an agenda to solve it. This picture supports the findings of the discussion in the fourth chapter, which illustrates that the conspiracy theories on Dönmes unravel an ongoing political paranoia about minorities in different contexts.

Like Marx's well-known statement "there is a spectre of communism around Europe", there is a spectre of the omnipotent Dönme/Jew in Turkish politics. Some are scared, some are disgusted, and some do not even want to speak about spectres. In the next chapter, I will discuss the potential reasons for the emergence of conspiratorial accounts in contemporary politics to understand their current popularity on a global level.

Chapter 9. Understanding Conspiracy Theories in Contemporary Politics

9.1 Introduction

The conspiracy theories about Dönmes are linked with international political discourses. The interviews in the seventh and eighth chapters indicate strong links between belief in the conspiracy theories and alienation from the current globalisation processes. Political parties, such as MHP and SP, which take reactionary stances towards contemporary global transformations, are inclined towards the conspiratorial perspective. There were many attributions to the current globalisation process as part of Dönme conspiracies among the readers of the *Efendi* series. Furthermore, the historical evidence in chapter four suggests that the conspiracy theories on Dönmes were adopted from the anti-Semitic tradition in Europe and are part of global anti-Semitism. Previous chapters also claim that the conspiracy theories today fit the definition of the new anti-Semitism. Therefore, the conspiracy theories on Dönmes, albeit originating in Turkey, are strongly intertwined with the general conspiracy literature and international politics.

As these links underline, an effort to understand conspiracy theories would be incomplete without examining their significance in international politics. This chapter will investigate the reasons underlying the contemporary political demand for conspiracy theories on a global level. It will deal with questions such as: why do we see conspiracy theories after every significant event, like the 9/11 attacks or the invasion of Iraq? What aspects of contemporary politics lead to widespread conspiracy theories? What are the social and political factors creating demand for those explanations? How do we account for conspiratorial accounts in current politics?

The chapter will explore the universal applicability of the theoretical framework of the thesis by focusing on contemporary politics. It will inquire about the relevance of the theoretical paradigm to understanding the contemporary significance of conspiracy theories on a global level. In doing so, the chapter aims to help the literature to understand the global dynamics of conspiracy theories better. It will stress the changes in communication technologies and their impacts on politics. In

particular, it will refer to concepts such as Network Society (Castells, 2000; 1996a; 1996b), the politics of fear, and infotainment to underline the significance of conspiracy theories today. It brings these concepts into the discussion, because this thesis describes conspiracy theories as a specific form of political conduit appearing in certain contexts. Thus, the changes in communication technologies and the political implications of this have prime importance for describing the current significance of conspiracy theories. Finally, the chapter will engage in the data from previous chapters, as well as including an analysis of a political speech of Donald Rumsfeld⁷⁷.

By scrutinising the contemporary social and political reasons of conspiracy theories, this chapter will also contribute to the discussion in the academic literature. There are two major views on the social significance of conspiracy theories. The classical perspective, which is shaped mainly by Cold War rhetoric, approaches conspiracy theories as political pathologies of marginal cliques (Pipes, 1999; Robins & Post, 1997; Popper, 1966). They focus on the absurdity of conspiratorial accounts and associate them with political marginalities. The cultural perspective, also being aware of their potential meaninglessness, emphasises cultural and political reasons for conspiratorial accounts (Fenster, 1999; Knight, 2001; Bratich, 2002). It does not only deny these theories, but explains them as social symptoms. This chapter, on one hand, will look at what kind of symptoms conspiracy theories represent for contemporary society. On the other hand, it will investigate the social and political impacts of these theories in parallel to the classical perspective.

The chapter will consist of three sections. First, it will discuss the general characteristics of contemporary politics with a focus on the changes in communication technologies. It will consider the political consequences of these transformations by referring to concepts such as the politics of fear. Second, it will provide examples of this theoretical discussion from the cinematic images after 9/11 and from one of Rumsfeld's key political speeches. Third, it will outline the main points of the discussion and demonstrate how they relate to the Dönme case. It will

⁷⁷ Donald Rumsfeld, an American politician and businessman, was the Secretary of Defence of the United States at the time of speech.

conclude with a brief discussion of the relevance of conspiracy theories to international political discourse today.

9.2 Transformations in Politics and Communication

One of the most comprehensive works on contemporary communication and its social, political and cultural consequences is Castells' *Network Society* thesis. Castells (2000) claims that revolutions in communication technologies have created a new kind of society, which he calls the informational or network society. According to Castells, network society's distinctive characteristic lies in its ability to communicate at an incredible speed regardless of geographical and time distances. He argues that new technologies have changed our experience of time and space: "The emphasis on interactivity between places breaks up spatial patterns of behaviour into a fluid network of exchanges that underlies the emergence of a new kind of space, the space of flows" (ibid, 429). In parallel, the human experience of time is altered: "the network society is characterised by the breaking down of the rhythms, either biological or social, associated with the notion of a life-cycle" (ibid, 476). A simple example of this could be given from a phone call from friends to the writer of this thesis during the course of writing. While the friends were in a different time zone and climate, enjoying the beach, the author was experiencing an English summer in a lonely living-room. This shows the potential of communication technologies to open a space of flows, where different geographies and time zones can communicate instantly and globally.

These technologies have changed the means of production. Information has been turned into a crucial commodity and human intellect alone became the tool of production: "For the first time in history, the human mind is a direct productive force, not just a decisive element of the production system" (Castells, 2000: 31). Castells also suggests that the contemporary political system creates its own reality. Communication technologies and capitalist informationalisation produce a meaning system or a culture without referring to any transcendental beings. Castells (2000: 404) labels this cultural regime as *real virtuality*: "a system in which reality itself (that is, people's material/symbolic existence) is entirely captured, fully immersed in a virtual image setting, in the world of make believe, in which appearances are not

just on the screen through which experience is communicated, but they become the experience.” In other words, the capitalist market circulates its values through new communication means: “value making, under informational capitalism, is essentially a product of the financial market” (ibid, 160). Castells believes that real virtuality denotes a secularised cultural regime, where cultural signs are constantly re-created and manipulated by the political system:

The final step of the secularisation of society follows, even if it sometimes takes the paradoxical form of conspicuous consumption of re-ligion, under all kinds of generic and brand names. Societies are finally and truly disenchanted because all wonders are on-line and can be combined into self-constructed image worlds (Castells, 2000: 406).

Some contemporary theorists echo Castells’ depiction of real virtuality. Hardt and Negri (2001: 347) agree that information technologies have created a society in which the capitalist regime quelled other ideologies: “Communication is the form of capitalist production in which capital has succeeded in submitting society entirely and globally to its regime, suppressing all alternative paths.” In parallel, Baudrillard (2005: 84) contends that the virtual produces its own reality and changes the nature of politics: “Virtual dominates every sphere, there is no politics of virtual, it is virtual politics.” Baudrillard (1995) even claims that the First Gulf War did not take place like the other wars, as the social experience of the war was mediated by media images. He describes a context in which you cannot be for or against real virtuality, because virtual seems to be everything (ibid).

However, real virtuality is not antagonism-free. Since it has transformed and dislocated social and political antagonisms, it lays ground for new conflicts. Castells (1996a; see also 2008) portrays a clash between power of identity and power of flows. He claims that new communication technologies or real virtuality still cannot entirely replace transcendental or eternal cultural codes, because while information flows are global-reaching, most of people’s experiences remain local: “most dominant processes, concentrating power, wealth, and information, are organised in the space of flows. Most human experience and meaning are still locally based” (ibid, 124). Thus, people’s identities serve a legitimate base of reaction against the

contemporary flows of power: "God, nation, family and community will provide unbreakable, eternal codes, around which a counter-offensive will be mounted against the culture of real virtuality. Eternal truth cannot be virtualised. It is embodied in us" (ibid, 66). Castells argues that these religious, ethnic or national identities counter the global flows of power (ibid).

Kinnvall (2004: 743) expresses the reasons for this as follows: "(1) Old ways of getting things done are eliminated, which tends to leave behind old uncertainty; and (2) the structures that identified the community and bound it together are also being eliminated, which has a disintegrative effect." Accordingly, globalisation or real virtuality triggers ontological insecurities of people because of the social uncertainties and ambiguities it imposes (Hermans and Dimaggio, 2007). This creates the reactions of solid identities, as Castells mentioned above, because they provide a ground on which uncertainties of the social world could be dealt. Kinnvall explains this as follows:

My argument is that nationalism and religion supply particularly powerful stories and beliefs (discourses) through their ability to convey a picture of security, of a 'home' safe from intruders. They do this by being portrayed as resting on solid ground, as being true, thus creating a sense that the world really is what it appears to be. The world in this view, 'really' consists of a direct primordial relationship to a certain territory and/or to a certain god. In this way, nationalism and religion, as identity-signifiers, are likely to increase ontological security while minimising existential anxiety (Kinnvall, 2004: 763).

This perspective reiterates the discussion in the previous chapters that describes conspiracy theories as a political conduit among the alienated, because they provide maps of political power through which they re-totalise the world and give ontological securities. For example, as mentioned in the third chapter, reactionary movements based on ethnic/religious identities tend to use conspiracy theories, since these movements represent a belief in an organic state of society and explain the diversions from that ideal by conspiratorial accounts. In other words, they are susceptible to semi-erudition and conspiracy theories. This interpretation also

resonates with the reactions of MHP and SP, which use the conspiratorial accounts on Dönmes to legitimise their solid identities and opposition to globalisation. In this regard, conspiracy theories' current popularity can be due to the antagonism between power of flows and power of identity, as they might be one of the popular political conduits that provide ontological securities. Nonetheless, I do not suggest that all forms of resistances against global flows are conspiratorial. Instead, I claim that the strong identity focus of these movements makes them susceptible to those explanations.

Global flows of communication have also altered the nature of mainstream politics. Castells (1996a) states that media has achieved a greater control over political communication and created an entertainment-information fusion in politics. He refers to this infotainment approach as follows:

To understand the framing of politics by the logic of the media, we must refer to *the overarching principles governing news media: the race for audience ratings, in competition with entertainment; the necessary detachment from politics, to induce credibility* [author's italics]. Only 'bad news,' relating to conflict, drama, unlawful deals, or objectionable behaviour, is interesting news. Since news is increasingly framed to parallel (and compete with) entertainment shows, or sports events, so is its logic. It requires drama, suspense, conflict, rivalries, greed, deception, winners and losers, and, if possible, sex and violence (Castells, 1996a: 321).

Castells (2000; 2008; see also Thompson, 2000) labels contemporary politics 'scandal politics', which communicate to their audience through entertainment techniques. Like Debord (1995), he proposes a politics of spectacle thesis in which politicians and media use scandals as spectacles to win public attention: "The use of scandal politics in and by media as the fundamental weapon utilised by political actors, business interests, and social groups to fight another" (Castells, 2000: 341). Indeed, Castells is not alone on this point about the infotainment aspect of contemporary politics. There is already a literature on the prevalence of infotainment -the fusion of information and entertainment - in today's politics (Altheide, 1997; Altheide et al, 2001; Altheide, 2002; Altheide, 2004; Altheide and Grimes, 2005;

Coleman, 2003; Brants and Niejens, 1998; Baum, 2002; Baum, 2003; Prior, 2003). Altheide, who has made an important contribution to this literature, describes the political effects of infotainment as follows:

The 'infotainment' perspective holds that, for practical reasons, any event can be summarily covered and presented as a narrative account with a beginning, middle, and end... Moreover, as audiences spend more time with these formats, the logic of advertising, entertainment, and popular culture becomes taken for granted as a 'normal form' of communication. Thus, various audiences now find it perfectly sensible to 'cover the world in 60 seconds,' to watch the war 'live,' or to see major social events cast as music videos... This has led to an immense simplification of politics and world events, often cast as a visual signature of complex events (e.g. Staging a 'spontaneous civilian dismantling of a statue of Saddam Hussein) (Altheide, 2004: 294).

Infotainment seems to shape the political communication today and lead to a semi-erudite synthesis between reason and belief in politics. Brants and Neijens (1998: 157) point to the increasing involvement of politicians in infotainment programmes in the Netherlands: "Image and drama are more important than the message and the latter is preferably simple and light-hearted or intimate and laden with emotions." Coleman (2003: 757) suggests that infotainment has created a new form of politics today: "in an age of infotainment politics has become more like a game, with its races, winners, stage-setting spin doctors and war coverage that looks like a video game, and games have become more like politics, with mass voting in reality TV polls, national debates about football managers and high-court dramas about cheating in *Who Wants to Be A Millionaire?*"

The popularity of the video-clip "I Got a Crush... on Obama" could be seen as an example to the increasing presence of infotainment techniques in politics. Despite not being a part of the political campaign of Barack Obama, the internet viral video became very popular and created a great deal of response. One of the shirts used in the video was auctioned for one thousand dollars (BBC, 2008). It led others to post similar videos, such as the one about the Republican Party candidate John McCain. In the United Kingdom, the conservative leader David Cameron has attempted to

attract attention with a YouTube channel, Webcameron. Likewise, the current London mayor Boris Johnson and the Prime Minister Gordon Brown have also posted videos on the internet to catch public attention.

Fear constitutes an important theme in entertainment politics and in shaping public opinion. Furedi (1996; 2007a; 2007b), Massumi (1993), Hubbard (2003), Ellin (1999; 2001), Tudor (2003) point to the prevalence of fear in contemporary society. According to Furedi (2007b: 657-658), "fear today has a free floating dynamic", because it "can migrate freely from one problem to the next without any causal and logical connection." Hubbard (2003) suggests that fear, advertised through media, is deeply embedded in society today, and it shapes social practices. He demonstrates that middle-class people chose to go to cinemas outside the city centre, as they are scared of potential threats (ibid). In this regard, fear contributes to geographical and social fragmentation in society. Ellin (2001) proposes that fear leads to a retribalisation, increasing nostalgia and escapism. It diminishes public confidence of meeting in common places and interacting: "the rising tide of the fear has transformed most public spaces into controlled and guarded places" (ibid, 876).

Altheide (2006: 83) claims that media promotes politics of fear through infotainment techniques to sell news: "The discourse of fear is constructed through evocative entertainment formats that promote visual, emotional, and dramatic experience that can be vicariously lived, shared, and identified with by audience members." His research (Altheide, 1997) illustrates that fear has become a more prevalent theme in the last decades in America. Elsewhere, Altheide (2002) argues that corporate media attempts to control audiences by fear as an entertainment format. Infotainment and fear seem to be popular themes in current political communication, which has been developed by new information technologies and organised by capitalism. Conspiracy theories, constituting a fusion of belief and reason, fear and entertainment, fit contemporary entertainment politics. They provide entertaining-informative stories or spectacular politics for people, who are mesmerised by the rapid transformations. Therefore, they could be seen as the mirror images and representations of prevalent themes of mainstream politics today. Fenster explains that as follows:

Indeed, if scandal and trust are the measure of politics, and fear of the loss of employment, personal control, and identity in a continually transforming economy and shrinking civil society saturates the everyday lives of a considerable portion of the public, then conspiracy theory constitutes a profoundly satisfying politics. It not only explains the victory of seemingly demonological forces and the emptiness and inaccessibility of politics, but it also establishes a particular logic based on the interpretation of the phenomena within an explanatory narrative form that is profoundly sceptical of dominant discourse (Fenster, 1999: 72).

However, this is not enough to explain the contemporary demand for conspiracy theories. In order to understand their current prevalence, some examples from the media representations of politics, such as Rumsfeld's well-known speech on unknown unknowns, will be discussed in the next section. In this way, individuals' receptivity to fear and conspiracy theories today will be investigated in more detail.

9.3 Entertainment Politics: Enjoy Unknown Unknowns!

Contemporary similarities between popular culture and politics could be analysed as a symptom of infotainment politics. Rogin (1987: 296) acknowledges this similarity by focusing on films: "Movies make political demonology visible in widely popular and influential terms. They not only have a power normally denied the word alone; they also show us what we are talking about. Movies provide more than additional evidence about demonology; they speak to the fundamental countersubversive impulse to ingest historical, physical, and personal reality." Likewise, in this section I will attempt to catch glimpses of the politics of fear/scandals/entertainment mainly by surveying the relation between films and politics.

The 9/11 terrorist attacks produced almost identical images to the film *Fight Club*. In parallel, the United States army hired script-writers to identify new potential terrorist threats. The famous 9/11 conspiracy theory *Loose Change*'s creator became a script writer for Hollywood (Furedi, 2007; also see Sales, 2006). Meeuf (2006) comments that contemporary politics is wide open to fantasies, and therefore we can see similarities between political expressions and popular cultural products. This

incongruity between reality and entertainment format could be observed in responses to 9/11:

On September 12, CNN titled its coverage 'The Day After' (which was also the title of the well-known 1980s made-for-TV disaster movie). NBC sported the slogan 'America Strikes Back' - based, of course on the Star Wars trilogy. Meanwhile the FBI enlisted the television show America's Most Wanted to help in the hunt for terrorists (Spigel, 2004: 4-5).

Adorno and Horkheimer (1997) also spotted the increasing resemblance between the televisual image and reality in the following manner:

Real life is becoming undistinguishable from the movies. The sound film, far surpassing the theatre of illusion, leaves no room for imagination or reflection on the part of the audience, who is unable to respond within the structure of the film, yet deviate from its precise detail without losing the thread of the story, hence film forces its victims to equate it directly with reality (Adorno and Horkheimer, 1979: 126-127).

Adorno and Horkheimer claim that people are reduced to the capitalist formula of producer at work and consumer at home because of the pervasiveness of mechanical logic, pragmatism and bureaucratisation in social life (ibid, 147). Under these enlightened mechanisms of control, people imitate the forms in films, and social life becomes indistinguishable from movie scripts. In other words, Adorno and Horkheimer consider the resemblance of social life to films as an indicator of the sophisticated social control mechanisms: "In the culture industry this imitation finally becomes absolute. Having ceased to be anything but style, it reveals the latter's secret: obedience to the social hierarchy" (ibid, 131). Like Castells or Hardt and Negri, they point to a fusion of reality and entertainment while acknowledging this convergence as a symptom of high social control.

In a similar vein, Baudrillard (2006: 87) argues that the United States actually fantasised about its own destruction through popular cultural products: "those who live by the spectacle will die by the spectacle. Do you want to acquire power through

the image? Then you will perish by the return of the image.” Zizek (2002) stresses how the attack was anticipated in blockbuster movies. Another example of entertainment politics could be given from Donald Rumsfeld’s famous political speech, in which he legitimised the Iraqi invasion by claiming the existence of weapons of mass destruction:

Reports that say that something hasn't happened are always interesting to me, because as we know, there are known knowns; there are things we know we know. We also know there are known unknowns; that is to say we know there are some things we do not know. But there are also unknown unknowns - the ones we don't know we don't know (Rumsfeld cited in Steyn, 2003).

Known knowns are things that we know, such as that we can clone a sheep. Known unknowns are the ones that we are aware that we still do not know, e.g. we do not know if we can clone a human or not. Both stances propose a knowing subject, who can analyse the confines of his/her knowledge; s/he has a sense of control and an ability to identify what s/he knows. However, unknown unknowns refer to a completely different scenario. We are not aware of the things that we do not know, which means that we do not know the dangers we might be facing, and we do not have any control over the situation. It refers to a fantasy scenario, whose horrors should be imagined by each individual differently, because they are not there concretely. For the same reason, according to Rumsfeld “the absence of evidence is not an evidence of absence”. Furedi (2007) remarks that the concept is a mystification, because it means that we cannot identify what is the problem; we are not aware of what we do not know, but we are going to do something about it. In this respect, Rumsfeld’s speech is an example of the infotainment fusion of politics and fear.

It could be argued that the unknown unknown rhetoric exercises the entertainment principle of suspense through which a perverse element will be revealed. We do not know what it is, but there has to be some intrigue, which will be unfolded in the finale as in Hitchcock films:

Hitchcockian narrative obeys the law that the more a situation is somewhat *a priori*, familiar or conventional, the more it is liable to become disturbing or uncanny, once one of its constituent elements begins to 'turn against the wind'... The staging and editing of the suspense serve to draw the audience's attention to the perverse element. The film's movement invariably proceeds from landscape to stain, from overall shot to close-up, and this movement invariably prepares the spectator for the event (Bonitzer, 1992: 23).

Indeed, the social fantasy of the unknown unknowns in contemporary politics corresponds to the McGuffin object in Hitchcock films, which "is an 'irrelevant' object, a 'nothing at all' around which the action turns (Dolar, 1992: 44). The joke that gave it its name is as follows:

'What is the package on the rack?'

'It's a McGuffin.'

'What is it for?'

'To kill the lions on the Highlands.'

'But there are no lions on the Highlands' (Dolar, 1992: 44)⁷⁸.

The McGuffin object is basically an empty signifier, an object which may not even have material existence. Regardless of this insignificance, it has a key role in the story. Like unknown unknowns, we do not know the content of McGuffin: "the micro-films in *North by Northwest*, the plans for aeroplane machines in *The Thirty-Nine Steps* (the plans that we never see), the encoded melody of *The Lady Vanishes* (the immaterial object that has to be entrusted to the voice and to the memory)" (ibid, 44). It could be argued that Rumsfeld's unknown unknowns function as the McGuffin object, being an empty signifier, an irrelevant thing, which gives meaning

⁷⁸ The McGuffin object could also be used to understand conspiracy theories many of which do not have empirical reality but political significance. One of the readers of the Efendi series used a McGuffin object in the following manner:

"Samet: 'We see Dönmes in every political context. Erdoğan, the Prime Minister of Turkey, before starting an operation in Iraq, asks permission from the United States. Related... He attacks northern Iraq, but he cannot do anything about Barzani... Why? Because there is a religious connection.'

Türkey: 'What is its connection with Dönmes?'

Samet: 'Whatever, isn't what I said true? Did you hear anything bad about Barzani?'"

to the whole plot of contemporary politics. Therefore, I would like to quote the role of unknown unknowns interchangeably with the McGuffin object as follows:

The McGuffins [unknown unknowns] signify only that they signify, they signify the signification as such; the actual content is entirely insignificant. They [unknown unknowns] are both at the core of the action and completely irrelevant; the highest degree of meaning – what everybody is after – coincides with an absence of meaning. The object itself is a vanishing point, an empty space; it does not need to be shown or to be presented at all... an evocation by words is enough. Its materiality is inessential; it suffices that we are merely told of its existence (Dolar, 1992: 45).

In parallel, Derrida (2003) stresses the feeling of suspense after the September 11 attacks. He contends that today we fear a potential terror not of the past but of the future, i.e. we fear the worst yet to come. We experience suspense through expecting a more powerful future attack: "Traumatism is produced by the future, by the to come, by the threat of the worst to come, rather than by an aggression that is 'over and done with'" (ibid, 97). It could be suggested that the trauma of the events like 9/11 and the mystification of the unknown unknowns reflect an entertainment use of suspense that holds spectators/citizens tight in their seats. In other words, spectators/citizens follow politics of fear with a sense of enjoyment. When Rumsfeld announced the theory of unknown unknowns, the response of the crowd was a big laugh, not a critical discussion.

Zizek (1992: 223) argues that the viewer actually desires the bad guy to be annihilated, and that extermination is enjoyable, since the punishment of the transgression of the law increases the feeling of community. He declares that the sense of community is intrinsic in fantasies of transgressing normality: "The deepest identification which 'holds a community together' is not so much identification with the Law, which regulates its 'normal' everyday circuit as, rather, *identification with the specific form of transgression of the Law, of its suspension* (in psychoanalytic terms, with the specific form of enjoyment)" (ibid, 225). The narrative of fear draws on the transgression of law, as it is "built around a balance that is broken through a traumatic event, a murder, and is in the end established again" (Dolar, 1992: 134).

Similarly, Rumsfeld's speech employs the same scenario to rationalise the Middle Eastern policies of the United States. Rumsfeld justifies the policies through fear narratives with the promise that spectators will enjoy the end product of annihilating the evil. The speech basically relieves the spectators/citizens' tension by exteriorising a necessary evil, who will be punished soon. In that sense, the unknown unknowns speech could be seen as a product of infotainment politics, because it echoes entertainment techniques such as suspense and fear. It could also be claimed that contemporary mainstream politics makes use of fear to manipulate the public and functions similar to conspiracy theories by utilising anxiety and its enjoyment. Indeed, both contemporary politics and conspiracy theories provide certain comfort and enjoyment for their believers. Žizek (1989: 31) talks about the difficulty of interrupting people's ideological fantasies due to this enjoyment factor. He claims that one who attempts to annul the difference between the reality and conspiracy will be attacked by those who find comfort in those fantasies.

This enjoyment could be labelled as surplus-enjoyment, the pleasure "generated by the presence of the opposite of pleasure, that is, pain" (Žizek, 1997: 47). Surplus-enjoyment exists as pain's reversal: "Pain generates surplus enjoyment via the magic reversal-into-itself by means of which the very material texture of our expression of pain (the crying voice) gives rise to enjoyment." Žizek gives an example from love poetry in which verses about the loss of a beloved provide a certain artistic pleasure as a defining aspect (*ibid*). Therefore, people's visits to film theatres to see aesthetic ways of annihilation, or their tendency to believe unknown unknowns, could be understood by the surplus-enjoyment principle. In both examples, people are led to fantasise or to think about their own possible annihilation. Hitchcock maintains that: "people like to go to my films to be scared and later on go out and giggle about it".

Dean (2002: 102) suggests that conspiracy theories provide surplus enjoyment, because they represent aesthetic ways of transgressing the law: "conspiracy theory is necessarily an expression of pain, of the violation of a body politic (be it configured territorially, ideationally, or ethnically) or a body that stands in for the body politic... Conspiracy writing, especially in the exuberance of its interpretations and associations, seizes a pleasure from the pain caused by the conspiracies it

documents...” It could be claimed that surplus-enjoyment plays an important role in the demand for conspiratorial lines.

To sum up, contemporary politics tends to manipulate fear and its surplus-enjoyment through new communication means. It is hard to challenge those views, and it is easy for politicians to use such frames. Thus, like in the case of Rumsfeld, they may divert the attention from what is really at stake and use them as social control mechanisms, as Castells, Adorno and Horkheimer previously stressed. In this political and cultural environment, conspiracy theories provide similar narratives. They are the mirror images of the contemporary politics of scandals, fear and entertainment. Therefore, while politics resembles horror films, conspiracy theories’ popularity rises.

9.4 Conspiracy Theories Today

The discussion proposes a couple of points about the contemporary prevalence of conspiracy theories. First of all, contemporary society experiences rapid transformations that are characterised by the revolutions in communication technologies. These transitions influence societies on a global level and create new complexities and ambiguities. Political/social knowledge, everything that is taken for granted in society, is subject to changes, which generates a ‘postmodern’ gap in people’s cognitive maps. As explained in the first chapter, these voids create ontological insecurities and social demand for alternative explanations. Conspiracy theories fill those gaps by providing unconventional ways of understanding the world.

Melley (2000; 2002) claims that the decline in human agency is the main reason behind the success of conspiracy theories today. He thinks that contemporary society’s complexity diminishes the self-integrity of individuals. Melley (2002: 62) calls this ‘agency panic’, an anxiety about a loss of autonomy and self-control. A conspiracy theory, in this context, protects the diminishing self-integrity by its tendency to explain or map everything. Similarly, Spark (2001: 57) describes this summoning aspect of conspiracy theories as people’s attempts to respond to the current social ambiguity: “The sudden visibility of the contingent therefore suggests

a reason to account for the swift rise in popularity of conspiracy theories in the 1990s, namely as popular attempts to re-conjure a lost totality, and cope with the randomness which now seems to propel the world” (also see Sutton, 2003; Wexler and Havers, 2002).

In a similar way, this thesis illustrates that the conspiracy theories on Dönmes become widespread in times of rapid social transformations. The two periods when the conspiracy theories about Dönmes were prevalent coincide with two transitional periods in Turkey. They attempted to explain ambiguities in those periods through alleging links between people and events to provide cognitive maps. Moreover, the interviews with the *Efendi* series’ readers acknowledge that apolitical people, who do not have definite cognitive maps about politics and who have rather ambiguous perceptions of politics, tend to be influenced by the conspiracy theories. Indeed, all apolitical respondents were convinced by the *Efendi* series’ claims, which might show that conspiratorial accounts could easily convince people without clear social/political cognitive maps.

Secondly, the current social transformations alienate people and lead to resistance movements based on traditional identities as Castells explains (1996a). These groups present reactionary stances, usually a return to an organic state of society. They tend to fuse the beliefs of their identity (e.g. Islamic fundamentalists or Militias) with political reasoning. This often produces a semi-erudite political rhetoric, which coincides with conspiratorial explanations. Accordingly, these groups are likely to use conspiracy theories to explain the shift from the natural state of their ideal societies to the current evil one. In this process, conspiracy theories provide suitable conduits to blame secret groups for plotting social, religious degradation. Thus, today the alienated use conspiracy theories to make themselves heard. West and Sanders express this as follows:

In a variety of ways, the subalterns... mime the powers that they suspect. This should come as no surprise, for, as they reveal the ideological nature of transparency claims, these people express their own ideologically informed views of power- views that re-present the world as they experience and understand it... In any case, they adorn the reality that they purport to

describe with masks no more, and no less, constructed than those that they seek to tear off the inchoate face of reality (West and Sanders, 2003: 17).

There are many examples of that use of conspiracy theories by the repressed within West and Sanders' (2003) edited book *Transparency and Conspiracy*. They demonstrate the ways in which the oppressed in different contexts, such as in Indonesia (Schrauwers, 2003; also Burhanuddin, 2007), the United States (Hellinger, 2003; Brown, 2003; Harding and Stewart, 2003), South-Korea (Kendall, 2003), Nigeria (Bastian, 2003), Tanzania (Sanders, 2003), Mozambique (West, 2003) and Montserrat (Skinner, 2001), use conspiratorial and occult perspectives. Likewise, many works on conspiratorial literature take groups or people that disapprove mainstream politics, such as blacks (Simmons and Parsons, 2005; Sasson, 1995; Quinn, 2002), Militias (Fenster, 1999; Fields, 2002), Patriot movement (James, 2001), the Arabic world (Salam), Greeks and Albanians during the NATO bombing of Yugoslavia (Brown and Theodossopoulos, 2003), men who are negatively influenced by the adverse experiences of deindustrialisation in South Africa (Niehus and Jonsson, 2005), Islamists in Indonesia (Lim, 2005), or the extreme right in France (Quinn, 2001), as examples for different uses of conspiratorial beliefs. Not surprisingly, all these groups/people, in one way or another, react to contemporary transformations. Conspiracy theories appoint scapegoats to justify these reactions as well as to relieve the ontological insecurities of the contemporary politics.

On this point, the Dönme case also provides a good example. The political parties MHP and SP, which defend solid identities of Turkish nationalism and Islamism, utilise the conspiratorial accounts to justify their reactions to contemporary social transformations. Similarly, the interviews with the *Efendi* series' readers note that the respondents who embrace these Turkish nationalist or Islamist identities are all convinced by the conspiracy theories. The use of the conspiratorial accounts to voice reactions of solid, traditional identities also affirms the theoretical assumption of the third chapter, which suggests that conspiracy theories could envisage scapegoats to delegitimise political systems. Therefore, the groups and people that react against existing political systems could pragmatically use those narratives, which was also the case in the discussion of the *Efendi* series in the media.

Thirdly, there is a new shift in mainstream politics towards the entertainment format. Like the prevalence of conspiratorial accounts in marginal movements, mainstream politics is also full of semi-erudite narratives. In other words, the new focus on scandals and disasters in contemporary mainstream politics brings it closer to conspiratorial accounts. Rogin's (1987: 20) account of the United States former president Ronald Reagan provides an example of this argument: "By responding to typecasting that either attracted or repelled him, by making active efforts to obtain certain roles and to escape others, Reagan merged his on- and offscreen identities. The confusion between life and film produced *Ronald Reagan*, the image that has fixed our gaze." Rogin suggests that the subversives' use of conspiracy theories is a mirror image of entertainment politics (ibid, 284). According to Huang (2007: 162), conspiracy theories become mainstream through taking part in entertainment and literary culture. Nelson (2003), in a similar fashion, identifies conspiracy theories as a Hollywood trope for system through which resistance to totalising systems could be set. Stempel et al. (2007), who conducted 1010 telephone surveys on 9/11 conspiracy theories in the United States, find that beliefs in conspiracy theories are parallel to the differences among mainstream political parties. They suggest that these accounts become a routine part of mainstream politics (ibid).

In parallel, Knight (2008) proposes that conspiratorial accounts become a part of mainstream politics today by showing the similarities between 9/11 conspiracy theories and the official responses, i.e. the framing of the Bush administration. He claims that both the conspiracy theories and official responses envisage a Manichean order between good and bad: "The mainstream discourse used to explain 9/11 and justify the need for a war on terror is marked out by a tendency toward apocalypticism and heated exaggeration; a sense of urgent crisis and imminent threat to a specifically American way of life from an all pervasive hidden enemy; the portrayal of America as an exceptional victim; the reassertion of traditional American values and a call to national unity in response; a Manichean insistence on dividing the world into Them and Us; the demand that America lead an epic to-the-death fight against plotters; the casting of all blame onto the enemy; and the portrayal of the enemy as completely alien, inhuman, all-powerful, and, above all, evil" (ibid, 180). Accordingly, Knight sees 9/11 conspiracy theories as an almost inevitable counter-reaction to the official accounts (ibid, 181).

Similarly, this thesis focuses on the influence of the widespread conspiracy theories on mainstream politics. The conspiratorial explanations about Dönmes seem to be prevalent themes in contemporary Turkish culture and mainstream politics. The Dönme themed conspiracy books are proven to be best-sellers. The interviews with the mainstream political parties show that all of them are aware of these conspiracy theories. Moreover, the conspiracy theories on Dönmes, as the frame analysis of the *Efendi* series unveils, use infotainment techniques to reach a wider audience. One of the most apparent aspects of this lies in the series' attempts to allege Dönme identities to well-known people and celebrities. In this sense, the conspiracy theories afford very suitable themes for scandal politics that could entertain masses. The infotainment aspect could explain the evident popularity of Yalçın Küçük and Soner Yalçın, as both writers use similar infotainment techniques to allege Dönme origins of well-known people. It could be inferred that the infotainment aspect helps to move the Dönme conspiracy theories to mainstream politics, because the marginal right-wing groups' ongoing conspiracy theories on the topic for almost a hundred years have never gone beyond the boundaries of those circles. Therefore, the contemporary prevalence of the conspiracy theories on Dönmes in Turkey seems to draw parallel to the current entertainment format of politics.

Fourthly, the extensive use of fear in both entertainment politics and conspiratorial accounts underline an inclination to social control. By threatening the subject with potential political disasters, they justify an increased social control. The pre-emptive war against Iraq, which was legitimised on the 'unknown unknowns' claim, may be seen from that perspective. While it prioritised a semi-erudite belief and fear regarding homeland security, it provided surplus-enjoyment to audiences. It legitimised state policies and social control through fear. In parallel, the conspiracy theories about Dönmes provide an alert about homeland security by attributing enormous power and deceitful characteristics to the Dönme community. While doing so, different writers warn the public about the concealed dangers of the contemporary transformations and express a need for a shift to the political perspectives they propose. For example, in the interviews with the conspiracy theorists, while Yalçın emphasises the early modernisation period of Turkey, Dilipak is more concerned with the departures from the Islamic nature of the country.

Likewise, MHP and SP use the conspiracy theories to legitimise their political agendas that oppose the contemporary direction of changes in Turkey. Besides, most of the Efendi readers become depoliticized after being convinced of the omnipotent power of Dönmes. As a result, the conspiracy theories on Dönmes demonstrate the social control aspect by attempting to manage the social transformations from a specific perspective and by leading people to a passive stance.

In summary, the discussion suggests a link between contemporary politics and conspiratorial accounts. Conspiracy theories are not pathological attempts to understand the political reality but rather mirror images of mainstream politics. It could be proposed that conspiracy theories are a continuation of politics with semi-erudite means. The classical approach on conspiracy theories fails to see the societal symptoms these theories reflect by focusing predominantly on paranoid aspects. This chapter agrees with the contemporary perspective, which understands conspiracy theories as social symptoms. However, it should be noted that the chapter does not negate the fact that conspiracy theories are most often imaginary scenarios.

9.5 Conclusion

'He still says he saw the beastie. It came and went away again an' came back and wanted to eat him--'

'He was dreaming.'

Laughing, Ralph looked for confirmation round the ring of faces. The older boys agreed; but here and there among the little ones was the dubiety that required more than rational assurance.

'He must have had a nightmare.'

More grave nodding; they knew about nightmares.

'He says he saw the beastie...'

'But there isn't a beastie!'

'He says in the morning it turned into them things like ropes in the trees and hung in branches. He says will it come back tonight?'

'But there isn't a beastie!'

There was no laughter at all now and more grave watching...

Jack seized the conch

'Ralph is right of course. There isn't a snake-thing. But if there was a snake we'd hunt it and kill it. We're going to hunt pigs and get meat for everybody. And we'll look for the snake too-'

'But there isn't a snake'

'We'll make sure when we go hunting' (Golding, 1984: 32).

The chapter describes the relevance of conspiracy theories in contemporary politics according to four main characteristics. First, the current social transformations have generated an ambiguous social and political environment in which people do not have clear ideas or cognitive maps about the political system. This promotes a suitable ground for conspiratorial explanations to fill the gaps in people's cognitive maps. Second, new changes have alienated some groups, which use conspiratorial accounts to voice their discontent. Third, there is a popularisation of the infotainment approach in mainstream politics. In addition to the use of the alienated people, mainstream politicians also produce conspiracy-like narratives through fusing reason with belief. Fourth, entertainment politics makes an ample use of fear that brings mainstream politics closer to the conspiracy theory tradition, because they both exploit social and political insecurities/fears to establish social control or re-create the destructed social harmony. The Dönme discussion and Rumsfeld's speech provide cases that support these points.

William Golding's novel (1984), *The Lord of the Flies*⁷⁹ provides an analogy about the use of fear to enforce social control. The book summarises a change in political leaders and attitudes, from Ralph to Jack or from democracy to totalitarianism. In the story, Jack establishes his totalitarian regime through using an unfounded fear (a McGuffin object if you wish) that he does not even believe. That fear gives him the

⁷⁹ In brief, *The Lord of the Flies* is a story of a group of children, who are shipwrecked on a desert island. They establish a social order until they are saved by the grown-ups. The main figures signify different political attitudes: Chief Ralph, opts for a civilised order and democracy; Piggy, the scientist figure giving ideas on how to be saved and lighting the fire by his own specs, and Jack, the hunter, represents a fascistic figure. After the group starts to believe in a beast, which does not exist, Jack exploits this fear to establish his order with the promise of food and security. He becomes a fascistic chief, who leads the group to kill Piggy and Ralph. Diken and Laustsen (2006: 431) compare Jack's coming to power to security obsession and consumerism of contemporary society: "Lord of the Flies is an allegory of a bio-political or, better, a post-political society that elevates 'security' to its most sacred principle of organization in the form of a permanent state of exception and tries to combine with consumerism (so that we need security to be able to consume and need to consume to be able to feel secure)."

political means to establish an entertainment-oriented (by meat feasts and parties), fear-dominated totalitarian regime. Ralph's (democratic-progressive) inability to provide a satisfying answer to fear about the beast and Jack's ability to promote surplus-enjoyment leads Jack's fascistic coup to success. The story signifies the juxtaposition of politics of fear and entertainment politics, which dominate with surplus enjoyment to legitimise a totalitarian order. Hence, the book can be taken as an example of the relevance of surplus-enjoyment, politics of fear/entertainment, social control and conspiratorial accounts. Unfortunately, the extensive use of fear can lead to violent consequences, as depicted in the *Lord of the Flies*.

Chapter 10. Conclusion

The conspiracy theories about Dönmes offer an excellent case study by which to understand the social and political significance of the conspiratorial style. They link well with the general conspiracy literature, as they translate the stereotypical anti-Semitic conspiracy theory themes to Turkish cultural context. The audience, the conspiracy theorists, the political parties, and the others who contributed to the debate on Dönmes, are all inclined towards the general conspiracy literature. The previous chapter also demonstrates the relevance of the conspiracy theories to both mainstream and marginal politics on international level. Symptomatically, the contemporary Dönme discussion is in tune with the debates on new anti-Semitism. Furthermore, the conspiracy theories about Dönmes afford a historically significant conspiratorial theme, which has attracted public attention in Turkey in different periods. Their ability to reach the Turkish public makes it easier to trace the social and political significance of the topic.

Throughout this study, there have been a few important themes that recurrently came into view. The first four points concern the ways of studying conspiratorial accounts while the rest are about the social, political and methodological characteristics of conspiracy theories. First of all, conspiracy theories constitute a specific political narrative style that is evolved historically. Some authors call it conspiracism (Pipes, 1997) or paranoid style (Hofstadter, 1965). Second, there is a need to develop a holistic approach that considers the methodological, social and political characteristics of conspiracy theories in an interrelated manner. Third, Adorno's concept of semi-erudition provides an efficient ground on which these three aspects of conspiracy theories can be investigated, because it explains the social and political significance of a text in relation to its methodological characteristics. Fourth, the academic literature on the subject needs to be developed through empirical analyses. In response to that, the study conducted empirical research to verify its claims.

Fifth, conspiracy theories appear in times of political vacuum and respond to ontological insecurities. They relieve feelings of ambiguity and ontological insecurities by summarizing the reality from a specific viewpoint that accuses certain people/groups for adversities. Sixth, conspiracy theories affirm certain political

standpoints, as they see the world strictly from a specific perspective. They portray a Manichean order that strictly distinguishes between good and evil. Seventh, they are totalitarian explanations, which impose a certain viewpoint. They discourage alternative explanations and impose social control. Eighth, discontented groups tend to use conspiracy theories, because these accounts help them to delegitimize existing order. Fundamentalist and reactionary movements, which offer a return to an organic harmonious state of society, utilise conspiracy theories to accuse their opponents of hindering the harmonious order. Ninth, conspiracy theories are not only used by marginal movements but also constitute a part of the mainstream politics currently. Their political style, which provides simplified, scandalous accounts, fit the infotainment style of the mainstream politics. Tenth, there are basic qualitative differences between left-wing and right-wing conspiracy theories, as they scapegoat according to distinct criteria and seek justification in different sources. Eleventh, the credibility of conspiracy theories is increased when they provide evidence from an alleged insider, because this is seen as a crucial mark of authenticity.

To start with, as could be seen in the history of anti-Semitic conspiracy theories, conspiratorial accounts constitute a specific political narrative style. They do not only share similar ways of narrating politics but also form a tradition and political style. For that reason, the conspiratorial tradition accumulates different themes about different groups throughout history, e.g. Freemasonry, communists, Jews, Illuminati etc. The different uses of *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, as mentioned in chapter three, affirm that conspiracy theories refer to a historical political tradition rather than being eccentric non-linear narratives. The interviews with the conspiracy theorists, conspiracy readers, and political parties, and the frame analysis of the *Efendi* series, also demonstrate that people often link the conspiracy theories about Dönmes with the stereotypical themes from the conspiracy tradition/literature rather than just focusing on the issues concerning Dönmes. The conspiracy theorists, political parties (the ones rejecting the conspiratorial accounts) and the *Efendi* series associate the community with a global Jewish-dominated conspiracy network. Besides, many *Efendi* readers are directed to learn more about the general conspiracy theory literature.

Second, there is a need for a threefold approach that considers the methodological, social and political aspects of conspiratorial theories. In that way, conspiracy theories' historical tradition and social/political functions could be explored in a holistic manner. However, the academic literature has not provided such a comprehensive perspective. It reveals three main perspectives, namely the internalist, the classical and the cultural approaches. The internalist perspective stresses the methodological and epistemological reliability of conspiratorial accounts. Its discussion centres on how trustworthy conspiracy theories are as explanatory models. The debate is limited by methodological concerns and lacks an emphasis on the social and political significance of these accounts. The classical and cultural approaches particularly focus on these deserted areas. The classical approach mainly explores the political impacts of conspiratorial accounts. It often associates them with political marginalities and repudiates conspiracy theories as political anomalies. The cultural stance, in contrast, understands conspiracy theories as social symptoms and explores their relevance to society. The perspective refuses the classical approach's pathologisation of conspiracy theories.

These three standpoints focus exhaustively on one of the main aspects of conspiratorial accounts: the internalists analyse the methodology, the cultural approach investigates the social significance, and the classical perspective emphasises the political impacts. The boundaries among the three approaches reflect the main deficiency of the academic literature, as they eventually negate each other. In other words, the debates in these perspectives are not informed by each other and give a rather fragmented picture on the subject. For example, the contributions to the internalist debate fail to acknowledge the importance of the social and political implications of conspiracy theories and do not provide a systematic evidence about the conspiracy literature. Having acknowledged that problem, this work dwells on these three approaches comparatively to develop a holistic viewpoint.

The conversations with the conspiracy theorists confirm the relevance of a holistic, threefold approach in delineating the conspiratorial tradition, as these theorists' arguments and self-presentations strongly relate to the methodological tools they use. They justify their political identities and claims by their methods. The left-wing theorists rationalise their modern-secular stance with scientific rigour: Küçük

develops a scientific meta-theory, and Yalçın documents the existence of Dönmes in top positions. Dilipak, as an Islamist, rejects these theories on the grounds that they deny the metaphysical reality and dwells in a more religiously-informed interpretation of the community. The frame analysis of the *Efendi* series also highlights the need for a threefold approach, as its methodological choices and literary style legitimise its political content.

Third, the thesis uses Adorno's (1992) concept of semi-erudition to provide a perspective that explains conspiracy theories' methodological characteristics in relation to their social and political significance. It essentially proposes that conspiracy theories are semi-erudite explanations that consist of a fusion of belief and reason. That is to say, conspiratorial accounts are biased on certain beliefs, which they try to prove by reason. For example, providentialism is a semi-erudite narrative like conspiratorial accounts, because it explains empirical reality according to a divine foresight or interposition.

The methodological semi-erudition of conspiracy theories shapes their social significance and political impacts. First, because they are centred on a certain belief, they interpret the word strictly from a particular perspective/identity. In that way, conspiracy theories affirm the identities on which they are centred. As Jameson (1992) also mentions, they provide cognitive maps by offering simple, unambiguous pictures of society in which an individual can easily locate himself/herself. Therefore, they can relieve ontological insecurities and clarify ambiguities by reducing or simplifying reality into a text. Political movements, which have dogmatic definitions about the natural state of society, often use conspiracy theories, as these theories' semi-erudite character allows them both to explain the world strictly from a specific standpoint and to blame an imagined evil hindering the attainment of the ideal society. Second, conspiracy theories seem to draw boundaries around individuals' agency to interpret, as they explain reality according to predefined rules and beliefs. They might enforce social control over individuals by positing theories that defy individual agency: i.e. conspiracy theories provide essentialist narratives that nourish individual passivity and conformity.

The Girardian theory of sacrifice supports the semi-erudition perspective in understanding conspiracy theories. Girard (1995) contends that society is generated over a sacred symbol, a sacrifice. He proposes that societies channel their inner tensions to outside by sacrificing a person or an animal, and therefore scapegoating and sacrificing strangers ensure social cohesion (ibid). From that perspective, conspiracy theories could be seen as social constructions that function to keep the cohesion of society, because they confirm certain beliefs and relieve ontological insecurities by envisaging a Manichean order. This thesis understands conspiracy theories as methodologically essentialist texts that relieve ontological insecurities by providing cognitive maps which blame people or groups for any disturbance of social order. In this regard, it considers the methodological essentialism of the phenomenon in relation to its political and social significance. These theoretical suggestions will be discussed in the light of the empirical evidence below.

Fourth, the academic literature lacks empirical analyses, which causes an important problem in understanding the effects of the conspiratorial style. The research addresses that problem by engaging in interviews with the conspiracy theorists, readers and political parties to investigate the reasons of producing conspiratorial accounts and the ways of perception on micro and macro levels. It also conducts a frame analysis on the *Efendi* series to understand the political content and direction of the conspiracy theories. In so doing, the study empirically outlines the social communication process of the conspiracy theories on Dönmes. The empirical analysis provides a test to verify the theoretical assumptions that are outlined above.

Fifth, as proposed in the semi-erudition theory, conspiratorial accounts tend to appear in periods of power vacuum and supply explanations that relieve ontological insecurities and feelings of ambiguity by summarising the reality from a specific viewpoint. Hence, as Smith and Novella (2007: 1314) also show on the conspiracy theories about HIV, conspiracy theorists do not propose any alternative solutions, but exploit anxieties. The historical discussion on the conspiracy theories about the Dönme community reiterates this point. First, there is an apparent distinction between the empirical existence of the group and the conspiratorial social constructions about it. While the group originated in the seventeenth century, the conspiracy theories only started in the beginning of the twentieth century. Moreover,

there are two main historical periods in which the conspiratorial accounts on Dönmes were widespread. In the early twentieth century, the right-wing Islamist groups blamed the community for the moral decay that they associated with modernity. Their theories were utilised by many political groups, which were discontented by the transitions in that period. The conspiratorial works became prevalent again during the 1990s, especially due to the efforts of some left-wing theorists. They accuse the community for the changes brought by contemporary globalisation. Overall, this might suggest that the conspiracy theories about Dönmes voice political discontent in different periods in Turkey. They seem to be versatile political conduits that relieve alienation and ontological insecurities of certain groups.

In the Dönme case, this has been particularly illustrated through Turkish nationalism's fear of dismemberment, i.e. Sèvres paranoia, which leads to a strong suspicion principally of its religious minorities. The Dönme community's fluid identity, due to their crypto-Judaic roots, feeds this paranoia about the religious minorities. In other words, the vagueness of the Dönme identity, combined with the existing ontological insecurities of Turkish politics, gave birth to the question marks about the community, which have been narrated by the conspiracy theories in different contexts. Thus, the conspiracy theories became prevalent subsequent to alleged members' confessions in different periods, as the confessors scratched the ontological insecurities of Turkish nationalism. Although Karakaşzade Rüşdü in the early twentieth century and Ilgaz Zorlu in the 1990s did not want to evoke the conspiratorial rhetoric, they both triggered the tensions about Dönmes by exposing the group to public scrutiny, which led a variety of political circles to manipulate these discussions to affirm their own stances.

Sixth, conspiracy theories justify certain political perspectives, because they see the world strictly from a specific perspective. By describing a Manichean order that strictly distinguishes between good and evil, they affirm the standpoints from which they are written. Historically, different political movements used the Dönme-themed conspiratorial accounts to justify their own agendas. In a similar fashion, the conspiracy theorists' self-presentations in chapter five suggest that they project their political anxieties and affirm their identities through conspiracy theories. They seem to exploit the ontological insecurities of the Turkish society in their ideologically

preferred ways. Islamist Dilipak relies more on the classical right-wing account of the conspiracy theories on Dönmes, i.e. the ontological insecurities about modernisation, while Küçük and Yalçın from a secular leftist perspective focus more on the ontological insecurities of Turkish nationalism. In parallel, Yalçın associates the liberal and Islamist movements with the conspiracy theories about the group in the *Efendi* series and justifies his ideological opposition to these movements through conspiracy theories. Likewise, the interviews with the readers of the *Efendi* series show that almost the half of the readers (n= 15/31) strengthen their standpoints through the conspiratorial accounts. They attribute political adversities to the community's hidden plots in varying degrees. In so doing, they confirm their political stances by blaming Dönmes. This has also been observed in the interviews with the political parties. MHP and SP both justify their ideological stances by explaining their political discontentment as a product of Dönme conspiracies.

Seventh, conspiracy theories function as social control mechanisms that explain social complexity from a specific identity/standpoint. Conspiracy theories could shadow more genuine concerns and enforce others through their biased accounts. Despite being creative texts, they impose social control by prioritising certain beliefs over others. For example, the *Efendi* series, the political parties and the conspiracy theorists describe a Manichean order of Turkish society, which delegitimise any other explanations. In other words, they impose one way of looking at politics that clearly identifies who are good and who are rotten. The discussion in chapter six illustrates that the readers of the conspiracy theories tend to become depoliticised, because they become convinced of the alleged omnipotent character of the Dönme community. These readers' political attitudes seem to be subsumed by the conspiracy theory. This suggests that conspiratorial accounts not only relieve ontological securities but also enforce social control.

Eighth, politically discontented groups tend to justify their opposition through conspiracy theories, because the semi-erudition of these accounts helps them to delegitimise the mainstream politics as well as allowing them to weave a political explanation solely according to their specific ideologies. The reactionary or fundamentalist movements that are marginalised by mainstream politics could retaliate by conspiratorial narratives. The uses of *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*

by several distinct politically marginal groups and individuals through history support this point. The invention and the uses of the conspiracy theories about Dönmes by the far right and the discontented Marxist left in Turkey could also be counted as another example. All these groups used the conspiratorial accounts to legitimise their oppositions. Moreover, MHP and SP in chapter eight provide similar accounts that present how politically discontented groups react to contemporary social transformations through the Dönme-themed conspiratorial accounts. The discussion in chapter nine that explains the reactions of the solid identities to contemporary globalisation also suggests that reactionary, fundamentalist and marginal groups tend to use conspiracy theories to provide reasons for the subversion from their harmonious society definitions. It also supports the seventh point, in terms of revealing how the political groups, which attempt to impose social control against transformations, find haven in the conspiracy tradition.

Ninth, conspiracy theories also take part in mainstream politics nowadays, because their political style fits the simplified, scandalous approach of contemporary infotainment politics. Their semi-erudite fusion of belief and reason draws parallel to the infotainment fusion of entertainment and information. Accordingly, the Dönme case is a prevalent theme in contemporary mainstream politics in Turkey. The interviews with the mainstream political parties illustrate that they are all aware of the conspiracy theories. Moreover, the conspiracy theory books, such as the *Efendi* series, are proven to be best-sellers, and use infotainment techniques to reach a wider audience. The series attributes Dönme identities to well-known people and celebrities to scandalise Turkish politics. The attractiveness of the infotainment aspect is evident in the popularity of Yalçın Küçük and Soner Yalçın, as both writers use similar infotainment techniques. The infotainment aspect seems to characterise the Dönme conspiracy theories' move to mainstream politics, because the marginal right-wing groups' ongoing conspiracy theories for a hundred years have never gone beyond the boundaries of those circles.

In addition, conspiracy theories make themselves heard in contemporary international politics, as every significant event from the Southeast Asian Tsunami to Princess Diana's death seems to be followed up by widespread conspiratorial explanations. The increasing use of fear in politics today, as exemplified in

Rumsfeld's speech, relates the contemporary political discourse to conspiracy theories in terms of channelling fear in public. The fear and suspense of conspiracy theories seem to give a surplus enjoyment like popular cultural products, which may be one of the underlying factors of their popularity. It could be claimed that the preemptive war against Iraq provides surplus-enjoyment to audiences while prioritising a semi-erudite belief and fear about global security. In that way, it justifies state policies and social control through fear. This research proposes that current social transformations such as globalisation produced ontological insecurities, and conspiracy theories compose narratives that can relieve these insecurities with their simple and straightforward explanations. Symptomatically, many groups, such as fundamentalists, retreat into their solid identities and voice their discontent through conspiracy theories, which help them to weave their ideological discontent around a belief system. Meanwhile, mainstream politics and culture welcome semi-erudite forms of explanations as seen in the increasing popularity of scandals and infotainment format in politics. Thus, conspiracy theories are not only confined to fringe politics or reactionary circles but also constitute a theme in mainstream politics.

Tenth, the thesis encounters a significant qualitative difference between the left-wing and the right-wing conspiracy theories. The interviews with the conspiracy theorists, readers and political parties as well as the historical discussion on these theories propose that while the right-wing conspiracy theories tend to emphasise *de facto* characteristics of Dönmes, i.e. their crypto-Judaic identity, the left-wing conspiratorial accounts focus on the *de jure* acts of the community, i.e. their political significance. In that sense, whereas the right wing basically questions their identity, the left wing attributes to them the characteristics of capitalism and sees them as the local branch of international capitalism. For example, among the *Efendi* series' readers, while the right-wingers dislike Dönmes' Judaic origins, the left-wingers problematise them as dominant bourgeois figures. This difference is crystallised in Marx's (1844) treatment of Jewish problem, where he essentially equates the essence of capitalism to the essence of Judaism. This also suggests that left-wing conspiracy theories are rather secular accounts, which scapegoat certain groups or individuals for their alleged evil actions. Hence, the left-wing conspiracy theorists seek

legitimacy in scientific methodologies, although the right-wing theorist does indeed find their emphasis on sciences inadequate.

This fundamental difference produces important consequences. While picking on the same examples, such as Jews, left-wing and right-wing conspiracy theories do not really collaborate. They constitute parallel movements that do not mix. The responses to the *Efendi* series by the Islamists circles characterise this point. They applauded *Efendi 1*, as it echoes their conspiracy theories, but they harshly criticised *Efendi 2*, because it claims that Dönmes lead Islamist movements. The far-right political parties, SP and MHP, do not sympathise with the left-wing theorists despite pragmatically justifying their accounts with some of their points. Likewise, while Küçük and Yalçın give credibility to each other's accounts, they reject Dilipak's Islamist approach. Dilipak does the same the other way around, and the self-presentations of the authors draw boundaries most boldly between left-wing and right-wing approaches.

Eleventh, the discussion acknowledges that the credibility of conspiracy theories is related to their ability to provide evidence from an alleged insider, as this is accepted as an important mark of authenticity. In the Dönme case, Karakaşzade Rüşdü, Ilgaz Zorlu, and to a smaller extent Nazif Özge, were all taken very seriously by the groups that create the conspiracy theories about Dönmes. These insiders' allegations were manipulated in different periods to prove the authenticity of the conspiratorial accounts despite they did not propose conspiracy theories but the necessity for the community to dissolve into the Turkish society (Karakaşzade), the Jewish community (Zorlu) or the unethical actions of the group (Özge). Similarly, many *Efendi* readers believe in the authenticity of the books, because they did not hear the alleged Dönmes rejecting the arguments. The alleged insider has always been an important figure for the authenticity of conspiratorial accounts. Johnson (1996: 24) notes that the confirmation of conspiratorial accusations by Theobald, a former Jew who was seen as an insider, played a decisive role in the emergence of the anti-Semitic conspiracy tradition.

All in all, this study proposes a holistic perspective in understanding conspiracy theories that is verified in the empirical work on the Dönme community. It shows

that the semi-erudition perspective provides a valid and reliable theory, which can explain the methodological, social and political aspects of conspiracy theories together. Methodologically, conspiratorial accounts contain strongly-biased readings of the objective reality. Hence, they fail to provide a comprehensive account of politics. Socially, they tend to become popular in certain contexts and enforce passivity. The interviews with the readers of the *Efendi* series confirm that the ones convinced by the books tend to become depoliticised. Politically, conspiracy theories are often used as semi-erudite conduits in political communication especially by reactionary political movements. The involvement of the discontented right-wing, left-wing and Islamic circles with the conspiracy theories about Dönmes seems to support this argument. It should also be noted that conspiracy theories are widespread themes of mainstream politics today due to the prevalence of entertainment politics. The academic literature could draw upon the semi-erudition perspective to develop a holistic theory to delineate the social and political significance of conspiracy theories.

The research illustrates that more empirical studies to identify the significance of conspiracy theories in different contexts are needed to fill the gaps in the academic literature, which overemphasises the conspiratorial accounts in the United States. Only in that way will the discussion on the subject will be enriched by a variety of examples. In addition, the relationship between conspiracy theories and entertainment politics could be studied in more detail to understand how they interrelate. Moreover, the significance of the Dönme-themed conspiracy theories in Turkey shows the importance of ontological insecurities in politics. The concept of ontological insecurity is an important indicator, because it presents prevailing themes of fear in politics. For example, one of the reverberating ontological insecurities of the Turkish republic is its dismemberment by foreign powers, which shapes many political reflexes of the country, for example towards the processes of the EU. It could be suggested that understanding these ontological insecurities might provide valuable data about Turkish politics. Likewise, a study of the ontological insecurities and political fears of any other country may give us a pretext to study those contexts more empathetically.

In accordance with that, this thesis shows that conspiracy theories acknowledge political discontent, and they are used by alienated groups or individuals to relieve ontological insecurities. As exemplified in the Dönme case, looking at conspiratorial accounts might provide valuable conceptual means to understand the reasons for political discontent and how they are reflected. Similarly, further studies could look at the issues such as the relationship between conspiracy theories and political violence, i.e. the ways in which these theories turn into political action. In addition to this, the literature on conspiracy theories could be improved by comparative studies that would examine different ways of expressing political discontent in more detail.

As the Dönme case also shows, the printing press had dramatic influence on the history of anti-Semitic conspiracy theories (John, 1996: 110). Likewise, today the internet seems to be another important medium to disseminate these theories, as it forms a radically new political space in which conspiratorial accounts express political discontent in a way unmatched by traditional media. However, the impact of the internet on the content, distribution and significance of these narratives is an under-researched area, which could provide important insights about contemporary political discontent. Studying the internet as a new domain for conspiracy theories will outline the characteristics of the internet as a political medium. The internet is an important field that future researches can exploit.

Conspiracy theorists present a distinctive form of intellectual attitude. They seem to be intellectually omnipotent figures deciphering the hidden reality for lay people. They reflect a deeply fragmented vision between intellectuals and the rest. This analysis could be detailed by further studies that could dwell on questions such as: what kind of intellectual figures are conspiracy theorists? How are they influenced by the changes in the meaning of intellectualism? Which reasons lead them to the conspiracy literature? How does postmodern intellectualism influence the conspiratorial tradition? How feasible is it to refer to a distinct intellectual tradition that we can call conspiratorial?

In general, conspiracy theories can be seen as a political tradition, which functions to relieve ontological insecurities in different contexts. The conspiracy theories about Dönmes provide ontological securities and cognitive maps particularly in two

periods of change: the first one was a response to the changes brought by modernisation, while the second is to the changes imposed by globalisation. The conspiratorial accounts attempt to re-conjure the lost social harmony through providing new, clear-cut cognitive maps, which blame Dönmes for the negative consequences of changes. This may suggest that conspiratorial accounts are natural reflections of the alienated, because, as Marx once claimed, they supply a social form of opium:

Religion [conspiracy theory] is the general theory of that world, its encyclopaedic compendium, its logic in a popular form, its spiritualistic *point d'honneur*, its enthusiasm, its moral sanction, its solemn completion, its universal ground for consolation and justification. It is the fantastic realisation of the human essence because the human essence has no true reality... Religious distress [conspiratorial distress/blame] is at the same time the expression of real distress and the protest against real distress. Religion [conspiracy theory] is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, just as it is the spirit of a spiritless situation. It is the *opium* of the people (cited in Thompson and Tunstall, 1971:439).

Obviously, this thesis does not deny the possibility that some conspiracy theories might be right, as the ontological insecurities of Turkish nationalism might be justified. For example, the Kurdish terrorist organisation PKK aspires to establish a Kurdish state, and therefore it ultimately aims for the dismemberment of the country. Two Greek parliamentarians visited the PKK headquarters in the 1990s (Ergil, 2007), which could be seen as a proof of the foreign interest in dismembering the country. In parallel, the deep state discussions refer to a secret official organisation against the threat of dismemberment. However, conspiracy theories' social and political significance is not bound up with the empirical reality of the threat. They are rather semi-erudite guesses and imaginary scenarios about the enemy. In this regard, both the Dönme-themed conspiracy theories and the United State army's employment of the script-writers to imagine terrorist attacks (Furedi, 2007) refer to the same political reflex, because they compose semi-erudite, fantasy-led ways of understanding politics. It could be proposed that conspiracy theories' symbolic

reality, i.e. conspiracy theories as social constructions, is more significant than their doubtful actual presence. Žižek explains this in Lacanian terms:

Recall, again, Lacan's outrageous statements that, even if what a jealous husband claims about his wife (that she sleeps around with other men) is all true, his jealousy is still pathological. Along the same lines, one could say that, even if most of the Nazi claims about the Jews were true (they exploit Germans, they seduce German girls), their anti-Semitism would still be (and was) pathological - because it represses the true reason the Nazis needed anti-Semitism in order to sustain their ideological position. So, in the case of anti-Semitism, knowledge about what the Jews "really are" is a fake, irrelevant, while the only knowledge at the place of truth is the knowledge about why a Nazi needs a figure of the Jew to sustain his ideological edifice (Žižek, 2006: 115).

Conspiracy theories do not help with understanding or solving social and political problems in the final analysis, because they are used as narratives to affirm different kinds of worldviews. Individuals/readers/adherents are not expected to develop their own interpretations of social or political reality. Instead, they are given the tranquilizing explanations of conspiracy theories that defy any ambiguities. That is to say, conspiracy theories impose social control and depoliticise individuals by asserting a Manichean order. It could be claimed that conspiracy theories supply a reverential fear, which aims at re-ordering society out of ambiguity. Indeed, the word 'revere', which comes from Latin root *vereor* (to fear), refers to loving unquestionably and uncritically or to venerating as an idol. It is usually used to mean the religious conformism of an individual. Conspiracy theories' significance, which could be summoned as aiming to re-order society through fear, quite resembles the etymological meaning of the word 'revere'. This affirms that while they function as social and political painkillers, they divert the public attention away from other concerns.

In a nutshell, this work adds several important points to the understanding of conspiracy theories. First, it fills the lack in the academic literature on conspiracy theories by suggesting the semi-erudition perspective, i.e. a holistic analysis that

combines methodological characteristics, political impacts and social significance of these accounts. Second, it introduces the first empirical study on the social and political significance of conspiracy theories. Previous studies did not interview conspiracy theorists, conspiracy readers or political parties on the subject. Third, it demonstrates that conspiracy theories do not only belong to marginal politics but they exist as underlying themes of the mainstream. Fourth, it shows that political parties and individuals, who are influenced by conspiratorial accounts, use them pragmatically to affirm their identities, and they do not all of a sudden become involved in a conspiratorial vision of the world. Nevertheless, most of the convinced readers and political parties are inclined towards the general conspiracy literature. Fifth, this work acknowledges that widespread conspiracy theories are often well attached to ontological insecurities of a society. Their success often relies on their ability to exploit political fear. In other words, conspiracy theories, as social constructions, often appear to be more important than their doubtful authenticity. For that reason, even if the Dönme community becomes transparent, conspiracy theories about them will most likely continue. Sixth, this research presents that there is a significant qualitative difference in left-wing and right-wing conspiratorial accounts that produces an un-mixing of these two different traditions. Last but not least, an alleged insider confessor is a vital figure for the authenticity of conspiratorial accounts.

Appendix 1. List of Abbreviations

CUP (*İttihat ve Terakki Cemiyeti*): Committee of Union and Progress

DP (*Demokrat Partî*): Democratic Party

MSP (*Milli Selamet Partisi*): National Salvation Party

AKP (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*): Justice and Development Party

MHP (*Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi*): Nationalist Action Party

CHP (*Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi*): Republican People's Party

SP (*Saadet Partisi*): Felicity Party

DTP (*Demokratik Toplum Partisi*): Democratic Society Party

IMF: International Monetary Fund

JINSA: Jewish Institute for National Security Affairs

BBC: British Broadcasting Corporation

CNN: Cable News Network

BOP (*Büyük Ortadoğu Projesi*): Greate Middle East Initiative

ASALA: Armenian Secret Army for the Liberation of Armenia

PKK (*Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan*): Kurdistan Workers' Party

IRA: Irish Republican Army

SBS (*Siyasal Bilimler Fakültesi*): University of Ankara Political Science Faculty

DMG (*Doğan Medya Grubu*): Doğan Media Group

TÜSİAD (*Türkiye Sanayicileri ve İşadamları Derneği*): Turkish Industrialists' and Businessmen's Association

NATO: North Atlantic Treaty Organization

EU: European Union

ECHR: European Court of Human Rights

TL (*Türk Lirası*): Turkish Lira

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