

Eschatological Conspiracy Theories: Models and Ways for Identifying Apocalyptic Semantics and Syntax*

BOOK REVIEW: SHNIRELMAN V. A. (2022). *KATECHON. FROM APOCALYPSE TO CONSPIRACY THEORIES*, MOSCOW; SAINT PETERSBURG: NESTOR–HISTORY, 424 P.

Irina Trotsuk

Doctor of Sociological Sciences, Centre for Fundamental Sociology,
HSE University
Professor, Sociology Chair, RUDN University
Address: Myasnitskaya str., 20, Moscow, Russian Federation 101000
E-mail: irina.trotsuk@yandex.ru

*Conspiracy against Russia
Not in the protocols of Zion,
Not in foreign omnipotence,
Not in hostile obstacles.
Conspiracy against Russia —
In the heart that despises God,
When sins defeat
Sacrifice, sincerity, faith...
Archpriest A. Zaitsev (2011). Conspiracy against Russia*

*...The frock coat was innocent,
beautifully tailored, well sewn...
its owner was an anti-Semite
and shouted about Zion;
tugged at the skirts of his frock coat,
which was sewn long ago by the old laws
and by the Jewish tailor — old Solomon,
and now the owner was a member of the Central Com-
mittee, which seemed like forever,
but only for the frock coat...
V. Normann (1992). The Ballad about the Frock Coat*

According to the abstract, the book is intended “for a wide range of scientists... and everyone interested in ethnography, ethnology, social and cultural anthropology, history, sociology and other branches of humanities” (p. 2). The sociologist (it is difficult for me to think about other ‘type’ of reading) too concerned about disciplinary boundaries may be ‘hurt’ by the definition of sociology as a ‘branch of humanities’, but the book is not intended for a ‘disciplinary purist’. It is an excellent example of interdisciplinary analysis, in which approaches and elements of different sciences are used to reconstruct the core

* The results of the project “Everyday life in the state of emergency and its normalization strategies: inertia of affect and openness to challenges”, carried out within the framework of the Basic Research Program at the National Research University Higher School of Economics (HSE University) in 2023, are presented in this article.

of a hybrid-eclectic “conspiracy theory that combines geopolitics, Christian eschatology and esotericism with Soviet legacy”, and this core is “the Orthodox-church apocalyptic ideas about the last times and Russia’ role as a katechon” (p. 2). The book is full of factual data, reflects the author’s attitude (sometimes ironic and even sarcastic) and reminds of a fascinating non-fiction investigation into the activities of conspiracy theorists (the text can be perceived in other ways, but it is certainly interesting even for the “uninitiated”).

At first sight, the structure of the book may seem unbalanced: three chapters — “Conspiracy Concepts: From Apocalypse to World Conspiracy”, “Nesta Webster and the ‘Masonic Conspiracy’” and “Western Conspiracy in Russia” — consist of 80 pages, while the remaining 300 pages make the fourth chapter “Russian Conspiracy Theories” divided into 15 paragraphs. However, this imbalance is seeming: there is no Introduction (only Conclusion¹ and Index, References are presented as 2000 footnotes²), and the first three chapters serve as an extended preface/introduction to the main part. At second sight, it may seem that the author presents a set of illustrative cases in the framework of eschatological conspiracy theories, such as the magazine *Young Guard*, murder of the royal family, neo-pagans³, A. G. Dugin, and so on. However, the book provides numerous an-

1. Conclusion summarizes the ideas of all sections, so it is enough to understand the argumentation and further directions of the author’s research if the reader for some reasons cannot read the whole book, although I would highly recommend it.

2. The reader may catch himself thinking that the huge number of footnotes shows not only the author’s enormous work (in another book, *Limits of Tolerance: Ideology and Practice of the New Racism*, Notes and References consist of about 200 pages each) but also that everything said about political theology/ideology/eschatology is the result of working with sources rather than of ‘harmful and dangerous’ fantasies.

3. See: *Neopaganism throughout Eurasia* (2001). Comp. by V. Shnirelman, Moscow: Biblical Theological Institute of Saint Andrew the Apostle. Neopaganism is a “new Russian ideology”, but “Russian neopagans are not a purely religious movement; they raise social, environmental and ethical issues, as was typical for many sects in the 19th — 20th centuries... Russian neo-paganism should be defined as movements that aim at constructing a ‘true Russian religion’ that would fully satisfy contemporary needs of the Russian society and the Russian state. Russian neo-paganism seems to be a national religion artificially created by urban intelligentsia from fragments of ancient, pre-Christian, local beliefs and rituals to ‘revive national spirituality’. This means not so much the revival of religion as constructing an ideological basis for a new social-political community under modernization. At the same time, religion is often understood as ideology: it is assumed that the more united the national community the more it is based on the national ideology that appeals to the behests of ancestors and to ‘uniqueness’... And such a ‘Russian religion’ should be free from any foreign influences. A certain role in the development of neo-paganism is played by the rejection of the modern industrial civilization with its barbaric attitude to nature and its social inequality. But neopagans are even more concerned about preserving the traditional cultural environment threatened by the leveling tendencies of globalization... Such an attitude determines the desire for a radical revision of the Russian history and even of the concept of ‘Russianness’... Since in the last millennium the development of the Russian people has been connected with Orthodoxy, which neo-pagans resolutely reject as a foreign and even harmful element, they see nothing positive in the Russian history of this era. They argue that the most glorious pages of the past belong to earlier antiquity, and this puts them in a rather difficult position. First, specialists do not know about the Russian people in the early Middle Ages, not to mention previous centuries and millennia. Second, historical sources about the Slavs in the pre-Kievan period, including their religious beliefs, are extremely scarce and fragmentary” (pp. 8–10). The history of Russian neo-paganism from its origins to the present, including the features of neo-pagan approaches in the political and religious spheres, formation of neo-pagan communities and their unions in the last twenty years and other issues (except of neo-pagan myths, beliefs, rituals, community life and gender relations), are presented in the book: Shnirelman V. A. (2012). *Russian*

alytical typologies ‘within’ the contemporary, apocalyptically focused conspiracy theories — consistently (often in chronological order), following the rules of the scientific method in its social-humanitarian version, with carefully selected and examined examples⁴.

In the first, introductory part, the author clarifies the terms and subject field of the book: “Christian eschatology, developed by theologians for centuries, created a colorful⁵ picture of social decay and general decline on the eve of the end of the world, which was impossible to prevent as everything was destined by divine providence... But no one knew the timing. Therefore, there have always been people trying to discover visible and invisible signs of the approach of the Apocalypse... to decode the complex symbols of Holy Scripture... who exactly was meant, how and when these forces were to act and how they could be resisted. In the religious atmosphere of the Middle Ages, there was little choice — only the enemies of Christianity, and all suspicions fell on the Jews⁶... At the turn of the Modern Age... religion lost its former authority... Revolutions, decline of the traditional patriarchal way of life, nationalism, transition to mass politics... new synthetic religions... and all sorts of secular organizations... created the impression of chaos that was impossible to understand... The era of globalization multiplied these fears, exacerbating the feeling of helplessness in the face of possible total control of some invisible powerful forces... Stereotypes that had developed for years [and even centuries] came to rescue and today are examined for the presence of a certain archetype... The traditional narrative about the ‘end of the world’ and the coming of the Antichrist fit perfectly with the concept of a conspiracy” (pp. 4–5).

As in all other sections, the author refers to similar observations of researchers who noted “the blurred line between folk eschatology and reactionary, secular conspiracy theories”⁷, “the similarity of conspiracy theories with belief in witchcraft”⁸ (p. 6), etc. The second distinctive feature of the book is the rejection of ‘causal’ interpretation of the

Native Faith. Neopaganism and Nationalism in contemporary Russia, Moscow: Biblical Theological Institute of Saint Andrew the Apostle.

4. The author examines Russian eschatological conspiracy theories no less carefully than, for instance, cattle breeding. See: Shnirelman (2020). *Origins of Cattle Breeding: A Cultural-Historical Phenomenon*, Moscow: Publishing House “Librocom”.

5. Apparently, colorfulness of Bosch’s “The Last Judgment” type.

6. And not only on the Jews, judging by the number of crusades and their justification by church hierarchs, but those enemies were more obvious and distant.

7. Here and further, the authors and works are not mentioned — the reader can see the selection of ‘experts’ and the interpretation of their positions in the book. The review aims at identifying the ‘tools’ for creating this *Compendium on Contemporary Russian Eschatological Conspiracy Theories* (based on the author’s previous works) in the spirit of the *Compendium on General Sociology* by V. Pareto (Ed. by G. Farina. University of Minnesota Press, 1980) and its ‘glossary’, some ‘articles’ of which the reader would prefer to be expanded.

8. The author refers to the work by L. G. Ionin (2005). *New Magical Age* (*Logos*, no. 5, pp. 23–40), “a part of which is globalization that causes a conservative reaction of local cultures, similar to primitive magic” (p. 6). In another book, Ionin notes such “a result of the postmodern obsession with identity” as the emergence of totalitarian sects, or ‘psychosects’: people become members of such sects not by birth but by choice. See: Ionin L. G. (2013). *Revolt of Minorities*. Moscow; Saint Petersburg: University Book, p. 168.

rapid development of conspiracy theories — due to the apostasy-apocalyptic sentiments in the early 20th century: “apocalyptic sentiments do not always produce conspiracy theories — additional incentives are needed... A powerful impetus for conspiracy theories was given by the consequences of the World War I which led to the collapse of thousand-year-old empires and to the Bolshevik Revolution... Conspiracy theories tend to rethink the image of the enemy according to the era and to combine various phobias despite a striking constancy of the enemy’s characteristics... this is a change in ideology without a change in the way of thinking... only the names of conspirators change, while the main content of the conspiracy myth remains the same” (p. 7).

The third feature of the book is that it evokes associations in the reader’s subject field. Thus, if conspiracy theories are similar to mythology not in content but in functions, the reader may remember the idea of V.Ya. Propp⁹ about the functionally same set of characters in fairy tales of different peoples, the works of T. van Dijk about discursive strategies¹⁰, the critical discourse analysis developed by N. Fairclough¹¹ (interpretation of the center of the world conspiracy and its name depends on the dominant conspiracy concepts and objective social-economic and (geo)political realities), and general models for constructing the image of the enemy, including in the field of international relations.

After defining conspiracy theories as “a secular version of the Apocalypse, which preserves many ideas about it, developing for centuries within the Christian worldview” (p. 8), the author systematizes the substantive and functional characteristics of conspiracy theories, referring to numerous fundamental and applied, scientific and non-scientific works:

- this is a special discourse that always focuses on a community (racial, national, political, economic, etc.), only explanations of its danger differ;
- this discourse is based on pseudoscientific marginal ideas, aggressively criticizes academic science (as if hiding some invaluable knowledge from people), undermines trust in official institutions and their representatives as manipulators, and relies only on previous conspiracy works;
- this discourse is not a prerogative of authoritarian or democratic regimes — both use it to create an image of the enemy in a situation of social disappointment or growing social pathologies (a gap between formal legal equality and real power, an increase in the number of well-educated people that cannot find a worthy place in society, etc.), but regimes’ tools differ (the growth of the secularized, rationalistic component to the detriment of the esoteric and eschatological, a shift to the field of mass culture, etc.).

To flourish conspiracy theories need: “archaized population with consciousness deeply rooted in religious images, which is not ready to perceive a contradictory picture of reality and necessarily complex explanations; political elites that want to preserve such con-

9. See: Propp V. (2022). *Morphology of the Folktale. The Historical Roots of Fairy Tales*, Moscow: CoLibri.

10. See e.g.: Van Dijk T. A. (2008). *Discourse and Power*, Palgrave.

11. See e.g.: Fairclough N. (1995). *Critical Discourse Analysis: The Critical Study of Language*, London; New York: Longman.

sciousness and are paranoid about losing power due to a ‘conspiracy’, which makes elites live in the mode of conspiracy theories and ‘special operations’; finally, mass psychosis and frustrations which facilitate the consumption of explanations produced by conspiracy theories” (p. 13). The fourth feature of the book is that even if the author does not provide examples, they come to the reader’s mind without prompting. Thus, in this case, one may think of the contemporary Chechen society with the legitimate¹² archaic norms of Sharia, tribe social structure and ‘culture of apology’ (including ‘special operations’ to return fugitive sons/daughters of the Chechen people to the family by the republic’s law enforcement agencies from any Russian regions) for wrongdoings the ‘delinquency’ of which is explained by the ‘departure from traditions’. As for mass psychosis and frustration, the coronavirus pandemic gave rise to an infodemic (described in the last section of the book) that shook the already undermined faith in science and in social orientation of governments, and then military conflicts strengthened the conviction of people (not fully recovered from the pandemic and the social-economic decline) in a conspiracy of political elites against the common man (both subjects of this confrontation have specific distinctive features in different countries and communities).

In the perception of conspiracy theories, the author identifies several fundamentally different approaches (pp. 13–15):

- “some authors develop such theories with passion, finding more and more ‘secret conspiracies’, and such works sometimes seem scientific or are published as adventure novels¹³;

12. Here are just two recent events that were widely covered by the Russian media and are difficult to imagine happening in any other Russian region. First, the apology of Russia’s Minister of Education S. Kravtsov to the head of Chechnya R. Kadyrov for the “rude descriptions of nations that suffered Stalin’s repressions” in the history textbook: Kravtsov visited Chechnya to report to Kadyrov on the changes made in the textbook. See e.g.: Khudyakova P., Ivanov F. Russia’s Minister of Education Personally Showed the New History Textbook to the Head of Chechnya. 11.11.202. URL: <https://www.vedomosti.ru/politics/articles/2023/11/11/1005341-ministr-prosvescheniya>. Second, Kadyrov’s indignation that the children of his regional officials do not speak Chechen: the generation “that does not speak or think in Chechen has no future”, so Kadyrov threatened such officials with dismissal from ‘his team’. 08.11.2023. URL: <https://www.rbc.ru/politics/08/11/2023/654b90179a794736ad220124>. And these are relatively neutral events of recent weeks, during which Kadyrov’s son took an interregional tour to collect high regional awards after his beating N. Zhuravel for burning the Koran.

13. The reader may remember movies based on the books of the same name by D. Brown: *The Da Vinci Code* presents a conspiracy of the Catholic Church against women (interpretations of the church conspiracy against the true teaching of Christ can be even more general, such as the concealment of the Gospel of Jesus in the movie “Stigmata” (1999), but Brown mentions the Gospel of Mary Magdalene); *Angels and Demons* presents a crime in the name of saving the traditional Catholic Church under the guise of an Illuminati conspiracy; *Inferno* — a conspiracy to preserve humanity by radically reducing population with a pandemic of a new virus. The author considers the first movie’s “fantasies about the connection of the Merovingians with Jesus Christ” the basis of the theory about “the conspiracy of the Roman Catholic Church that did not want to recognize the descendants of Jesus and deliberately belittled the role of his wife Mary Magdalene from the position of gender discrimination”. Proponents of this theory, “based on the apocrypha, new readings of the Gospel and the Qumran manuscripts, called for the restoration of justice — reconstruction of the true Christian teaching and of its true history, which were completely distorted by the church” (p. 79).

- other authors try to conduct a serious scientific analysis of conspiracy theories but assess this phenomenon differently” (irrational paranoid thinking, marginal phenomenon, collective myths or rational political strategies);
- the third group considers “conspiracies as a kind of a game of imagination, which is regarded with irony”¹⁴ (especially the utopian desire of conspiracy theories to eliminate contradictions and conflicts by discovering some hidden truth);
- the fourth group “justifies conspiracy theories as a special philosophical technique determined by a skeptical perception of the generally accepted paradigm of causality set by the Enlightenment, and calls on researchers to focus on clarifying reasons for the popularity of conspiracy thinking and on the social function of conspiracy theories... that make us think seriously about the sources of our knowledge and beliefs” (in this interpretation conspiracy theories are of interest to sociology of knowledge);
- the fifth group “tries to formally distance from conspiracy theories and allows its criticism... but blindly repeats all main arguments of conspiracy theorists”.

Before ‘classifying’ conspiracy theorists, the author identifies their features¹⁵ — positive in terms of intentions but negative in terms of their realization:

- “all conspiracy theorists consider themselves patriots and develop their concepts based on their understanding of the interests of their states and peoples; therefore, such concepts have a pronounced national character” (p. 15);
- “conspiracy theorists appeal not to reason but to emotions and faith¹⁶; therefore, they are illegible in facts and do not disdain fakes” (pp. 15–16), creating “a kind of bricolage in which heterogeneous and sometimes incompatible elements (religious, esoteric, political, pseudoscientific, etc.) are taken out of context and presented in a variety of combinations” (p. 16), or “dubious/illegal parallels are drawn with the present time” (p. 44);
- conspiracy theorists publish lengthy lists of ‘secret organizations’ and their members “to make their ideas credible and persuasive”; “they use facts or interpretations that cannot be verified, and if scientists try to prove their dubiousness, these scientists are accused of being a part of a conspiracy” (p. 26);
- conspiracy theorists make guesses based “not on strict documentary evidence but on the taken out of context individual ideas of people of different competences, which does not lead to an unambiguous interpretation” (p. 47);

14. It seems to be an irony in the spirit of the last three novels by V. Pelevin — *Journey to Eleusis* (2023), *TRANSHUMANISM INC.* (2022) and *KGBT+* (2021) — about the visually traditional Slavic but technologically controlled through implants (Russian) civilization.

15. In the spirit of G. Simmel’s formal sociology, constructing a type of ‘conspiracy theorist’ (adherent/follower/apologist of conspiracy theories).

16. In M. Weber’s terms, this would be a value-rational action that may shift rather to a traditional (reference to ancestors) or affective (mass protests) one than to a rational purposeful action (since conspiracy theories’ ways for achieving political goals are emotionally charged).

- conspiracy theorists prefer “an openly metaphysical approach — believe in the immutability of social structure and in the constancy of ‘national character’” (p. 44);
- conspiracy theorists describe the “essence of conspiracy” with such terms as ‘obviously’ or ‘probably’¹⁷ (p. 51);
- conspiracy theorists alarmistically “scare us with the plans of the world elite... to establish a dictatorship under the abolition of national states and the creation of a global empire” by “reducing the world population by an artificially created famine and by provoking civil wars and genocides” (pp. 67–68);
- conspiracy theorists combine different techniques of ‘information wars’ — replace direct names with euphemisms, hyperbolize and spread fakes based on horror stories, and so on (p. 379);
- conspiracy theorists refer to apocalypticism (scenarios of victory over evil) but “find the source of evil outside, as some alien external forces (‘global cabal’, ‘invisible hand’¹⁸ and other versions of the ‘enemy’, whose archetype is revealed in the myth of the Antichrist) which often turn out to be minorities, ‘strangers’. At the same time, minorities and marginalized racial groups use conspiracy theories as ‘weapons of the weak’ to resist discrimination and to stand for their rights” (p. 20).

Thus, conspiracy theories “artificially simplify the complex and dynamic nature of historical process” (nothing is accidental — everything goes according to a plan, everything is not what it seems), “exaggerate the connection between intentions and results of action”, “strive to find a cause-and-effect connection even if there is none” (pp. 20–21), interpret the lack of evidence “in favor of a conspiracy, because people believe that ‘conspirators’ can skillfully ‘hide ends in the water’” (p. 27). Today the set of conspiracy theorists’ tools has expanded: technical means and the Internet provide them with platforms for disseminating their views on unprecedented scale and with incredible speed. While academic critics of conspiracy theories lost their former ‘expert status’¹⁹, since “younger generations brought up in the conditions of ‘clip thinking’ do not need any lengthy evidence²⁰”. Not only the youth does not believe professional historians and supports methods of ‘alternative history’, trusting ‘revisionist historians’ who as if “look for true causes of historical events by studying sources hidden from the general public” (p. 51) and successfully ‘find’ such sources (like in a Masonic conspiracy). Contemporary states

17. For instance, the Russian media as if reveals a ‘Western conspiracy’ by noting the frequent use of ‘highly likely’ in the anti-Russian discourse.

18. The reader may wish to add ‘market’ — “the invisible hand of the market”; however, conspiracy theories emphasize not an unintentional self-regulation but that all market processes are determined by the interests of the owners of transnational corporations.

19. Which is certain, see e.g.: Nichols T. (2017). *The Death of Expertise: The Campaign Against Established Knowledge and Why It Matters*, New York: Oxford University Press; Heffernan M. (2021). *Uncharted: How Uncertainty Can Power Change*, London: Simon & Schuster; O’Neill C. (2016). *Weapons of Math Destruction: How Big Data Increases Inequality and Threatens Democracy*, New York: Crown Publishers, etc.

20. Which is doubtful: the youth is very heterogeneous, including in relation to conspiracy theories.

(especially authoritarian ones) support the popularity of conspiracy theories by “expanding the boundaries of secret information” (p. 16) and preserving the previous models for creating and disseminating conspiracy ideas — ‘from above’ (elites) and ‘from below’ (folk), although these models have national-historical and political specifics.

In the book, numerous classifications of various components of conspiracy theories serve as a context for the analysis of “the conspiracy theory that deals not with individual conspiracies but with a truly global conspiracy designed to introduce a ‘new world order’ and establish a ‘powerful world government’... by fraudulently bringing and supporting religious dogmas, albeit in a modified form, in the ‘age of reason’... which means... introduction of a single universal religion and abolition of Christianity together with traditional cultures and national states” (pp. 18–19). Today apocalyptic ideas take the form of allusions and implicit references, since these ideas acquire new discursive forms according to historical realities and political situation (for example, Jewish conspiracy — Masonic threat — conspiracy of international bankers). At the end of the first chapter, the author notes that he is interested in the versions of the super-conspiracy “popular in wider public circles of post-Soviet Russia, with an emphasis on the presence of anti-Semitism” (p. 29).

In fact, the further narrative is a thorough and predominantly chronological reconstruction (in different ‘locations’) of this super-conspiracy in its social, educational, scientific, political-ideological and practical contexts. Descriptions of the apocalyptic-conspiracy thinking reveal the fifth feature of the book — the author’s desire to follow Weber’s principle of value reference²¹, although it is difficult not to notice the author’s skeptical-tragic perception of the social and intellectual consequences of the dominance of eschatological conspiracy theories in the Russian public and media discourses. Sometimes the author fails to adhere to dispassionate statements²² and emotionally expresses his perception of conspiracy theorists’ works on the verge of scientific sarcasm:

- “used dubious sources, resorted to unfounded speculation and spread unreliable information”; “when he got to the essence of the ‘conspiracy’, his speech became sluggish and unsure” (p. 51);
- “claimed without necessary evidence” (p. 59);
- “described real facts but distorted them at his will and gave them a fantastic explanation so that they fit into his concept” (p. 60);
- “tried to present himself as an impartial historian but at times could not contain his emotions and branded the revolution with shame” (p. 62);
- “until his death was engaged in anti-Jewish and anti-Masonic journalism” (p. 64) [one cannot help wondering what people deliberately spend their lives on];

21. See e.g.: Weber M. (1946). Science as a Vocation. *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology* (Eds. by H. H. Gerth, C. W. Mills), New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 129–156; Goddard D. (1973). Max Weber and the Objectivity of Social Science. *History and Theory*, vol. 12, no. 1, pp. 1–22.

22. For instance, in such a way: “books [about the occult powers/hobbies of A. Hitler and his connections with Satan] are full of contradictions and blatant misinterpretations of historical facts, which indicates either the frivolity/ignorance of authors or their deliberate misleading of readers” (p. 70).

- “tabloid works [about the Nazi cult with references to Gnosticism and Satanism] were based on rumors and speculation” (p. 68);
- “turned a literary fantasy into a proof of the sinister plans of some external forces preparing a terrible fate for Russians” (p. 116);
- “tried to attribute to the Jews all criminal acts that have ever happened in history — from the burning of late ancient Rome to the outbreak of the civil war in Russia” (p. 127);
- “declared as the main enemy of the contemporary society a strange mixture of Freemasons, occultists, Kabbalists, bankers and revolutionaries, acting together to destroy national states and establish the power of a world government”; “he repeated tales about Freemasons as god-fighters and Satanists preparing the coming of the Antichrist... for greater persuasiveness comparing the building of the European Parliament with the Tower of Babel” (p. 141);
- “at first he limited himself to the statement about the influence of the Jews and Zionists on Hitler, but then his imagination ran wild to the point that he declared... many leaders of the Third Reich ... ‘Jews by origin’, presented Hitler as a ‘Jewish messiah’... Nazism — as ‘the heresy of Judaizers’, anti-Semitism — as a result of the ‘Jewish self-hatred’... and exposed the ‘myth of the Holocaust’” (p. 148);
- his “book, full of errors and speculations, published by the well-known chauvinist publishing house”, was based on the “centuries-old Judeophobic interpretation of the Gospel” (p. 301);
- “the author remains silent until the very last pages of his book, on which through gritted teeth he admits that China is a land empire... however, the reader gets a comprehensive idea of English intrigues, even of those that did not exist” (pp. 302–303);
- “the book received the blessing of the Orthodox elders and an afterword written by one of them; obviously out of modesty, these elders decided to remain anonymous” (p. 153);
- “in the early 2000s, national patriots became concerned about mass migrations²³ and imagined the death of Russia flooded by ‘foreign invaders’” (p. 206);
- “it is difficult to understand who bothered whom — either minorities bothered indigenous peoples, or vice versa; however, it was clearly stated that things in the West were going very badly, and Russians had nothing to do there” (p. 207);

23. See: Shnirelman V. A. (2011). *Limits of Tolerance: Ideology and Practice of the New Racism*, Moscow: New Literary Observer, vols. I–II. The author considers the forms of new racism in the Russian society through the anti-immigrant discourse compared to conspiracy theories, migration realities and migrant-phobic sentiments revealed by sociological surveys. The author identifies the following forms of new racism: essentialist cultural racism; self-preserving biological racism of the ‘white man/race’; scientific racism of researchers “convinced of the existence of strictly defined, objective, unusually stable ‘racial types’ supposedly characterized by different ‘mentalities’”; doctrinal racism “developed and popularized by writers, journalists and scientists that provide rational arguments for popular irrational stereotypes” (vol. II, p. 465); “doctrinal racism is typical for a part of the educated elite, and emotional unreflective racism is more typical for everyday thinking and is expressed in derogatory terms” (vol. II, p. 470).

- “sometimes he forgot about the Jews to declare that all power in the contemporary world belonged to Freemasons, but then he came to his senses and blamed at once ‘Zionists, Illuminati and Freemasons’ as if not knowing whom to prefer” (p. 313);
- “this ‘political scientist’ is known for very strange ideas about history and for an image of the present time, which is far from reality” (p. 379), and so on.

In the second chapter, the author reconstructs the general argumentation of conspiracy theorists based on the work of the “founder of the contemporary Western conspiracy theories” N. Webster. She explains the “evil activities of the Jews” as follows (pp. 30–32): they strive for world power and for destruction of Christianity; for this purpose, they develop and implement socialist ideas (in the 1920s), hiding behind them attempts to enslave all humanity (‘goyim’) which they hate; any supporter of socialist ideas and/or revolution is an Illuminati, and all international socialist organizations are anti-patriotic, i.e., serve the enemy.

Here and further, the author provides examples of the type-forming features of the conspiracy theorist: attempts to discover (in fact to invent) parallels when there are none (between revolutionary programs and the views of the Bavarian Illuminati); voluntaristic labeling (some German kings of the 19th century were declared Illuminati, and legal, well-known organizations were named secret societies); denial of the obvious social, political and economic causes of revolutions, their explanation by the intrigues of secret occult forces (even concerning the Bolsheviks and Social Democrats, which they would be surprised at). However, in all conspiracy theories the author tries to find a rational grain, for instance, noting that Webster recognized the cruel oppression of nobility (monarchy) and the high level of corruption and selfishness of politicians (democracy), but still saw the main reason for people’s uprisings in the activities of secret societies with the intervention of ‘dark forces’. Moreover, many conspiracy theories’ accusations turn out to be ‘empty’ if we refer to the historical research which, for instance, show that ‘Freemasons’ were very differentiated (participated in both revolutionary and pacifist movements, in the opposing military coalitions) and very patriotic (p. 32).

In the third chapter, the author summarizes the ways and results of the penetration of Western conspiracy theories into the Russian society “at the end of the Soviet period” (p. 38) in the form of three sets of ideas: attempts to rationally explain activities of secret societies as closely related to the economy and policies of the modern era (conspiracies of politicians, financiers, intelligence agencies, etc.); emphasis on the esoteric foundations of conspiracies (developed in the Middle Ages, which explains references to the end of times and the Antichrist); justification of the secret penetration of aliens from outer space into the human civilization (interest not so much in secrets of unearthly civilizations as in attempts of evil reptilians to enslave humanity²⁴). Irrational and rational components of these three ‘branches’ of conspiracy ideas can be combined: for instance, ‘Kremlin wives’ were declared both Jews and ‘Martians’, Jewish revolutionaries — ‘homosexuals’,

24. Apparently, in the spirit of L. R. Hubbard’s ideas presented in the movie “Battlefield Earth” (2000).

‘mentally ill degenerates’ and ‘legionnaires’ (p. 41); Hitler — a Nazi occultist, Satanist, bearer of the ‘collective unconscious’ associated with the ‘memory of the Aryan blood’, an avatar of Hindu gods (p. 73); ‘Russian civilization’ — a state in which identity is determined not by ethnicity but by ‘soul’, culture and morality, therefore, A. S. Pushkin is ‘the wisest magus’, his works “contain the encoded ancient knowledge about the world and its evolution” (p. 273); coronavirus — an “ethnic weapon artificially created by Americans” and a “global sabotage of the world government” (p. 160), so vaccination is a “disastrous chipization” aimed at “creating a digital Babylon”.

To ‘construct’ an irrationally motivated “bad Jew” (communist, Zionist, etc.), conspiracy theorists use the following rational discursive strategies (pp. 43–45; 47–48):

- turning upside down (interpretation of the Egyptian captivity described in the Bible as a ‘Sinai expedition’ which aimed at destroying local population and religion, i.e., the Jews pretended to be captives);
- understatement (the centuries-old persecution of the Jews in medieval Europe is not mentioned at all or Jewish casualties are considered “monstrously exaggerated by Zionists”);
- denial (first, of the Jewish origin of Jesus Christ, today of the Holocaust²⁵);
- zeroing (the Nuremberg trials were declared “the revenge of Talmudists”);
- stigmatization by labeling (the Jewish god is “the god of racism, hatred and revenge”);
- immunity to cognitive dissonance (ignorance of contradictions of one’s assumptions to the available data, to one’s reasoning and to one’s previous beliefs);
- constant repetitions of the same ideas, like mantras.

Repetition is a kind of refrain in the book. On the one hand, the author emphasizes that conspiracy theories are published by the same publishing houses, written by the same authors, refer to the same ideas and works, etc. On the other hand, the reader also gets the impression of ‘wish-wash’: the triviality of the same initial postulates, endlessly discussed by conspiracy theorists (just in other words and contexts), makes the author repeat himself, commenting on reincarnations of previous conspiracy ideas in new political and ideological forms. The author stresses the “distortions of history” by conspiracy theorists that “have a poor understanding of history... select only those facts that are beneficial to their a priori concepts and often give facts their own interpretation which makes professional historians smile” (p. 45). Certainly, such forbearance can be justified if we consider historical science in line with its philosophical understanding as a struggle of narratives²⁶. However, today, when the statist discourse explains (geo)political and economic decisions with a set of ideas from conspiracy theories and introduces sanctions with ‘empty’ nominations (discreditation, propaganda, treason, protection of the Russian

25. Despite numerous documentary evidence, many countries do not officially recognize the Holocaust and the Armenian genocide in Turkey.

26. See e.g.: Ankersmit F. (1983). *Narrative Logic: A Semantic Analysis of the Historian’s Language*, Springer; Ankersmit F.R. (1994). *History and Tropology: The Rise and Fall of Metaphor*, University of California Press.

world/interests, etc.), conspiracy theories would not make even the common man smile, given their spread and media popularity. Moreover, the techniques used by conspiracy theorists to “create an impression of authenticity and specificity for the naive reader” (p. 59) sometimes do not work as expected due to the naivety of everyday thinking that fails to accept a too complex and unstable system of enemy nominations, which changes according to the political situation²⁷ (as it was common to say in the Soviet period, “fluctuates according to the party line”).

The author concludes the third chapter and, accordingly, the introductory part of the book by identifying two types of the “Western conspiracy theories translated into Russian” (p. 82). The first type comes mainly “from the right-wing camp with racist and anti-Semitic views”; the second — “from the liberal camp frightened by the dictatorial regime as arising from the uncontrolled power of transnational corporations”. In Russia, “an intricate mixture of eschatology, messianism and conspiracy theories emerged in the Orthodox fundamentalist circles already in the 1970s — 1980s... In general, conspiracy theories developed in Russia in an esoteric direction. At the beginning of the 21st century, such ideas were taken by the authorities as a powerful instrument of national unity [and social solidarity in the Durkheimian sense] to contain globalization and ‘color revolutions’ in neighboring countries. The latter were attributed to secret machinations of the ‘Washington Regional Committee’ [or the ‘London Central Committee’], behind which stood the global forces of evil or the new world order” (p. 83).

The last and the longest chapter of the book considers Russian conspiracy theories based on the historical, journalistic (review of the formation of various types of conspiracy discourse in the Russian media²⁸), political (theoretical and practical interest of

27. The radical change in the “policy of the party and government” can be easily traced by the mentions/ignorance of media ‘heroes’ in political talk shows on the Russian television. For instance, this happened in the programs of V. V. Solovyov with S. V. Surovikin: when he was appointed a commander of the joint group of troops (forces) in the area of the special military operation, he was mentioned almost daily, including as ‘General Armageddon’, but then disappeared from the media agenda instantly and without a trace.

28. For instance, the permanent Editor-in-Chief of the newspaper *Tomorrow A*. Prokhanov continues to publish in it and to present on television shows his theory of the Zionist conspiracy of malicious Jewish intellectuals, who “want to turn Russia into a ‘new Khazaria’” (p. 134) “led by the Antichrist”. Here are some proving quotes from the *Tomorrow*, which I wrote down for my study project in 1999: “Not a single bastard will evade responsibility... We will forgive our enemies [Jewish Freemasons and Western henchmen of Yeltsinism] only when we hear a mortal howl of remorse, anguish and pain from their filthy mouths. Satan acted through them, and it is not easy to cleanse human vessels from his stinking presence. Bodies must suffer. No one will escape the punishment”. “A special, indescribable feeling of the reality of the bright, sunny principle of supreme beauty and harmony present in the world, giving Russians the right to some kind of eschatological hope ‘at the end of times’”, was preserved “in the traditional Russian toy, bearing the imprint of millennia and the message of the ancient faith”. The description of the Western culture is completely opposite: “Today, the ‘Barbie empire’ becomes the vanguard of the Western ‘magical aggression’, destroying the archetypal models for perceiving reality, which were inherited from their ancestors by Russian children... The little man receives his first experience of cultural colonization, feeling that toys are ‘not ours’ and painfully submitting to a foreign toy pantheon. This is the first social-cultural trauma in the child’s life, which subsequently forms a severe complex of cultural inferiority... there is a foreign yoke over Russia, and to fight it we need not only military, technical, economic mobilization but also resources of a different kind, which in a certain sense can be called ‘magical’. Thus, even a small clay toy can become a magical shield against the leveling mass-cultural pressure that destroys the deepest foundations of our ancient culture”.

officials and political scientists in conspiracy theories) and sociological (a small section of the book focuses on the reflection of various elements of conspiracy theories in the Russian public opinion under the “cultivation of conspiratorial sentiments”²⁹) data and examples which are pointless to try to fit into one review, so further only the specifically Russian features of the eschatological³⁰ conspiracy theories are mentioned.

“Russia had its own long tradition of conspiracy theories, which did not die even in the Soviet period” (p. 83). Initially in the 1820s — early 1830s, this tradition had an anti-reform eschatological character and opposed the “anti-Christian conspiracy” (with the participation of the Jews). The next surge of conspiracy theories followed the defeat in the Crimean War and the Polish rebellion of 1864. At the beginning of the 20th century, the ultra-conservative conspiracy version of human history “tirelessly searched for the origins and motives of the activities of secret societies in the Jewish tradition” (p. 84), and the wave of spy mania and chauvinism led to “the culmination of anti-Semitism and Germanophobia during the World War I” (p. 85). With the exception of specific wordings and objective historical factors, these conspiracy ideology and rhetoric did not differ much from Western ‘analogues’ and foundations: anti-Masonic and anti-Jewish campaigns; reliance on fabrications of foreign authors without reliable data; threatening the common man with the far-fetched eradication of Christianity and abolition of national states by the evil Freemasons; hints and direct references to the eschatological myth (satanic plans to bring the Antichrist to power) (p. 85); apocalyptic terms in conspiracy narratives and posters (Trotsky — ‘a monster committing ritual murders’; Bolsheviks — ‘antichrists’, ‘children of the devil’ and ‘forerunners of the last Antichrist’; revolution — ‘Jewish’; Russia — ‘raped girl’, etc.) (pp. 94–96). “The myth of the ‘Jewish Freemasons’, which was not popular among the elites of Tsarist Russia, found a new life during the Revolution and the Civil War, when even some former liberals moved towards the Black Hundreds” under the influence of the “myth of the Jewish-Bolshevik power” (pp. 93–94). This myth remains today in the form of the belief that the Revolution was the result of some secret conspiracy.

29. See also: Gudkov L., Zorkaya N., Kochergina E., Lezina E. (2016). Anti-Semitism in the Structure of Russia’s Mass Xenophobia: Negative Identity and Mobilization Potential. *Bulletin of Public Opinion*, no. 1–2, pp. 140–198; Gudkov L., Pipia K. (2018). Parameters of Xenophobia, Racism and Anti-Semitism in Contemporary Russia. *Bulletin of Public Opinion*, no. 3–4, pp. 33–64; Gudkov L., Zorkaya N., Kochergina E., Lezina E. (2018). Anti-Semitism in Russia: Opinions of the Jewish Population. *Bulletin of Public Opinion*, no. 3–4, pp. 65–109, etc. See: Shnirelman V.A. (2011). *Limits of Tolerance: Ideology and Practice of the New Racism*, Moscow: New Literary Observer, vol. II (the section on sociological surveys consists of 8 chapters).

30. In 2023, a book was published in Russian, which can provide the interested reader with a detailed review of Western eschatology (theological and philosophical): Taubes J. (2009). *Occidental Eschatology*. Transl. with a Preface by D. Ratmoko, Stanford University Press. According to Taubes, apocalyptic prophecy comes from the future, and yet it is completely in the present; in the apocalyptic beginning, two forces unite — the one that destroys all forms and images, and the one that creates new forms; depending on the situation and task, one comes to the fore, but this does not mean that the other is absent. Thus, in Apocalypics, history does not appear as only an event chronology: based on the past and present, history tries to comprehend the future as broadly described and permeated with one decisive question — when the end will come. Therefore, the structure of Apocalypics and gnosis is significantly affected by the eschatological moment, even when ‘mythological’ apocalypse turns into ‘philosophical’ systems.

In the Russian emigration, these eschatological sentiments persisted, while in the USSR “conspiracy theories developed in a different direction: Stalin’s terror campaigns gave a powerful impetus to conspiracy sentiments... when the whole country feared numerous ‘conspiracies’.. of pan-Turkists, pan-Iranists, pan-Islamists, Pan-Finns, cosmopolitans and... agents of all kinds of foreign intelligence services” due to Stalin’s campaigns aimed at identifying and eliminating ‘enemies of the people’ (p. 98). During this period, Russian conspiracy theories acquired their main features: “an explosive mixture of unsatisfied complexes of national priority and images of secret and obvious adversaries”; “a mixture of archaic religious fears with populist Judeophobia of the fascist type, and of capitalist rhetoric with chauvinistic propaganda”; “‘bashful anti-Semitism’ hiding behind various euphemisms and metaphors, which failed to hide the visible features of the ‘Black Hundred internationalism’”; “distortion and falsification of the position and motivation of enemies, i.e., of the West” — Western high ideals and values were declared a cover for “the desire for vulgar profit” (pp. 98–99). The author rightly notes that many conspiracy ideas were borrowed by the post-Soviet era — both spontaneously (by writers and historians) and purposefully by the state ideology (Judeo-Masonic/Jewish conspiracy and anti-Zionism opposed to the ‘Aryan world’³¹). Today these ideas are a part of the political and media rhetoric, which determined a “return to Stalinist resentment” (p. 99) in the form of a combination of “uncompromising anti-Westernism” with “rehabilitation of Stalinism”.

Thus, conspiracy theories of the post-Soviet period acquired the following new features:

- romanticization of the ancient Slavic past and discovery in it of “the worst enemies of the Slavs, who did everything to conquer, enslave and, ultimately, destroy them... which marked the beginning of the Khazar myth³²... then the flowering of

31. See: Shnirelman V. A. (2015). *Aryan Myth in Contemporary World*, Moscow: New Literary Observer, vols. 1–2. The author considers “the process of constructing the Aryan identity and the existence of the Aryan myth in both temporal and political-geographical dimensions”. The author mentions an appeal to the Aryan myth by “amateur writers in search of a commercial success”, by “radical politicians trying to impose the Aryan myth on society to implement their political programs”, by “esotericists and neo-pagans creating new religious cults and rituals”, and by “power structures wishing to create an attractive national ideology... therefore, today there is no longer a single Aryan myth but its various modifications with different goals” (vol. I, p. 5). “The Aryan myth is considered as a discourse that combines ideas about ancestors with a project for the future reorganization of society”. The author suggests the following complex interdisciplinary analysis for both the Aryan myth and eschatological conspiracy theories: a combination of diachronic and synchronic approaches, historical research (analysis of the emergence and dynamics of the Aryan myth), comparative studies (to identify features of the Aryan myth in different ethnic-cultural frames), discursive analysis of ‘Aryan ideas’, qualitative analysis of the media, etc. (vol. I, p. 10).

32. See: Shnirelman (2012). *Khazar Myth. Russia’s Ideology of Political Radicalism and Its Origins*, Moscow; Jerusalem: Bridges of Culture, Gesharim. The Khazar myth is briefly described in another book: “At first I was interested in the Khazar myth created mainly on the Russian soil and giving a specific flavor to the local anti-Semitic propaganda. The Khazar myth is especially interesting because it shows, first, how basic ideas easily change their meaning, adapting to the interests of certain social or religious groups; second, how these ideas transform according to political changes; third, how easily these ideas juggle images of historical events and heroes”. Shnirelman V. (2017). *Tribe of Dan: Eschatology and Anti-Semitism in Contemporary Russia*, Moscow: Publishing House of the Biblical Theological Institute of Saint Andrew the Apostle (p. xi).

the Slavic-Aryan myth, and both emphasized a secret terrible conspiracy based on Nazi models³³” (p. 106);

- conspiracy rhetoric’s inclination to religious conservatism and “an eschatological version of the conspiracy that explain the eternal Western hatred for Russia by the fact that Russia remained faithful to Orthodoxy and is the ‘center of world spirituality’” (p. 124);
- the search for the origins of a secret conspiracy in such hoary antiquity that “Merovingians are described as Slavs, who turn out to be almost the founders of the European civilization³⁴... but ‘stained’ their genealogy with the blood of the ‘tribe of Dan’³⁵” (p. 147);
- the tendency of Orthodox fundamentalism towards “securitization that dooms its supporters to a tireless search for enemies, both external and internal” (p.162);
- such a large-scale and free penetration of conspiracy theories into mass culture and intellectual circles that conspiracy ideas turn into collective/social representations identified by sociological surveys;

33. This makes the image of the Russian singer Shaman more clear: his songs appeal to the Russian identity/history, while his image evokes associations with the Nazi aesthetics among such a wide audience that the Blogs and Communities section on the *Tomorrow* online portal published an article in defense of Shaman: “The fugitive conquerors of Upper Lars and the pseudo-leftists saw... Nazi aesthetics... and hints at the slogans of the Third Reich: “God is with us!” (Gott mit uns!) and even “The banner is up!”, supposedly taken from the party anthem “Horst Wessel” with the phrase “Die Fahne hoch!” — “Banners up!”. “God is with us” is a common phrase used since the beginning of Christianity, and the notorious badges with “Gott mit uns” were invented not by the SS officers but long before them in Royal Prussia, and even the later Romans shouted “Nobiscum Deus!”. As for “Die Fahne hoch!”, they can find fault even in the Soviet painting by G. Korzhev “Raising the Banner”. However, those who left Russia on the “philosophical electric scooter” are illiterate and affective... They are also not pleased with the appearance of Shaman and make vivid comparisons: “a typical Hitler Youth”; “reminds of the young Nazi from Bob Fosse’s movie “Cabaret”. How? With his blonde hair? Should we ban blondes? Since when did the leather jacket become a ‘fascist uniform’? On the contrary, it was a workwear of commissars... In Germany, leaders of the Rot Front wore leather jackets — like Russian communists. The general style of Shaman is informal... leather jackets became bikers’ clothes all over the world... The uniform of the Hitler Youth consisted of a brown shirt and black shorts similar to the scout uniform”. See: Ivankina G. They saw fascism even here. Who and why did not like Shaman’s new video. URL: https://zavtra.ru/blogs/oni_i_tut_uvideli_fashizm.

34. Such quasi-historical constructions remind of the ideas of the satirist M. Zadornov about Russian as the proto-language of all peoples, but he did not claim to be a historian/public intellectual.

35. See: Shnirelman V. (2017). *Tribe of Dan: Eschatology and Anti-Semitism in Contemporary Russia*, Moscow: Publishing House of the Biblical Theological Institute of Saint Andrew the Apostle. The author identifies “in the general mass of anti-Semitic theories several popular issues that define the general negativism towards the Jews... these are three main mythological constructions represented by the myth of the Antichrist, the Aryan myth, and the Khazar myth. They have different roots, are based on different ideas and arguments, address different audiences. Which proves the ambiguous and highly contradictory essence of the contemporary anti-Semitic views which, on the one hand, oppose each other with fierce polemics, but, on the other hand, reflect some common basic emotions expressed in different images” (pp. x-xi). The book focuses on the eschatological myth “that caused a surge of mass interest at the turn of the 20th — 21st centuries not only in Russia but also in Western countries, especially in the USA”, and “like two other myths provides rich material for conspiracy theories... being popular in the West, such ideas largely got rid of former anti-Semitism, but in Russia they still feed on its juices” (p. xii).

- a paradoxical combination of religious, mystical and conservative variations of conspiracy theories with devotion to socialism or communism;
- expansion of conspiracy theories ‘upwards’ — from the “conservative and national-patriotic part of the intellectual spectrum”, searching “for the secret force that destroyed the USSR”, to civil officials and law enforcement officers who “blame in all Russia’s troubles ‘machinations of the West’... the US intelligence services... ‘fifth column’ or ‘agents of influence’ [today they got the official status of foreign agents]” (p. 117).

The maximum concentration of eschatological images and corresponding terms is typical for the statements of Orthodox priests, theologians and parachurch thinkers who attributed the function of ‘katechon’ to Orthodoxy and Russia as endlessly repelling the attacks of all evil forces “that dream of destroying the ‘last Christian state’” (p. 126). However, the results of Russia’s victory over the “global forces of evil” are described in different ways: a tragic scenario of the death of Russia, leading to the death of the whole world; a more neutral end of the old world that will be replaced by a new world led by a revived Russia; an optimistic “return to the original state of communal-religious patriotism”³⁶. Many historical events acquired a conspiratorial interpretation with eschatological details precisely as battles in this endless fight³⁷: for instance, the “ritual murder” of the Romanov royal family (“sacrifice to Satan”; “genocide against the Romanov dynasty”; “cutting off heads of the members of the royal family” as a part of the “satanic ritual”; denial of the scientific examination of the royal family as “machinations of liberals”); organization of the February and October Revolutions by ‘Russophobes’, “by the order of the worst enemies of Russia”, etc.

The essence of the eschatological component of the Russian conspiracy theories is simple as narrative but complicated as scientific argumentation. The simplicity of narrative is determined by its traditional nature and biblical logic of the plot: Russia is katechon, not allowing the Antichrist into the world; this determines Russia’s confrontation with the West that wants to destroy the “Russian God-bearing people” and open the way for the Antichrist; weapons of the West are secret societies and occult organizations, groups of “satanic invasion” and “quiet Freemasons” (p. 138); world history is the struggle between civilizations of good (Orthodox/Christianity) and evil (‘Judeo-Masonic’/‘misanthropic Judeo-Talmudic ideology’, “usurious doctrine of buying up the world”, “Zion-Nazi dictatorship”, “Zion-Nazi aggression” of the “technocratic Euro-American civilization», “genocide of the Russian people”). The corresponding interpretation of real historical events is based on “a symbolic language, its terms are polysemic, and their true meaning is understood only by experts (“initiated”): for example, “the discussion about the regicide and the authenticity of the royal family remains revived the anti-Semitic discourse” (p. 268).

36. Descriptions of such an original state, for example, in the dystopian novel by T.N. Tolstoya *Kys* or in the dystopian works by P.G. Sorokin’s *Day of the Oprichnik* and *Sugar Kremlin* do not evoke much optimism.

37. It is described in the novel by M.Yu. Elizarov *The Librarian*, which was recently filmed as a TV series.

The undoubted advantages of the book were mentioned above, but there are several more. First, this is one of the author's last fundamental studies, so he refers to his previous works that reveal certain aspects of the issues discussed in detail. Second, the book is easy and interesting to read despite its overload (in the positive sense) with factual and historical material, which can be explained by the author's style — this is not a boring pretentious presentation but a story of the interested researcher that provides scientific but sometimes emotional arguments, sometimes with metaphors more typical for fiction: “golden age of conspiracy theories”; “patriarch of French anti-Semitism”; “his books were full of chauvinism, militarism and anti-Americanism... then with alarmism”; “he completely changed the eschatological scheme, replacing the ‘Holy Scripture’ with the ‘Program of the CPSU’”, etc.

Third, the book raises many questions for social sciences and humanities. For instance, the question of the demarcation line between science and ideology, which was becoming thinner throughout the 20th century but locally, while after the coronavirus pandemic and on the eve of either the World War III or a nuclear war this line has almost disappeared, and in some issues (interpretation of military and geopolitical decisions), disciplines (history) and social institutions (education and upbringing) is even denied by the state authorities. A particular manifestation of this trend is that “an image of the enemy with an accompanying escalation of fears may lead to a real war; it is clear that such logic is acceptable for security officials and military strategists but absolutely unacceptable for historians, from whom scientific ethics requires unconditional reliance on authentic historical documents” (p. 117).

Another question is to what extent explanatory metaphors of social cognition in an ideological-politicized context and in the world of post-truth lose the function of metaphor and turn into empty ‘invectives’. This is again the problem of distinction between ideology and science: both rely on explanatory models, but if science begins to fit facts into them (“fitting the history of the Jews into an a priori scheme”) it loses its difference from ideology, and “the reasoning of pseudo-scientists ‘causes enormous harm to society, generating and spreading myths and phobias and leading to a social split’” (p. 262). Thus, the biological-organicist metaphor of the early sociological thought helped to adjust its ‘optics’, albeit with distortions of social Darwinism and single-factor theories, while conspiracy theories “turned to biology in incorrect ways³⁸... to develop a metaphorical language for showing the enemy as an absolute stranger” (p. 196), i.e., “for distorting reality” and “creating a reactionary obscurantist ideology” (p. 202). It is incredibly sad to read about a sociologist who “quite rightly believes that sociologists should not ignore the issue of secret societies but considers it not as political myth making or a kind of folklore

38. Apparently, the author means racism in which distinguishes ideology and practice: “the ideological construction is not always embodied in practice and the practice of racism is not always based on a developed ideology... It is useful to consider racist practices as follows: a) everyday racism that does not require a developed ideology; b) political racism based on a party ideology; c) institutional racism inherent in some social institutions (school, medical care, housing, social assistance, religious organizations, etc.); d) state racism manifested in legislation and practices sanctioned by the state”. See: Shnirelman V. A. (2011). *Limits of Tolerance: Ideology and Practice of the New Racism*, Moscow: New Literary Observer, vol. II, p. 465.

but as a harsh reality... believes in magical practices, collective sacrifices and even celestial aliens [not in the anthropological or astronomical sense]" (p. 342).

The provided generalized description of the "convinced conspiracy theorist" may help: "every now and then he distorts historical facts for the sale of his favorite idea", "his favorite expressions are 'there is no doubt' and 'there is no reason to doubt', and he constantly uses them as evidence of his dubious statements" (p. 208); "he persistently tries to reveal connections albeit there are none" (p. 327); his works are not original, his arguments are trivial and based on compilations of well-known ideas (p. 213) and works of other conspiracy theorists, i.e., this is 'secondary literature' (p. 294). "He uses a variety of facts to arbitrarily interpret them and believes that 'the world is always against us'... he does not believe scientific data" (p. 304). His texts "amaze with the abundance of the most diverse materials, and the only thing they miss is serious analysis. They are full of emotional assessments, pseudo-erudition, unjustified jumps from one era to another, implausible comparisons and connections, tendentious interpretation of the ideas and activities of some famous authors, and obvious mistakes in presenting historical facts" (p. 149). Unfortunately, as a rule, not an academic historian but "a convinced conspiracy theorist, who believes that the main factor of history is not economy but mysticism... enjoys a certain popularity, gives public lectures and interviews" (p. 304). While an academic historian or philosopher may "recognize conspiracy theories as a legitimate scientific direction that reveals the secrets of those in power", "reproaches scientists for 'servility', i.e., for serving moneybags who are the least willing to allow a truthful coverage of their activities", and calls "opponents skeptical of conspiracy theories 'useful idiots' who play into the hands of conspirators" (p. 319).

Perhaps, the most interesting illustration of the "conspiracy theorist" is A. G. Dugin: "in different years he declared himself... an esotericist, an Old Believer, a Eurasianist, a political scientist, a sociologist... Considering the 'world conspiracy', he proceeds from esoterica, conspiracy or geopolitical theories... The surprised reader does not understand which to follow. But this does not bother Dugin, because he places emotions above reason and values the irrational approach immeasurably higher than the rational" (pp. 164–165). However, the author recognizes Dugin's "complete rightness" in some positions: his interpretation of conspiracy theories as "a continuation of medieval myths about 'dark forces' and 'machinations of the devil', which are now used outside the strict religious context"; his warning that "excessive and uncritical enthusiasm for conspiracy theories" can lead to "intellectual degradation" (pp. 165–166). Here the author seems to reach the limit of his emotional neutrality³⁹ and wonders why Dugin does not follow "his own wise advice" but formulates ideas "on the verge of schizophrenic delirium": "being under the indelible impression of dual constructions, Dugin sees the key to any ideas and movements in dividing them into oppositions and calls these verbal games an 'analysis'" (p. 168). Dugin's

39. The author describes A. Prokhanov even more emotionally: "poetizes crimes", "his language is full of delirium and insanity, colored with resentment", "as his language he chooses delirium and vulgarity, leading the Russian mass literature into the jungle of anti-intellectualism that pleases the current political system" (p. 176).

views change “almost with every new book he reads”, but he “loves his ideas so much that does not give up a single thought... and manages to offer the surprised reader several contrasting ideas about the Jews, which he suggested in different years” (p. 166)⁴⁰. The author explains numerous and obvious contradictions in Dugin’s concept by the fact that he “is not a scientist, he is an ideologist that sees his main task in evoking emotions that would direct people to the desired goal, and for this all means are good” (p. 173).

Although the review implies critical remarks, I hardly have the right to make such, but complex and ambiguous issues of the book cannot but raise questions from the reader. A reader with a sociologically biased perception may have some doubts about “the high mass demand for conspiracy theories” (the question is not in scale but in demand as such) or about conspiracy theories “meeting the needs of the rising populist wave” (the question is not so much in the wave as in the interpretation of populism⁴¹ and in criteria of the rise). It would probably make sense to supplement the book with a glossary of basic terms, because the author uses some as synonyms, for instance, noting that “conspiracy sentiments... can become an incentive for real destructive actions — escalation of conflicts and violence, wars and genocide”, explaining that “when these myths [conspiracy ideas?] are used as a tool of the propaganda struggle, they have a strong political impact” (pp. 27–28). Undoubtedly, this is a perfect description of contemporary realities, but when reading the book, the reader gets the feeling that conspiracy theories, propaganda, eschatology and utopia are too strongly intertwined in the semantic space of this narrative.

The reader may have doubts about the interpretation of the main subject of the global conspiracy — “international bankers” — as an euphemistic nomination for the Jews (today “rich people” are hated rather as a class in the Marxist sense) and about the strengthening of the anti-Semitic rhetoric in the Russian conspiracy texts (the image of the enemy is more variable, and, judging by the television rhetoric, certain “Anglo-Saxons” are the leading “enemies of Russia” today⁴²). Some readers may consider the relationship

40. In another book, the author notes that “Dugin can hardly be accused of ideological obstinacy. He creatively changes his views, subtly sensing the changing political situation... His constant fluctuations in assessing Israel and the Jews are determined by the momentary political situation and indicate the subjectivity of his approach which is very far from scientific”. See: Shnirelman V. A. (2011). *Limits of Tolerance: Ideology and Practice of the New Racism*, Moscow: New Literary Observer, vol. II, pp. 224–225.

41. The author notes that “conspiracy theories can be attributed to the field of populism, in which the place of the rejected meta-narrative is immediately taken by a new meta-narrative promoted by conspiracy theorists” (p. 26). This is a too broad interpretation of populism, which clarifies little in its essence in general and in its relationship with conspiracy theories in particular. Even more confusing is the author’s clarification that “post-truth generated by conspiracy theories leads to post-democracy, and this is precisely what has been observed in recent years in the form of the rising populist wave... because conspiracy theories give birth not to dissidents but to a zombified public” (p. 28). See, e.g.: Nikulin A., Trotsuk I. (2022). Political and Apolitical Dimensions of Russian Rural Development: Populism “from above” and Narodnik Small Deeds “from below”. *Politics and Policies of Rural Authenticity*. Ed. by P. Pospěch, E. M. Fuglestad, E. Figueiredo, Routledge, pp. 77–93; Nikulin A. M., Trotsuk I. V. (2022). Humanitarian Populism. *Russian Sociological Review*, vol. 21, no 4, pp. 136–149; Ely C. (2022). *Russian Populism: A History*, Bloomsbury Publishing.

42. In the book *Tribe of Dan: Eschatology and Anti-Semitism in Contemporary Russia*, the author clarifies that “today anti-Semitism is the most well-known type of phobia”, but “its extraordinary stability and ability to

between the rational and the irrational in conspiracy theories insufficiently articulated in the everyday context: as a rule, there are two groups of the everyday ‘conspiracy theorists’ — those who do not believe in a secret conspiracy of dark forces but purposefully use this horror story (politicians — to gain power, bloggers — for enrichment, journalists — for career, etc.); sincere believers and those frantically preaching the future dark/godless times, who ensure the successful life strategies of ‘non-believers’ from the first group. Probably, this conventional scale with two ‘poles’ needs other, intermediate positions (irrationally motivated politicians and ordinary people that rationally intimidate others), but I would like to live in a society lacking this scale. Apparently, this is a utopia which loses to conspiracy theories, but everyday life gives reasons to doubt their correctness, which means, according to the behest of V.I. Lenin, that conspiracy theories are not omnipotent. Every day our plans so invariably collapse or change that we simply cannot believe in total control of some ‘evil empire’ over everything that happens around — “hunger, civil wars, genocide..., oil prices, WTO policies, devaluation of national currencies, GMOs, etc.”. Otherwise, we would have to admit that the “global cabal” does not cope⁴³ with its primary (in the Leninist sense) tasks.

Эсхатологическая конспирология: теория и практика опознавания апокалиптической семантики и синтаксиса

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Ирина Троцук

Доктор социологических наук, ведущий научный сотрудник,

Центр фундаментальной социологии,

Национальный исследовательский университет «Высшая школа экономики»

Профессор, кафедра социологии, Российский университет дружбы народов

Адрес: ул. Мясницкая, д. 20, г. Москва, Российская Федерация 101000

E-mail: irina.trotsuk@yandex.ru

survive entire eras, changing forms and adapting to new situations, continues to raise questions. In particular, the emphasis on racial, political and social-economic forms of anti-Semitism pushed its religious forms into the background... The contemporary religious renaissance leads to the revival of religious forms of anti-Semitism... the Jews are described as the vanguard of the Antichrist, which makes believers interpret their high activity as a sure sign of the approaching end of the world”, while there is still “anti-Semitism without the Jews” (p. 4).

43. In the spirit of the similar assessment of government decisions and reforms by J. Scott (1999). *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*, Yale University Press.