PArtecipazione e COnflitto
http://siba-ese.unisalento.it/index.php/paco
ISSN: 1972-7623 (print version)
ISSN: 2035-6609 (electronic version)
PACO, Issue 15(3) 2022: 651-671
DOI: 10.1285/i20356609v15i3p651

Published 15 November, 2022

Work licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Non commercial-Share alike 3.0 Italian License

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Virtuosos of Mimesis and Mimicry: A Case Study of Movements Propagating Conspiracy Theories in Ireland and Poland

Elżbieta Drążkiewicz
Institute for Sociology, Slovak Academy of Sciences

ABSTRACT: In recent years, conspiracy theories have been increasingly defined as a new social enemy, a threat to democracy. But scholars of conspiracy theories also point out that we have very little research that examines a direct link between conspiracy theories and political practice. We still know very little about the ways in which conspiratorial beliefs influence different forms of civic engagement and democratic participation. By examining Irish and Polish movements that endorse vaccination-related conspiracy theories, this article explores what relation they have to civil society. I argue that, in order to shed the negative label of conspiracy theories, such movements engage in the practices of mimesis and mimicry. According to Markus Hoehne, mimesis is a form of positive appraisal, an art of imitating well-established models of social and political organization. Mimicry, on the other hand, involves the deceptive imitation of such models in order to attain one's own political agenda. What, then, are the Covid-19 era protests: masters of mimicry or masters of mimesis?

KEYWORDS: Civil society, conspiracy theories, Covid-19, Ireland, Poland, mimesis, mimicry, NGOs, vaccination hesitancy, anti-lockdown protests

CORRESPONDING AUTHOR: Elżbieta Drążkiewicz, ela.drazkiewicz@savba.sk

1. Introduction

In the 1980s, social and political commentators of the Western world feared that one of the biggest problems of the upcoming decades would be political apathy. As a remedy, they prescribed wide-scale citizen participation that ought to strengthen both established and emerging democracies (Paley 2002; Greenberg 2014). Participation was linked to the production of democratic citizens; it championed liberal notions of individual agency and choice (Greenberg 2014). The activization of citizens was to take place through the

(re)mobilization of civil society, embodied as formalized associations that became known as non-governmental organizations (NGOs), non-profits, or the Third Sector (Drążkiewicz 2016).

Thirty years on, the fear of political apathy seems to be overtaken by a new concern: fear of political rage. This rage is increasingly attributed to conspiracy theorists, who are blamed for the rise of Trump, Brexit, the regimes of Putin, Kaczyński, and Orban, and eroding the dominant philosophical underpinnings of liberal democracies (McGranahan 2017; Hellinger 2019; Bergmann 2018). Already before the Covid-19 pandemic, conspiracy theories were identified by the World Health Organization as the key challenge for the protection of public health (World Health Organization 2020). The arrival of the pandemic ultimately sealed the status of conspiracy theories as the key social enemy of the present, a threat to democracy (Douglas 2021; Bratich 2020; Basit 2021; Tennent and Grattan 2022).

However, as leading experts in the field point out, very little research actually considers a direct link between conspiracy theories and political practice (Butter and Knight 2020). We do not know enough about how conspiratorial beliefs influence civic engagement and political participation (Thórisdóttir et al. 2020; Bertuzzi 2021), although there has been widely shared assumption regarding the impact of conspiracy theories on people's compliance with restriction measures and the acceptability of vaccinations (Momplaisir et al. 2021; Morales et al. 2022; Rutjens et al. 2021; World Health Organisation 2020). In mainstream media and within the dominant political sphere, conspiracy theories were blamed for mobilizing "anti-Covid-19" protests and incidents of aggression directed at immunization venues and healthcare workers. Thus, the pandemic presents an interesting opportunity to interrogate how conspiratorial views influence action and how movements propagating conspiratorial narratives link with civil society.

My analysis is based on observations of Irish and Polish pandemic-related conspiratorial milieus. I focus specifically on two organizations that were identified by local medical establishments as being particularly disruptive for the implementation of Covid-19 health regimes: Ogólnopolskie Stowarzyszenie Wiedzy o Szczepieniach Stop-NOP (Nationwide Association for Knowledge About Vaccines – Stop-NOP) and Anti-Corruption Ireland (ACI). Both organizations and their leaders were among the most vocal critics of pandemic-related restrictions and vaccine mandates in their countries. Not all their communications can be considered conspiracy theories, but importantly, their leaders – Gemma O'Doherty with John Waters (IRL) and Justyna Socha (PL) – are widely perceived by media and medical establishments as conspiracy theorists and, in their home countries, function as "poster children" for conspiratorial movements.

By analyzing Stop-NOP's and ACI's activities, I aim to assess what place they occupy in the socio-political order. In this article, I am using my observations to explore new ways for conceptualizing the relationships that movements propagating disinformation and conspiracy theories might have with liberal democracies. We already know that their evaluation in academic and expert circles is not favorable. But the goal of this article is to push discussion further by asking how – in spite of negative labelling and heavy media criticism – these organizations have managed to maintain their social presence, and sometimes even succeeded in expanding it. How, in spite of such strong pushback, have they carved out space in the public sphere, and how have they managed to take on the status of social movements?

In trying to answer similar questions, other scholars have focused on the appeal of the worldviews presented by such movements (Harambam 2020) and their ability to create space for likeminded people (Sobo 2015; Lepselter 2016). While I agree with those interpretations, I propose to take a step further and analyze strategies of individuals and organizations endorsing conspiracy theories that allow them to successfully attract followers and create that space for themselves within the political ecosystems of their countries. I demonstrate that organizations such as ACI and Stop-NOP appropriate and imitate methods usually associated with civil society, in particular with formalized NGOs. I argue that mimesis and mimicry are important strategies contributing to their survival and expansion. Hoehne (2009) argues that mimesis is a form of a positive

appraisal, an art of imitating well-established models of social and political organization. Mimicry, on the other hand, involves the deceptive imitation of such models in order to achieve one's own political agenda. What, then, are the Covid-19 era protests and conspiratorial movements: masters of mimicry or masters of mimesis?

1.1 Conspiracy theories and the medical field: Courting, despising, and imitating

The incorporation of conspiracy theories into discourses surrounding the Covid-19 pandemic should be no surprise. Conspiracy theories influenced pivotal moments in the history of the Western World: the French Revolution, the spread of Nazism, the Cold War, the Invasion of Iraq, and most recently the attack on Ukraine (Oberhauser 2020; Barkun 2013; Butter 2014; Hofstadter and Wilentz 2012; Panczová 2020; Pelkmans and Machold 2011; Yablokov 2022). An important component of the conspiratorial milieu is a belief that there is a special group or category of people who are plotting to harm specific groups (e.g., ethnic, racial, religious) or who threaten particular ways of life (Drazkiewicz and Rabo 2020). Most Covid-related conspiracy theories identified medical authorities as key villains. For instance, in Poland, people opposing vaccine mandates compared Prof. Miłosz Parczewski – a governmental advisor – to an SS officer. In May 2021, a flower arrangement typically used at funerals was left at his office with an inscription on the ribbon: "Stop Sanitary Segregation. Dr Mengele Vamoose!" (Kowalewska 2021). In Ireland, The National Public Health Emergency Team for Covid-19 (NPHET) and its members (especially its Chair, Dr. Tony Holohan) were key "suspects." But Gemma O'Doherty also found other villains to blame for contributing to the "scamdemic." For instance, in one of her videos she focused on Beaumont hospital in Dublin and its staff:

> It has been reported that the Director of Nursing, a woman called Marie Murray, remember that name, one day she will be facing a tribunal for crimes against humanity. Eoghan De Barra, a doctor, which, microbiologist, who I believe is rolled out by RTE [Ireland's flagship television network] in the same way as Luke O'Neill is, well Eoghan De Barra works in this hospital here and he has been filling the minds of staff, who are intelligent, who have done their research and who are saying no to the vaccine, with the most unbelievable rubbish about the adverse events. He's saying that the AstraZeneca vaccine is going to save the world, he's making all sorts of allegations and claims which cannot be substantiated. If we lived in a truly functioning democracy, the Gardaí would be in here today arresting Eoghan De Barra and Marie Murray. (The High Court 2021)

As these examples show, people endorsing conspiratorial views strongly question the credibility of scientific claims, the morality of healthcare workers, and the ethics of medical practice. They accuse the medical establishment of plotting against the welfare of citizens. Yet, even as they criticize science, they also appropriate it through insisting on doing their own "research" and applying pseudo-scientific jargon. As Song (2010) observes, people endorsing conspiracy theories simultaneously court, covet, despise, and dismiss the persona and authority of medics and scholars. This complicated relationship between science and conspiracy theories was quite well documented before the pandemic (Pop 2016; Sobo 2015; Uscinski et al. 2017; Drążkiewicz 2021). We already know that conspiracy theories criticize established scientific institutions and contest scientific epistemic authority (Marcus 1999; Roth 2005). They promote ideas of cognitive deviance and moral perversion in science (Fassin 2011). They question the elitism of experts, their neutrality and objectivity (Sobo 2016; Niehaus and Jonsson 2005; Dubé et al. 2015; Fairhead and Leach 2012). They are critical and suspicious of science funding regimes and the politicization of academic endeavors (Harambam 2020; Harambam and Aupers 2015). Importantly, though, while criticizing science and scientific practice, individuals and organizations propagating conspiracy theories also actively imitate scientific endeavor.

1.2 Imitation, mimesis, and mimicry as political strategies

Imitation – a practice of being almost the same, but not quite (Charles 2006; Bhabha 1984) – has received attention from anthropologists, especially those studying the art of mimesis and mimicry in colonial, post-colonial, and post-socialist contexts (Taussig 1993; Roque 2015; Drążkiewicz 2016; Wedel 1998). In the African context, mimesis and mimicry were interpreted as reactions to Western models, practices allowing meaningful emancipation, cultural resistance, and criticism of colonial order. For Bhaba (1984), imitation was an ironic compromise with the pressure of colonialism. For Taussig (1993), mimesis and mimicry allowed one to appropriate the power of the imitated subject, while also being an intentional afront to colonizers' reality and authority. Taussig interpreted them as a mix of appraisal and parody. He argued that, while mimesis and mimicry appeared to appropriate certain cultural traits, in fact they were ironic, defiant, resistant, and subversive cultural practices. Colonized people might appear to want to become like Westerners, but in fact they did not. Ferguson (2002) had a different view. He perceived mimesis as a serious claim to membership in the Western order, a negotiation for a place in this order. I adopted this view in my own analysis of the post-socialist context in my studies of Polish developmental and humanitarian NGOs, who frequently imitated their Western partners in order to gain international respectability and elevate their status at home (Drążkiewicz 2016; Drążkiewicz 2020).

While mimesis and mimicry are frequently considered jointly, Roque (2015) emphasizes that they are not the same. In both cases, the imitated subject is only partially present; it is both incomplete and virtual. But mimesis can be understood as a symbolic representation of reality, a form of mechanical reproduction. Mimicry, on the other hand, should be understood as a form of "dissimulation oriented towards subversive or disruptive copying" (Roque 2015). While mimesis can be seen as a form of respectful imitation, almost assimilation, mimicry is cheeky, a form of back talk, close to mockery. For Bhabha (1984), mimicry is also a form of camouflage, a resemblance that aims to imitate a certain subject while also displaying the difference. It is simultaneously about resemblance and menace (Bhabha 1984). Mimicry imitates the dominant patterns, but at the same time, it mocks and violates them. Hoehne (2009), who analyses how mimesis and mimicry are used in the process of state and identity formation in Somaliland and Puntland, makes a similar distinction between the two. He argues that the goal of mimesis is to imitate so as to get closer to the ideal, while the goal of mimicry is to copy so as to gain some profit. Importantly, he notes that the imitated subject is not always admired. Sometimes people and organizations imitate their social and political enemies, borrowing from their repertoire of tactics in order to defeat them. He also argues that the difference between mimesis and mimicry is that "the first is an open attempt to imitate, often as a strategy to cope with uncertainty, while the latter helps to conceal the real intentions of the actors" (Hoehne 2009). The deceptive nature of mimicry, its ability to radically revalue normative knowledge, turns it into a threatening practice. It is a practice that is hostile to the original model and the people propagating it (Bhabha 1984). Because mimicry is intentionally conflictual and disturbing, it is perceived as scandalous (Ferguson 2002).

1.3 Conspiracy theories and the art of imitation

As I noted above, the imitating nature of conspiracy theories has been analyzed most extensively in studies concerning the way conspiratorial discourses engage with academia through virtuoso intellectualism, expertise emulation, and reactionary anti-authoritarian occultism (Harambam and Aupers 2015; Harambam 2020; Barkun 2013; Song 2010; Pipes 1999; Byford 2011). Song notices that, in this context, mimesis is "born of a communicative duel. This aspect brings out its 'material' dimension, its ability to 'touch.' This is why conspiratorial reasoning is never meant to be a self-standing, disinterested 'theory.' It is a counter discourse, a

reactionary reversal, always already an answer to an anticipated discrediting, persecution, and censure" (Song 2010).

But from the studies of Mahmud (2012) and Vine and Carey (2017), we know that conspiracy theories imitate not only science, but also bureaucracy. They show that, while the state apparatus is subjected to severe critique, simultaneously its bureaucratic practices are also being imitated. Using the example of chemtrails and environmental theories popular in California, Vine and Carey (2017) argue that the villain forces uncovered by conspiracy theories borrow their key characteristics from the bureaucratic form. Like bureaucracy, the enemy described in conspiracy theories is depersonalized, faceless, and oppressive. It is rational and constantly expands its authority. Both conspiratorial enemies and bureaucracy are seen as highly powerful. Both raise the same questions and concerns about secrecy and transparency, control and interest groups. Similar observations are made by Mahmud (2012), who studied Masonic conspiracies in Italy. She shows that movements endorsing conspiracy theories frequently apply knowledge production and communication techniques that are typically associated with state bureaucracy. She demonstrates how the strategies of transparency of those who are accused of conspiratorial thinking follow the rules of state bureaucratic logics. They play with state ideologies rather than without them, using the same techniques as the states: PR campaigns, media-savvy communications, "policy-like" documents, manifestos, and press releases.

1.4 Civil society and NGOs: The new villains of conspiracy theories

The obsession of conspiratorial circles with "the deep state" and "corrupted science" have clearly attracted attention. But we know much less about the relationship that truthers have with the world of NGOs – a sector which is increasingly identified as the key villain of conspiratorial narratives. Of course, scholars do note that many right-wing theories mention George Soros, a Hungarian-born American businessmen who funded several NGOs in Eastern Europe and strongly supported capacity building in the Central and Eastern European civil society sector (Drążkiewicz 2016; Krekó and Enyedi 2018; Nagy 2018). In those narratives, Soros is frequently associated with the "Jewish lobby." Consequently, the analysis of narratives mentioning him focuses on the ways conspiracy theories feed on and contribute to antisemitism (Plenta 2020; Witte 2018). I strongly agree with those assessments. But in this article, I want to focus not on the antisemitic tropes but on the ways in which he, other powerful donors (like Bill Gates), and "liberal NGOs" came to symbolize unwanted external influences, liberal worldviews espousing undesirable socio-cultural change supposedly aimed to destroy "traditional" and "family" values.

For instance, at the time of the pandemic, both in Poland and in Ireland, one of the widely circulated theories argued that vaccines are made from the bodies of aborted children. The same theories also presented Soros and Gates as responsible for pushing vaccines on people. Such theories can be interpreted as a sign of poor understanding of science; thus, scientists and media outlets invested great effort to debunk this false narrative. They can also be seen as rehearsing old antisemitic blood libel: through linking abortion practice with Jewish "villains," they evoke a canard accusing Jews of murdering Christian children in order to use their blood in religious rituals. But they can simultaneously be seen as reflecting a deep dissatisfaction with social changes in both Poland and Ireland – countries once associated with Catholic values – that have taken place in the last decades, in particular liberalization, secularization, and diversification of society. These fears are particularly strong in the case of ACI and the Irish conspiratorial milieu. Already in 2018, O'Doherty argued that the Irish civil society sector was "infiltrated by groups funded by vile #Soros who insist on destroying sovereign #Ireland" (Twitter, 2 December 2018) or complaining about "the 'gravy train' that is multicultural Ireland, funded in no small part by the man who wants to destroy our continent, its values and its future. Anything funded by George Soros should be shunned" (Facebook, 30 November 2018). She illustrated these statements

with logos representing NGO members of the Irish Network Against Racism, suggesting clearly that she identifies these organizations as enemies plotting against "true" Ireland – a homogenous land of white Christians. Within this narrative, Soros is presented as the global leader of NGOs, a puppet master of the Third Sector. The NGO sector itself is presented as a suspicious agent concealing the subversive activities of other powerful social enemies. Similar tropes are also visible in the narratives circulated within right-wing populist circles in Poland and other Central and Eastern European states (Sobo and Drążkiewicz 2021; Giry and Gürpınar 2020; Kuzio 2011; Đorđević et al. 2021). Increasingly within these narratives, what is problematic is not just the values NGOs are representing, but the NGOs themselves. NGOs are defined as a threat to the conservative social order, a new enemy – but as I show below, they are also an enemy from which individuals and organizations endorsing conspiracy theories do not hesitate to borrow.

2. Mimesis, mimicry, conspiracy theories, and NGOs

2.1 Stop-NOP: A case of mimesis

Qualitative studies and population surveys suggest that conspiracy theories are particularly popular in Poland (Hajdu and Klingova 2020; Hajdu et al. 2020; Bilewicz et al. 2013; Bilewicz et al. 2019; Kofta et al. 2020). Historically, as in other countries of the region, communist regimes skillfully incorporated conspiratorial thinking into their governing apparatus. The censorship and reluctance to provide truthful information also contributed to the spread of "independent," anti-regime conspiracies (Panczová 2020; Panczová and Janeček 2015; Czech 2016; Ghodsee 2011). The most popular conspiracy theories in the country feed on and spread anti-Semitism and "anti-gender" sentiments (Bilewicz et al. 2013; Korolczuk and Graff 2018; Mierzyńska 2020a, 2020b; Czech 2016; Czech 2020). There is also a strong interest in theories that offer alternative explanations for the end of communism and the socio-political processes that followed (Czech 2020; Bilewicz et al. 2019). The last decade has been strongly influenced by the Smoleńsk plane crash, which also triggered many theories (Bilewicz et al. 2019; Czech 2015; Napiórkowski 2014). This tragic event and the way it was leveraged by conservative politicians to gain power resulted in strong polarization in the country.

Today, Poland experiences particularly strong political division. The last elections split the country in half as the Prawo i Sprawiedliwość candidate won by securing 51,03% compared to Civic Platform's 48,97% (Kosiński and Wosion-Czoba 2015). Studies show that, in divided societies, conspiracy theories might be more popular: when people have different views, they are likely to interpret the same events in different ways (Moore and Sanders 2002). But in Poland, it is not simply political polarization that contributes to the conspiratorial milieu, but also state authorities. The government is often responsible for using state-owned media to spread misinformation and foster conspiracy cultures; intentional manipulation of information is a normalized political tactic in the country (Bilewicz et al. 2013; Bilewicz et al. 2019; Kofta and Sedek 2005; Żuk et al. 2021; Czech 2015).

During Covid-19, some Catholic bishops and several conservative organizations (such as Ordo Iuris), expressed doubt about vaccination safety and spread false narratives suggesting that Covid-19 vaccines contained aborted fetal cells. While the official line of the government was in support of vaccines, not all public figures associated with the political leadership took part in immunization programs. In January 2022, the online platform Onet revealed that not all vice-ministers were vaccinated. The list of those who opted out included Jacek Kurski (then-President of Polish National TVP), Antoni Macierewicz (Chair of the

Parliamentary Committee for the Investigation of the Causes of the 2010 Polish Air Force Tu-154 crash), and Justice Krystyna Pawłowicz (MP and Member of the Constitutional Tribunal).

It is amid this context that Stop-NOP operates. Based in Poznań, the organization was initiated in 2011 by Justyna Socha – a mother born in 1976 who dedicated her life to opposing vaccination mandates. The primary goal of her organization is to change vaccination regimes in Poland. Currently, babies born in the country must be vaccinated against tuberculosis and hepatitis B. Vaccines against measles, mumps, and rubella (MMR vaccine), diphtheria, tetanus, whooping cough, and poliomyelitis are also compulsory. Those who opt out of vaccines without valid (medical) reasons risk fines and other legal repercussions. Socha's initiative to resist this system managed to gather a strong following: since 2017, it regularly brings thousands of people to the streets of Warsaw for the annual "March against Forced Vaccinations," also known as a "Freedom March." By August 2022, the organization had 174,289 followers on Facebook. During Covid-19, the organization actively protested social restrictions, lockdowns, mask mandates, and vaccines. It organized several public events, such as a 2022 protest in Poznań, which in spite of the cold January weather brought together approximately half a million participants. The suspicion towards vaccine safety was symbolized by coffins, carried by protesters, that were covered by black veils with the inscription "Vaccine's victims" (Kijeski 2022). Stop-NOP has a very clear focus on vaccinations. Even though the organization and its leader partner with right-wing populists, their agenda rarely branches out to non-vaccine related topics. When Soros or Gates are brought up by Justyna Socha, it appears to be a "dog whistling" practice, an attempt to gain the attention of wider (antisemitic, populist) audiences and attract them to the debate concerning vaccines; for Socha, they do not seem to be the main concern. The focus of Stop-NOP is on immunizations, not on wider politics, other NGOs, or "culture wars."

Since its inception, Stop-NOP has been continuously building its image as a legitimate member of Polish civil society. In order to achieve that goal, the organization secured official legal status in 2011 by being registered in the National Court Register. This maintains an appearance of transparency: the registry offers basic information about each organization's leaders and provides some contact details. Stop-NOP's agenda is very clear, and all activities, communications, and initiatives have a relatively narrow goal: to change the immunization regime in Poland and abolish vaccination mandates. The organization applies communication strategies that are typical for other advocacy groups. It has a website, runs social media accounts, and organizes press conferences and outreach campaigns. Like other advocacy organizations in Poland, Stop-NOP's mainly functions as an information and resource hub. Thus, the website offers a plethora of articles on vaccination trials, vaccination safety, risks related to transmittable diseases, and suggestions on how to mitigate those risks through other means than vaccines. Even though the sources they use are rarely reputable and the organizational database lacks academic rigor, the advice is designed to appear professional, and medical jargon is frequently applied. The website also serves as a legal "advice bureau" for people who want to opt out of vaccine schemes: it provides step-by-step guidelines on how to deal with the Chief Sanitary Inspectorate (the main body responsible for supervising immunization programs in Poland); informs about parental and medical rights; and provides advice on how to make vaccine damage claims. The organization offers templates of documents that can be useful in the process of opting out of immunization schemes or in dealing with the legal repercussions of such a decision.

Another important characteristic of Stop-NOP is its focus on legal action and legalism. In July 2018, Stop-NOP submitted to the parliament a proposal for a "Citizens' Act" that would repeal the mandatory status of vaccinations in Poland. Even though the proposal gained support from more than 120,000 citizens, it was rejected by the parliament. In spite of this failure, the leader of Stop-NOP promised to not give up on her mission and continue to fight for "vaccine freedom." While legalism is the preferred form of action, the

association also applies other forms of action typical of civil society: it organizes demonstrations, marches, and debates, and encourages its followers to engage in public debate. The organization strongly appropriates and embraces lingo usually associated with civil society organizations: it emphasizes such values as freedom, civic engagement, and the need to control the state apparatus. It encourages "social participation" and countering the "status quo," and it promotes individual agency and freedom of choice.

Further, a relevant practice applied by Stop-NOP in order to present itself as a legitimate member of the Third Sector aims at generating the impression of an expert body. This is achieved through partnering with academics, medics, and lawyers who already have expert status. Once the pandemic started, Stop-NOP frequently partnered with healthcare workers who questioned the severity of Covid-19 and the safety of vaccination. A particularly close collaboration was built with the members of the Polskie Stowarzyszenie Niezależnych Lekarzy i Naukowców – PSNLiN (Polish Association of Independent Medics and Scientists) – an organization established during the pandemic, claiming to present a voice from the medical community yet questioning Covid-19 health and safety restrictions. For instance, Stop-NOP endorsed PSNLiN's "Petition of Scientists and Medics Regarding SARS-COV-2 Vaccine Mandates and Lockdowns" (statements that strongly opposed lockdown measures and vaccine mandates). In the process, Stop-NOP emphasized that the petition was legitimate and trustworthy because it was "signed by 12 professors, 18 PhDs and 36 medical doctors." Such framing has important consequences: careful enumeration of signatories with advanced degrees gives an impression of widespread support for the anti-mandate agenda. Further, the emphasis on the academic credentials of petitioners allowed them to elevate the anti-Covid stance from a position taken by "uneducated" and "irrational" individuals to a view endorsed by respectable members of the expert community. The fact that PSNLiN leaders – Dr. Katarzyna Bross Walderdorff and Dr. Ewelina Gierszewska – were facing litigation for spreading misinformation regarding Covid-19 and vaccines and were shunned by the medical establishment was never hidden by Stop-NOP. Instead, it was used as evidence of their academic excellence – an ability to counter mainstream theories, to be critical thinkers, and to maintain professional integrity by speaking "truth" to power regardless of consequences. Partnering with individuals who appeared as experts and emphasizing their status, credentials, and affiliations allowed Stop-NOP to "borrow" their status. It was an important step in countering the image of an amateur and misguided organization, of being "crazy antivaxxers," to gain status as a knowledgeable and professional body, driven by reason and science.

While partnering with individual experts was important to gaining respectability, this process would not be complete without partnerships with high profile institutions. The best example here is the ability of Socha to enter the most prestigious political spaces – in spite of losing parliamentary elections twice. In 2015, she was invited for the parliamentary debate regarding immunization programs, and she was given a high-profile opportunity to address the Sejm in its main chamber. In that same year, as the leader of Stop-NOP, she was invited to the Presidential Palace, where she met with Wojciech Kolarski (the Presidential Minister) to present her standpoint regarding vaccinations. Since then, Socha has been actively supporting the establishment of the Parliamentary Committee for the Safety of Immunization Programs for Children and Adults. Significantly, the Committee's goals mirror those of Stop-NOP. Since 2019, Socha has been an official civic assistant to the PM Pawel Skutecki, and at the time of writing of this article she was serving as an assistant to the MP Grzegorz Braun. The events organized by Stop-NOP are frequently endorsed by the Konfederacja party. These political alliances and Socha's ability to enter high profile offices create an impression that Socha, her organization, and the agenda she represents are legitimate. They elevate the organization's status, suggesting that this organization is a valuable stakeholder in Polish civil society.

Another strategy undertaken by Stop-NOP to further advance this perspective involves international networking, for example, joining transnational coalitions of like-minded organizations such as the World

Council for Health. Building such networks generates better visibility and creates a perception that the association is not just a marginal player but part of a strong international movement.

Significantly, while the agenda of Stop-NOP is built on conspiracy theories asserting that "Big Pharma" is engaged in a conspiracy of misinformation regarding vaccination safety, the organization's activities do not differ much from those that are typical for the Third Sector. This ability to imitate other advocacy groups successfully elevated its position from a niche organization to one with strong visibility and considerable following. Their activities also correlate with dropping vaccination rates. Data provided by the National Institute of Public Health's Department of Epidemiology and Surveillance of Infectious Diseases shows clearly that since 2011 (the year of Stop-NOP's registration), vaccination levels have been steadily falling. For instance, between 2007 and 2011, the uptake of the MMR vaccine was estimated at the 99%. In 2019 (the last pre-pandemic year), the level dropped to 91,9% (NIZP 2020), far below the levels required for maintaining herd immunity.

While there is no data that would show clearly Stop-NOP being solely responsible for the lowering vaccination levels, it is clear that the organization to some extent contributed to this situation. Since 2011, the activities of the organization have increasingly been discussed in traditional and new media. The events organized by the association are attracting increasing numbers of participants; the most recent March for Freedom in 2021 brought a crowd of some 3,5 thousand people. Investigative journalists (Sepioło and Dauksza 2022) estimate that, between 2016 and 2022, Stop-NOP and its leaders were able to fundraise more than one million złotych (approx. 240,000 euros). While her association does not get good press, it is no longer an organization that can simply be ignored or ridiculed. It appears that Stop-NOP and its activities might have some influence on the public.

Significantly, Stop-NOP has managed to achieve this influence in spite of the strong stigma. Since its inception it has been labeled an "anti-vaxx" organization. It has been frequently mocked by journalists and social media users as irrational. Its followers are increasingly branded as "*foliarze*" (a reference to the popular culture image of conspiracy theorists believing an aluminum foil hat can protect them from telepathic brain infiltration by aliens). Socha made it clear on several occasions that she was aware of this image and expressed strong dissatisfaction with not being treated seriously. Thus, the persistent imitation of Third Sector strategies through institutionalization, prioritizing legal modalities of action, building expert status, empowering alliances, and international networking allowed Stop-NOP to push back against negative labeling. It allowed the organization to transform its image from an amateur, not-serious initiative to that of a professional organization.

Borrowing cultural templates and modes of operation from other members of civil society allowed this organization not only to overcome its negative image (at least among some publics) but also to strengthen its influence. The art of imitation helped Stop-NOP to carve out some space for itself in the public sphere. But this is still a space on the periphery, and not because of marginalization by others. It appears that the organization itself is reluctant to become a "proper" member of the Third Sector: it picks and chooses what practices it wants to follow, while rejecting others. For instance, while Socha opted to institutionalize its activities by registering the NGO, she avoids some responsibilities that come with the privilege of being a civil society member, such as proper transparency and making financial and activity reports available to the public. It is not clear where the organization gets its money, and where the money goes.

That is why I would argue that Stop-NOP's activities are not an attempt to become a legitimate member of Polish civil society, but instead an attempt at mimesis. Here, imitation becomes an opportunity to extract a force from other powerful stakeholders in order to fulfil one's own agenda (Ferguson 2002; Friedman 1994). It is a balancing act between appearing as an NGO, yet avoiding a full commitment to the Third Sector and its

rules. Nevertheless, mimicking a certain repertoire from the NGO playbook (claiming expert status, networking with established organizations, focusing on legalism and policy making) facilitates some level of assimilation into a specific milieu of civil society – a strategic choice facilitating a clearly defined goal of changing immunization programs in Poland. This is not mockery. While the organization is not fully honest about some of its actions, its agenda seems not to be deceptive – Socha might use vague language and engage with conspiratorial arguments, but her goal is clear: she wants to abolish vaccine mandates. All actions are in sync with that goal. Choosing the NGO model does not signal deception, as Poland has particularly high number of NGOs, and individuals and groups frequently choose the civil society path strategically to advance their agendas (Charycka et al. 2022). The Third Sector in Poland includes many populist organizations that spread extremist views, build outrage narratives, and propagate conspiracy theories. The best example is Ordo Iuris (Curanović 2021). Within this context, Stop-NOP is not an aberration, as the overall Polish Third Sector has "patience" toward organizations promoting outrageous views and perspectives. Further, Socha's choice to join this scene is not aimed at disturbing it.

2.2 Anti-Corruption Ireland: A case of mimicry

In the literature concerning conspiracy theories, Ireland is significantly absent. In spite of its difficult and violent history, in popular imagination the Republic is not typically associated with a strong conspiratorial milieu, nor with extreme right-wing populism (Arlow 2020). We know that Ireland and the Irish were the subject of many conspiracy theories propagated in Britain during the war for independence (Leeson 2021). It would be hard, then, to believe that Irish people would not share similar narratives about their opponents – yet we lack research that would provide evidence for this speculation. But we do have studies showing that radical groups in Northern Ireland are weaving conspiracy theories into their identity politics (Moore and Sanders 2002). The political events of The Troubles, without a doubt, provoked multiple conspiracy theories (McNaughton 2021). While less documented, the 2008 economic crisis and the consequential end of the Celtic Tiger era also provided an opportunity for developing theories of suspicion in the Republic concerning the Big Troika of the European Commission, the European Central Bank, and the International Monetary Fund (Monaghan 2011). Similar tropes were visible in discussions surrounding controversial Water Charges (Cox 2017). Shortly before Covid-19 hit the island, the theories that received the most attention concerned the safety of the HPV vaccine, leading to a 30% drop in the vaccine's uptake in the span of two years (O'Regan 2017; Drążkiewicz 2021; Drążkiewicz 2022).

Nevertheless, Ireland has not been considered a hotbed for conspiracy theories. Among very few public figures who engage with conspiratorial narratives openly are Gemma O'Doherty and John Waters, founders of Anti-Corruption Ireland (ACI), who have been labeled by media as key actors in the Irish conspiratorial milieu (Bracken 2021). As O'Doherty has been de-platformed by Twitter and Facebook, an important source of information about her stance is her own ACI website (https://anti-corruptionireland.com/). Here we can find the "Core Pillars" of her organization:

- End uncontrolled immigration, repatriate illegal/criminal non-nationals, leave UN migration pact and Agenda 21;
- Protect natural heritage and landscape, keep natural resources in ownership of Irish Nation;
- No 5G. End construction of industrial wind turbines and other environmentally damaging projects, no carbon tax.
- Develop Medic-led health service. Diminish the role of HSE, break state/medical links with pharmaceutical firms.

- Justice for victims of HSE. Hold perpetrators responsible. Ban HPV vaccine. Investigate links between childhood diseases and vaccination.
- Promote Irish sovereignty. Preserve Neutrality.
- Leave Pesco. Prepare for Irexit.
- Prioritize Rural Ireland. Promote small Irish businesses and organic farming. Promote Irish identity in food, retail and commerce.
- Promote pro-family/pro-life policies.

These populist views echo the key events and narratives of suspicion regarding the Economic Crisis of 2008, Water Charges, and the HPV Vaccine. They also stand in great contrast with the vision of Ireland that started to emerge with the last two referenda: the 2015 vote for marriage equality and 2018 repeal of the abortion ban (Drążkiewicz and Ní Mhórdha 2020; Drążkiewicz et al. 2020). Both events have often been interpreted as evidence that Ireland is becoming a progressive country, turning away from Catholic dominance and conservative values, a country able to create a political space where there is no place for rightwing populist movements like the one that O'Doherty and Waters try to lead (Arlow 2020). It is not surprising that, within this context, the leaders of ACI have not gained a major following. In spite of multiple attempts to run in Presidential, EU, and local elections, they have never achieved any meaningful success. The radical views of both O'Doherty and Waters seem like an aberration within an Irish political culture that avoids confrontation and conflict while promoting a moderate approach to politics (Drążkiewicz and Ní Mhórdha 2020).

But the recent pandemic brought some changes. When Covid-19 hit the island in 2020 and the government introduced very restrictive lockdown measures, O'Doherty's agenda shifted its focus from anti-immigration to anti-lockdown and anti-medical-establishment. During the pandemic, the main enemy for ACI became not the migrant but the Irish state and healthcare services (Sobo and Drążkiewicz 2021). In the past, O'Doherty referred to the topic of vaccinations and "medical freedom" only marginally; she was not a key figure in the debates surrounding conflicts over the HPV vaccine. Yet since the pandemic started, vaccines and health protection became a central issue on her agenda. O'Doherty and Waters were among the first European citizens to sue their own state for (what they perceived as) unnecessary and unconstitutional lockdown measures. This initiative, carried out in spring 2020, did not receive strong support. Only around one hundred people gathered in front of the court to support O'Doherty and Waters. But by Autumn 2021, things had changed. The anti-lockdown and anti-vaccine-mandate demonstrations that took place in Dublin brought thousands to the streets (Keena 2021). Alongside O'Doherty new activists started to emerge, and additional events were organized in smaller towns. It is clear that this populist movement endorsing conspiracy theories seized a moment to gain some traction and a following.

Yet, as I show below, the Irish case differs from the Polish one. Most importantly, the trajectories of Stop-NOP and ACI leaders differ. O'Doherty (born in 1968) rose to fame due to her investigative journalism and reporting on police corruption, for which she received several awards. According to #murraytweetindex, between 2014 and 2017 her Twitter account was ranked as the third most influential Irish account in the news category. Yet as her fame grew and she became increasingly vocal on social media, her racist, anti-immigration, and homophobic views also became more visible. Other journalists started to question her methods, and some branded her as a conspiracy theorist. Eventually, no reputable outlet wanted to publish her. YouTube de-platformed her in 2019, and Twitter in 2020.

But already at that time it was clear that O'Doherty was moving away from journalism to politics, and in 2018 she tried to secure nomination for the Presidential elections. In 2019 she established ACI. But the status of her "movement" remains unclear. The organization is not registered as a party, and when O'Doherty was

running for the Dublin Fingal by-elections for Dáil (Irish parliament) in 2019, she ran as an independent candidate. At that time, one of her supporters argued on Twitter: "O'Doherty is fighting to defend traditional Irish values from the challenges posed by Soros, mass Migration & Globalism" (Twitter account Amy Mek/@Amy Mek, 21.10.2019). In her own campaign video, O'Doherty argues:

> The Great Patriots who died for this country, what would they say about the modern culture in Ireland today? These NGOs are bringing us down … so the likes of George Soros need to be completely taken out of this country. We need to root this country out of this cultural Marxist identity politics agenda. We know that schools in this country are indoctrinating children with ideologies that are dangerous. The focus needs to go back on core subjects Irish and History…. Irish will be an ethnic minority in this country by 2040. We cannot allow that to happen. (Twitter user @AmyMek, 21.10.2019)

In the video, as O'Doherty speaks of dangerous NGOs and threatening ideology, we can see images of pro-choice campaigners and a drag queen reading to children, suggesting that the main threat to traditional Ireland is "gender and LGBTQ ideology."

It is clear that O'Doherty's political agenda is built on the call to protect "traditional" Ireland, which for her is embodied in Catholic values and "rural Ireland." O'Doherty and her political partner Waters embrace a variant of Irish nationalism that celebrates martyrs of the fight for independence, sees the (colonial) state as the enemy of the Irish people, and supports the vision of Ireland as a culturally and ethnically homogenous space. O'Doherty's ACI identifies the key problems of Ireland as not only a failed state and corruption, but also immigration and the fall of "traditional Irish" (i.e., Catholic) values. ACI explicitly calls for greater promotion of "pro-family and pro-life" values.

Significantly, as the last two referenda have shown, most NGOs in Ireland oppose such conceptualizations of Ireland, as many officially declared support for marriage equality and the "Repeal the 8th" movement to end the abortion ban. It was Irish civil society (not the state) that pushed for these two reforms. As I demonstrated in my work on "Repeal the 8th" and conflicts over the HPV vaccine (Drążkiewicz 2021; Drążkiewicz 2022), state authorities and politicians in Ireland are rarely drivers of social and cultural change. Thus, it is neither the state nor politicians that are the main threat to the values that O'Doherty holds dear. Instead, it is civil society and NGOs. The ACI leaders seem to be very well aware of that dynamic, increasingly identifying civil society, foundations, NGOs, and open society (whose symbol is obviously Soros) as the main enemies of traditional Ireland.

At the same time, ACI is also increasingly borrowing from that specific enemy, applying strategies typical for civil society and NGOs. Like Stop-NOP, ACI uses liberal discourse in order to counter liberal democracy. Both O'Doherty and Waters speak of themselves as citizens "representing the people," "acting on citizens' behalf," protecting their interests against the "corrupt ruling elite." O'Doherty frequently speaks of her actions as an independent "power of the people," fighting for "justice, truth and integrity." Describing the current post-pandemic world, Waters said:

> The next two to three years will be the most terrifying the world has ever experienced. Everywhere, in political terms, it will amount to the same thing: the disintegration of civilisation as we have understood it, and the attempted introduction of new, mainly digital systems of surveillance and control, that will, if they take hold, amount to monolithic global totalitarianism …. Only total obedience will suffice to ensure a safe passage. All this comes from the actions of corrupt politicians, judges and bankers, the determination of the world's richest to ensure that whatever happens, it strikes lower down the chain. We went to court in April 2020 in an attempt to prevent this going any further …. We hoped that by the time we got to the judicial review stage the picture

> would be clear to even the densest judge. But we did not calculate for the political biases of the judges …, or for the utter corruption of the Fourth Estate, which not merely failed to tell its audiences the truth, but offered itself up as a channel for lies, and in addition agreed to become a policing agency to silence and punish anyone seeking to speak truthfully. (Waters 2022)

ACI's purpose is to "wake up gullible society" and take political action. It is a goal that mirrors the ideology explaining the purpose of civil society, or at least the 1990s version that emphasized the need to overcome social apathy. In a twisted way, ACI has become a champion of civil society ideals: it promotes participation, embraces liberal notions of individual agency and choice, and pushes for stronger mobilization of citizens. It seeks to influence and claim back the space taken by the state in order to center life around families and "local communities."

To achieve its goals, like Stop-NOP, ACI imitates techniques of social engagement known from the Third Sector. ACI organizes informational campaigns, runs social media accounts (though after deplatforming, most of its activities moved to GETTR – an alt-tech social media platform). During Covid-19, ACI organized demonstrations in the capital. Most recently, O'Doherty and Waters started their own newspaper, *The Irish Light*, which is distributed in print. As O'Doherty explained in her GRITT video, she hopes that this will allow her to reach a wider audience and move beyond Internet bubbles. Both Waters and O'Doherty strive to be seen as experts, but they chose a slightly different strategy from Stop-NOP's: instead of partnering with other professionals, they strongly rely on the social capital that they built as journalists. Like Stop-NOP, they also embrace legalism: O'Doherty and Waters questioned in the High Court the legality of the Covid-19 lockdowns. They also resort to legal means to fight defamatory statements. When in 2015 John Waters was accused of homophobia in one of RTE's programs, he successfully threatened the broadcaster with legal action and managed to get compensation. Similarly, when Gemma O'Doherty lost her position at *The Independent* due to accusations of becoming a "rogue reporter" and extensive use of "theories of conspiracies" in her journalistic craft, she lodged a successful complaint in the Employment Appeals Tribunal (EAT) and a defamation case in the High Court. However, all these legal efforts are centered around the individual interests of ACI's leaders. With the exception of the Covid-19 lawsuit, to my knowledge ACI never took any action within the legal sphere that would impact Irish communities. ACI never presented any proposals of policies or legal reforms they would like to see implemented in Ireland. Nevertheless, it appears that in order to carve out for itself some niche in the Irish public space, O'Doherty opted to dress her ACI to appear as a member of civil society. In the effort to build her image, she extensively borrows from the tactics usually applied by NGOs.

Vine and Carey (2017) argue that conspiracy theories borrow their shape from bureaucracy because state bureaucracy is their key enemy. This suggests that conspiratorial movements like ACI are increasingly imitating civil society because they increasingly see civil society and NGOs as their main enemies. Indeed, for O'Doherty, the Irish Third Sector and its "Puppet Masters" Soros and Gates seem to represent corruption (due to "suspicious" funding regimes) and moral degeneration (symbolized in their choice to support the fight for marriage equality and the repeal of the abortion ban). As I noted above, O'Doherty made statements that suggest she holds the Irish civil society sector in high disregard. She is not interested in imitating it in order to become its legitimate member or to use the NGO model to achieve her own agenda. Instead, her actions appear as mockery, an attempt at deception, in which camouflaging as an NGO allows her to hide another agenda. This makes the imitation tactics of ACI closer to mimicry then mimesis.

And indeed, the agenda of ACI is particularly difficult to identify. O'Doherty moves between presenting herself as a journalist, a politician, and a civil society leader. Similarly, the status of ACI is vague; it is not clear if it is a social movement, a political party, or an NGO. O'Doherty ran in elections but never registered

ACI as a political party. Unlike political parties, ACI does not offer membership opportunities. This can suggest that she is more interested in a type of organization also embraced by Socha – a "one person NGO." Yet while in Poland such organizations are not an abnormality, in Ireland ACI comes across as highly deceptive, especially since ACI is not registered as a charity (as NGOs in Ireland typically are). O'Doherty also comes across as misleading when she states her agenda: while she built her capital on fighting against corruption, she later moved to endorse anti-immigration sentiments, and when Covid-19 hit, she latched onto the vaccination agenda. But in Ireland, where citizens can choose to opt in or out of immunization schemes without any consequences, calls for "medical freedom" also resonate differently than in Poland, where vaccines are mandatory, and where parents opting out of immunization schemes risk fines. Thus, in Ireland, calls to change vaccine laws give an appearance of deception, of "stirring the pot" in order to disturb the status quo. Consequently, O'Doherty's and Waters' actions appear as a mockery of the system, with a clear intent of disturbing it; it is mimicry rather than mimesis (Hoehne 2009).

It is this practice of mimicry – rather than O'Doherty's views alone – that makes O'Doherty's movement so scandalous. With its clumsy mimicry attempts that avoided full commitment to the world of civil society, ACI simply failed to effectively convince the public of its legitimacy. Paradoxically, even though O'Doherty is propagating nationalism, her own actions do not fit with the currently dominant variant of Irish political culture that rewards consent and moderation while excluding all forms of extremisms. In contrast, the Polish political scene has a high tolerance for extreme views. Further, the Polish NGO sector appears to be more accepting of organizations that, like Stop-NOP, do not follow all the best practices and freely pick and choose from the NGO repertoire of actions. Consequently, in the Polish context the art of mimesis practiced by Stop-NOP proved more effective in generating support and gaining social respectability than the art of mimicry in the Irish space. The impact of both organizations on their publics can be reflected in Covid-19 vaccination levels. According to ECDC, by June 2022 the uptake of the Covid-19 vaccine among the 18+ population in Poland reached 67,2% for the first dose and 38,1% for the booster/additional dose. In Ireland the levels were 94,6% and 73,9%, respectively. Clearly, in spite of alarming voices at the beginning of the pandemic that conspiracy theories and movements propagating them were the key obstacle to ending the pandemic, the vaccination uptake in Ireland was one of the highest in Europe. At the same time, the Stop-NOP strategy of patient mimesis proved more effective.

What also worked for or against both movements were local approaches to the pandemic. The Irish government maintained a unified, very restrictive front in promoting lockdown measures and vaccinations. At the same time, Polish authorities were not consistent in their approach to the pandemic, and as I noted above, even high-ranking politicians were known to doubt vaccine safety. Consequently, in the Irish context the views of O'Doherty seemed like a much stronger transgression, a serious affront to state power and public healthcare. In the Polish setting, Socha's views did not constitute such a strong aberration. As a result, these Irish and Polish organizations that were both questioning vaccination safety experienced different state reactions: the actions of O'Doherty generated much stronger pushback then those of Socha.

3. Conclusion

The conspiracy theory label has strong power to delegitimize a person's perspective, to push organizations that engage with conspiracy theories to the margins of the society (Nera et al. 2020). As I have shown in this article, through imitating NGOs, individuals and groups propagating conspiracy theories attempt to create a niche for themselves in the public space. The imitation practiced by Stop-NOP and ACI can be understood as a strategic response to othering. By seizing the cultural form of NGOs and civil society in the liberal era,

organizations such as Stop-NOP and ACI are asserting rights to the public space. They are making their way back from the fringes to the mainstream.

But significantly, neither Stop-NOP nor ACI fully embraces the world of NGOs. They are almost the same, but not quite: unlike NGOs "proper," they selectively imitate NGO tactics while refusing to subscribe to the obligations that come with NGO status. ACI and its leaders have a particularly troubled relationship with civil society and NGOs, especially those that are associated with "liberal" change in Ireland. Because O'Doherty identifies such organizations as social enemies – plotting to destroy "Irish values" – her attempts at imitation can be seen as a defiant practice, an attempt to appropriate the power of the imitated subject. At the same time, the activities of O'Doherty can be understood as an intentional afront to the whole sector – a mockery of the system, a mimicry rather than a mimesis.

But as the pandemic (hopefully) comes to an end, the question still remains: What are the consequences of such practices for the movements themselves and for civil society, even for democracy?

Both mimesis and mimicry allow organizations to take on the appearance of established, serious stakeholders. They use these strategies to elevate their status, to shed the pathologizing label of conspiracy believers. Their dependency on legalism also allows these organizations to gain some expert status, to be seen as players who must be taken seriously. Even if Stop-NOP or ACI fail to influence law and policy makers – to change the immunization regime in Poland, or to end pandemic restrictions in Ireland – they show commitment and determination. Their lack of hesitancy, their willingness to get rid of opponents by suing them, sends a strong signal to those who might be interested in investigating their practices and scrutinizing their actions. Applying legal strategies might have a chilling effect on journalists and researchers, who might fear litigation.

Appearing as an NGO without attempting to really become one might be concerning because such a practice of mimesis and mimicry might result in muddying the waters of civil society, causing reputational damage to the Third Sector. Perhaps this ability to destabilize the norms of the democratic order is what makes organizations such as ACI or Stop-NOP so scandalous, regardless of how low or high their following might be. Rather than their specific conspiratorial views or their ability to mobilize masses, it is the practice of mimesis and mimicry, of dressing up as someone else without revealing one's own identity that generates discomfort among those who do not share the views of these groups. The easiness with which they are able to engage in democratic processes, to blend into the civil society sector, leaves the observer with an uncomfortable feeling triggered not by specific theories but by the mockery of the democratic structures and democratic social contracts. It is this risk of the fundamental challenge to the liberal democratic order that makes these organizations so controversial and threatening.

In the colonial era, the response to the inappropriateness of mimicry, its threat to "normalized" colonial knowledge and its disciplinary powers, was the intensification of surveillance. Today the recalcitrance of movements engaging in mimicry and mimesis is also not left without a response; such organizations are disciplined by the newly emerging sector (NGOs, state-institutions) dedicated to countering misinformation, engaged in debunking, educational campaigns, policy-making efforts aiming to prevent and punish the spread of disinformation and conspiracy theories, and even direct policing. For instance, in August 2022, the Irish Gardaí were undertaking investigation into individuals spreading misinformation and conspiracy theories and weaponizing Covid-19 and Monkeypox for their political gain (MacNamee 2022).

But the practice of imitation is a doubled-edged sword: while it allows conspiracy movements to gain some strength, it also provides new opportunities for state and other actors to push back. Once an organization is formalized and registered as an NGO, it gains some privileges: a reputable status, it becomes entitled to apply for funding or to gain some position in the public space. But, it also becomes subject to certain legal responsibilities and the possibility of administrative control. For instance, in 2019 the President of the Supreme Chamber of Physicians (Naczelna Izba Lekarska) requested that the Mayor of Poznań – a city where Stop-

NOP is registered – should undertake official supervision and control of the activities of Stop-NOP. If such an audit took place, it would involve investigation of organizational finances and activities, checking Stop-NOP's compliance with fiscal and administrative laws.

Until recently, the main tools for pushing against organizations and individuals that propagate conspiracy theories were educational and fact-checking campaigns, which, unfortunately, rarely prove effective (Drążkiewicz and Harambam 2021; Harambam et al. 2022). Some individuals opted for litigation: both Socha and O'Doherty were sued by medical professionals for slander (The High Court 2021; Sałwacka 2019; Sałwacka 2021). However, such legal actions are not only costly and time consuming; they also push the responsibility for dealing with aggressive "truthers" onto their victims, who might not have the capacity to do so. Such litigation also does little to prevent the further spread of conspiracy theories and misinformation. In spite of legal problems, both O'Doherty and Socha continue to spread half-truths and misinformation about vaccines and Covid-19.

The administrative control requested by the President of the Supreme Chamber of Physicians suggests a significant shift in dealing with conspiratorial movements. It is a turn away from debunking to surveillance. Instead of focusing on conspiratorial narratives and addressing the problem through countering disinformation – a practice that some states are reluctant to take up, as it might entail risks for freedom of expression – this new tactic promotes administrative control. Of course, this move is not unproblematic in itself. It encourages stronger policing, surveillance, and state control. Yet this move seems to mirror the logic of the Al Capone case: the major crimes of this infamous mafia leader were impossible to prove and prosecute, yet he eventually got prosecuted for tax evasion. Similarly, calls to audit Stop-NOP suggest that while countering conspiracy theories might be difficult, such organizations still can be held accountable for their compliance with other laws. This suggests that, paradoxically, even though the art of imitation allows movements that spread conspiracy theories to gain some strength and seize the public space, it also provides new tools to those who wish to oppose them. Occasionally, the help to counter such organizations might come from surprising quarters. Just as this article was going to print, Stop-NOP was shaken by internal conflict. In an unexpected move, the Stop-NOP Board of Management accused Socha of lacking financial transparency and misappropriation of organizational funds. As she refused to answer questions about the organization's finances, her own colleagues forced her to resign. They also filed a report to the prosecutor's office requesting an investigation into suspected financial crimes committed by Socha.

References

Arlow J. (2020), "Antifa without Fascism: The Reasons Behind the Anti-Fascist Movement in Ireland", *Irish Political Studies,* 35(1): 115-137.

Barkun M. (2013), *A Culture of Conspiracy: Apocalyptic Visions in Contemporary America*, Berkeley: University of California Press.

Basit A. (2021), "Conspiracy Theories and Violent Extremism", *Counter Terrorist Trends and Analyses,* 13(3): 1-9.

Bergmann E. (2018), *Conspiracy & Populism: The Politics of Misinformation*, Cham, Switzerland: Springer International Publishing.

Bertuzzi N. (2021), "Conspiracy Theories and Social Movements Studies: A Research Agenda", *Sociology Compass,* 15: e12945.

Bhabha H. (1984), "Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse", *October,* 28: 125-133.

Bilewicz M., M. Winiewski, M. Kofta and A. Wójcik (2013), "Harmful Ideas: The Structure and Consequences of Anti-Semitic Beliefs in Poland", *Political Psychology,* 34(6): 821-839.

Bilewicz M., M. Witkowska, M. Pantazi, T. Gkinopoulos and O. Klein (2019), "Traumatic Rift: How Conspiracy Beliefs Undermine Cohesion After Societal Trauma?", *Europe's Journal of Psychology,* 15(1): 82-93.

Bracken A. (2021), "Anti-Vaccine Paper Pushes 'Conspiracy Propaganda'". *The Irish Independent*, 1 August 2021.

Bratich J. (2020), "Civil Society Must Be Defended: Misinformation, Moral Panics, and Wars of Restoration", *Communication, Culture, and Critique,* 13(3): 311-332.

Butter M. (2014), *Plots, Designs, and Schemes: American Conspiracy Theories from the Puritans to the Present*, Berlin: De Gruyter.

Butter M. and P. Knight (2020), "Conspiracy Theory in Historical, Cultural and Literary Studies", in M. Butter and P. Knight (eds.), *Handbook of Conspiracy Theories.* London: Routledge, pp. 28-42.

Byford J. (2011), *Conspiracy Theories: A Critical Introduction*, Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan.

Charles T. L. (2006), "Tactical Citizenship: Domestic Workers, the Remainders of Home, and Undocumented Citizen Participation in the Third Space of Mimicry", *Theory & Event,* 9(3): https://doi.org/10.1353/tae.2006.0034.

Charycka B., M. Gumkowska and J. Bednarek (2022), *The Capacity of NGOs in Poland – Key Facts. Research report 2021*, Warsaw: The Klon/Jawor Association.

Cox L. (2017), "The Irish Water Charges Movement: Theorising "the Social Movement in General", *Interface: A Journal for and about Social Movements,* 9(1): 161-203.

Curanović A. (2021), "The International Activity of Ordo Iuris: The Central European Actor and the Global Christian Right", *Religions,* 12(12): 1038.

Czech F. (2015), *Spiskowe Narracje i Metanarracje*, Kraków: Nomos.

Czech F. (2016), "Podejrzliwi Obywatele: Narracje Spiskowe Jako Element Krytycznej Kultury Politycznej w Polsce", *Władza Sądzenia*, 10: http://hdl.handle.net/11089/25729.

Czech F. (2020), "Mit Magdalenki i Media Społecznościowe: O Popularyzacji Narracji Spiskowych, zanim Stały Się Modne w Internecie", *Czas Kultury,* 36(3): 87-94.

Đorđević J. M., I. Žeželj and Z. Đurić (2021), "Beyond General Political Attitudes: Conspiracy Mentality as a Global Belief System Predicts Endorsement of International and Local Conspiracy Theories", *Journal of Social and Political Psychology,* 9(1): 144-158.

Douglas K. M. (2021), "Are Conspiracy Theories Harmless?", *The Spanish Journal of Psychology,* 24(e13): 1-7.

Drążkiewicz E. (2016), "'State Bureaucrats' and 'Those NGO People': Promoting the Idea of Civil Society, Hindering the State", *Critique of Anthropology*, 36(4): 341-62.

Drążkiewicz E. (2020), *Institutionalised Dreams: The Art of Managing Foreign Aid*, New York: Berghahn Books.

Drążkiewicz E. (2021), "Taking Vaccine Regret and Hesitancy Seriously: The Role of Truth, Conspiracy Theories, Gender Relations and Trust in the HPV Immunisation Programmes in Ireland", *Journal for Cultural Research,* 25(1): 69-87.

Drążkiewicz E. (2022), "Study Conspiracy Theories with Compassion", *Nature,* 603(7903): 765-765.

Drążkiewicz E. and J. Harambam (2021), "What Should Academics Do about Conspiracy Theories? Moving Beyond Debunking to Better Deal with Conspiratorial Movements, Misinformation and Post-Truth", *Journal for Cultural Research,* 25(1): 1-11.

Drążkiewicz E. and M. Ní Mhórdha (2020), "Of Trust and Mistrust: The Politics of Repeal", in K. Browne and S. Calking (eds.), *After Repeal: Rethinking Abortion Politics.* London: Zed Books, 90-106.

Drążkiewicz E. and A. Rabo (2020), "Conspiracy Theories", in *The International Encyclopedia of Anthropology*, Hillary Callan (ed.), Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118924396.wbiea2449.

Drążkiewicz E., T. Strong, N. Scheper-Hughes, H. Turpin, A. J. Saris, J. Mishtal, H. Wulff, B. French, P. Garvey, D. Miller, F. Murphy, L. Maguire and M. N. Mhórdha (2020), "Repealing Ireland's Eighth Amendment: Abortion Rights and Democracy Today" (Forum), *Social Anthropology,* 28(3): 561-584.

Dubé E., M. Vivion and N. E. MacDonald (2015), "Vaccine Hesitancy, Vaccine Refusal and the Anti-Vaccine Movement: Influence, Impact and Implications", *Expert Review of Vaccines,* 14(1): 99-117.

Fairhead J. and M. Leach (2012), *Vaccine Anxieties: Global Science, Child Health and Society*, London: Earthscan.

Fassin D. (2011), "The Politics of Conspiracy Theories: On AIDS in South Africa and a Few Other Global Plots", *The Brown Journal of World Affairs,* 17: 39-50.

Ferguson J. G. (2002), "Of Mimicry and Membership: Africans and the "New World Society", *Cultural Anthropology,* 17(4): 551-569.

Friedman J. (1994), *Cultural Identity and Global Process*, London: Sage Publications.

Ghodsee K. (2011), *Lost in Transition: Ethnographies of Everyday Life after Communism.* Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Giry J. and D. Gürpınar (2020), "Functions and Uses of Conspiracy Theories in Authoritarian Regimes", in M. Butter and P. Knight (eds.) *Handbook of Conspiracy Theories.* London: Routledge.

Greenberg J. (2014), *After the Revolution: Youth, Democracy, and the Politics of Disappointment in Serbia*, Palo Alto: Stanford University Press.

Hajdu D. and K. Klingova 2020. "Voices of Central and Eastern Europe", Bratislava: GLOBSEC.

Hajdu D., D. Milo, L. Klingova and M. Sawiris (2020), "GLOBSEC trends 2020. Central Europe Eastern Europe and Western Balkans at the Times of Pandemic", 10 December 2020, *GLOBSEC Ideas Shaping the World* (https://www.globsec.org/what-we-do/publications/globsec-trends-2020-central-europe-eastern-europe-and-western-balkans-times).

Harambam J. (2020), *Contemporary Conspiracy Culture: Truth and Knowledge in an Era of Epistemic Instability*, London: Routledge.

Harambam J. and S. Aupers (2015), "Contesting Epistemic Authority: Conspiracy Theories on the Boundaries of Science", *Public Understanding of Science,* 24(4): 466-480.

Harambam J., K. Grusauskaite and L. de Wildt (2022), "Poly-Truth, or the Limits of Pluralism: Popular Debates on Conspiracy Theories in a Post-Truth Era", *Public Understanding of Science,* 28: 09636625221092145.

Hellinger D. (2019), *Conspiracies and Conspiracy Theories in the Age of Trump*, Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan..

Hoehne M. V. (2009), "Mimesis and Mimicry in Dynamics of State and Identity Formation in Northern Somalia", *Africa,* 79(2): 252-281.

Hofstadter R. and S. Wilentz (2012), *The Paranoid Style in American Politics*, Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press.

Keena C. (2021), Several Thousand Protest in Dublin over Covid-19 Public Health Measures. *The Irish Times*, 27 November 2021.

Kijeski B. (2022), "Wielki Marsz Przeciwników Szczepień w Poznaniu: Nieśli Trumny z 'Ofiarami Szczepionek'". *Konin, Nasze Miasto*, 15 January 2022 (https://kalisz.naszemiasto.pl/wielki-marsz-przeciwnikow-szczepien-w-poznaniu-niesli/ar/c14-8634021).

Kofta M. and G. Sedek (2005), "Conspiracy Stereotypes of Jews during Systemic Transformation in Poland", *International Journal of Sociology,* 35(1): 40-64.

Kofta M., W. Soral and M. Bilewicz (2020), "What Breeds Conspiracy Antisemitism? The Role of Political Uncontrollability and Uncertainty in the Belief in Jewish Conspiracy", *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology,* 118(5): 900-918.

Korolczuk E. and A. Graff (2018), "Gender as 'Ebola from Brussels': The Anticolonial Frame and the Rise of Illiberal Populism", *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society,* 43(40): 797-821.

Kosiński D. and M. Wosion-Czoba (2015), "Pięć Lat po Katastrofie: Mocny Podział, bez Perspektywy Pojednania". Working Paper, *e-teatr.pl*, http://www.e-teatr.pl/pl/artykuly/200032.html.

Kowalewska J. (2021), Chcą go wrzucić do szamba, "zakładają" mu mundur SS-mana. Lekarz zakaźnik ze Szczecina zawiadomił prokuraturę. *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 20 May 2021.

Krekó P. and Z. Enyedi (2018), "Explaining Eastern Europe: Orbán's Laboratory of Illiberalism", *Journal of Democracy,* 29(3): 39-51.

Kuzio T. (2011), "Soviet Conspiracy Theories and Political Culture in Ukraine: Understanding Viktor Yanukovych and the Party of Regions", *Communist and Post-Communist Studies,* 44(3): 221-232.

Leeson D. (2021), "British Conspiracy Theories and the Irish War of Independence", *Éire-Ireland,* 56(1): 176-208.

Lepselter S. (2016), *The Resonance of Unseen Things: Poetics, Power, Captivity, and UFOs in the American Uncanny*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

MacNamee G. (2022), Gardaí Monitoring Safety of Irish Politicians Amidst Resurgence of Violent Rhetoric Online. *The Journal*, 23 August 2022.

Mahmud L. (2012), "In the Name of Transparency: Gender, Terrorism, and Masonic Conspiracies in Italy", *Anthropological Quarterly,* 85: 1177-1207.

Marcus G. (ed.) (1999), *Paranoia within Reason. A Casebook on Conspiracy as Explanation,* Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

McGranahan C. (2017), "An Anthropology of Lying: Trump and the Political Sociality of Moral Outrage", *American Ethnologist,* 44(2): 243-248.

McNaughton J. (2021), "Seán Hillen, Conspiracy, and the Ends of Irish Art", *Irish Studies Review,* 29(1): 84-105.

Mierzyńska A. (2020a), "Gwałcą Boski Porządek? Sprawdzamy, Kto Widzi 'Znamię Bestii' w Szczepionkach Przeciwko Covid-19". *Oko Press*, 21 December 2020.

Mierzyńska A. (2020b), "Nosisz Maseczkę? 'Jesteś jak Potulny Żyd w 1939': Skrajna Prawica Organizuje Bunt Przeciwko Pandemii". *Oko Press*, 11 September 2020.

Momplaisir F., N. Haynes, H. Nkwihoreze, M. Nelson, R. M. Werner and J. Jemmott (2021), "Understanding Drivers of Covid-19 Vaccine Hesitancy among Blacks", *Clinical Infectious Diseases*, 73(10): 1784-1789.

Monaghan L. F. (2011), "Post 'Celtic Tiger' Ireland, Silver Vigilantes and Public Sociology: Protesting against Global Neoliberalisation", *Sociological Research Online,* 16(3): 42-55.

Moore R. and A. Sanders (2002), "Formations of Culture: Nationalism and Conspiracy Ideology in Ulster Loyalism", *Anthropology Today,* 18(9): 9-15.

Morales D. X., T. F. Beltran, and S. A. Morales (2022), "Gender, Socioeconomic Status, and Covid-19 Vaccine Hesitancy in the US: An Intersectionality Approach", *Sociology of Health & Illness*, 44(6): 953-971.

Nagy K. (2018), "From Fringe Interest to Hegemony: The Emergence of the Soros Network in Eastern Europe 1", in Beáta Hock and Anu Allas (eds.), *Globalizing East European Art Histories: Past and Present*, New York: Routledge, pp. 53-63.

Napiórkowski M. (2014), "Dlaczego Wierzę w Mitologię Smoleńską?", *Znak*, 706: 49-55.

Nera K., S. Leveaux and P. P. Klein (2020), "A 'Conspiracy Theory' Conspiracy? A Mixed Methods Investigation of Laypeople's Rejection (and Acceptance) of a Controversial Label", *International Review of Social Psychology,* 33(1): 13.

Niehaus I. and G. Jonsson (2005), "Dr. Wouter Basson, Americans, and Wild Beasts: Men's Conspiracy Theories of HIV/AIDS in the South African Lowveld", *Medical Anthropology,* 24(2): 179-208.

NIZP National Institute of Public Health. (2020). "Vaccinations in Poland in 2020". Warsaw: Chief Sanitary Inspectorate – Department of Epidemic Prevention and Border Sanitary Protection. http://wwwold.pzh.gov.pl/oldpage/epimeld/2020/Sz_2020.pdf

O'Regan E. (2017). "'Scaremongering' over HPV vaccine puts lives at risk: Harris", *Independent.ie*, 23 April 2017 (https://www.independent.ie/irish-news/health/scaremongering-over-hpv-vaccine-puts-lives-at-risk-harris-35645734.html).

Oberhauser C. (2020), “Freemasons, Illuminati and Jews: Conspiracy Theories and the French Revolution”, in M. Butter and P. Knight (eds.) *Routledge Handbook of Conspiracy Theories.* London: Routledge, pp. 555-568.

Paley J. (2002), “Toward an Anthropology of Democracy”, *Annual Review of Anthropology,* 31: 469-496.

Panczová Z. (2020), “The Victims, the Guilty, and ‘Us’: Notions of Victimhood in Slovakian Conspiracy Theories”, in A. Astapova, O. Colăcel, C. Pintilescu, and T. Scheibner (eds.), *Conspiracy Theories in Eastern Europe*, London: Routledge, pp. 186-204.

Panczová Z. and P. Janeček (2015), “Popular Conspiracy Theories in Slovakia and the Czech Republic”, *Diogenes,* 62(3-4): 101-113.

Pelkmans M. and R. Machold (2011), “Conspiracy Theories and Their Truth Trajectories”, *Focaal*, 2011(59): 66-80.

Pipes D. (1999), *Conspiracy: How the Paranoid Style Flourishes and Where It Comes From*, New York: Touchstone.

Plenta P. (2020), “Conspiracy Theories as a Political Instrument: Utilization of Anti-Soros Narratives in Central Europe”, *Contemporary Politics,* 26(5): 512-530.

Pop C. (2016), “Locating Purity within Corruption Rumors: Narratives of HPV Vaccination Refusal in a Peri-urban Community of Southern Romania”, *Medical Anthropology Quarterly,* 30(4): 563-581.

Roque R. (2015), “Mimesis and Colonialism: Emerging Perspectives on a Shared History”, *History Compass,* 13(4): 201-211.

Roth F. (2005), “Ufology as Anthropology: Race, Extraterrestrials and the Occult” in D. Battaglia (ed.), *E.T. Culture: Anthropology in Outerspaces.* Durham, NC: Duke University Press, pp. 38-93.

Rutjens B. T., S. van der Linden, and R. van der Lee (2021), “Science Skepticism in Times of Covid-19”, *Group Processes & Intergroup Relations,* 24(4): 276-283.

Sałwacka S. (2019), “Justyna Socha ze STOP NOP Przegrała Kolejny Proces o Naruszenie Dóbr Osobistych”, *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 31 July 2019.

Sałwacka S. (2021), “Oskarżyła Lekarzy o Zabijanie Pacjentów: Teraz Próbuje Zablokować Swój Proces. Dziś Decyzja Sądu”, *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 10 November 2021.

Sepioło M. and J. Dauksza 2022. “Zawód Antyszczepionkowiec: Biznes na Teoriach Spiskowych”, *Frontstory.pl*, 2 April 2022, (https://frontstory.pl/antyszczepionkowcy-zbiorka-justyna-socha-jawornik-stopnop/).

Sobo E. J. (2015), “Social Cultivation of Vaccine Refusal and Delay among Waldorf (Steiner) School Parents”, *Medical Anthropology Quarterly,* 29(3): 381-399.

Sobo E. J. (2016), “Theorizing (vaccine) Refusal: Through the Looking Glass”, *Cultural Anthropology,* 31(3): 342-350.

Sobo E. J. and E. Drążkiewicz (2021), “Rights, Responsibilities and Revelations: Covid-19 Conspiracy Theories and the State”, in L. Manderson, N. J. Burke, and A. Wahlberg (eds.), *Viral Loads:* Anthropologies of Urgency in the Time of Covid-19, London: UCL Press, pp. 67-88.

Song H. (2010), *Pigeon Trouble: Bestiary Biopolitics in a Deindustrialized America.* Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Taussig M. (1993), *Mimesis and Alterity: A Particular History of the Senses,* New York: Routledge.

Tennent E. and F. Grattan (2022), “The Anatomy of a Conspiracy Theory in Covid-19 Political Commentary”, *Language in Society*, 1-22, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0047404522000197.

The High Court (2021), Beaumont Hospital Board and Marie Murray vs. Gemma O’Doherty. The High Court Judgment of Mr. Justice Allen delivered on the 9 th day of July, 2021, No. 4095P.

Thórisdóttir H., S. Mari and A. Krouwel (2020), “Conspiracy Theories, Political Ideology and Political Behaviour”, in M. Butter and P. Knight (eds.), *Handbook of Conspiracy Theories.* London: Routledge, pp. 304-316.

Uscinski J. E., K. Douglas and S. Lewandowsky (2017), "Climate Change Conspiracy Theories", *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Climate Science*, https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228620.013.328.

Vine M. and M. Carey (2017), "Mimesis and Conspiracy: Bureaucracy, New Media and the Infrastructural Forms of Doubt", *The Cambridge Journal of Anthropology*, 35(2): 47.

Waters J. 2022. Clown Courts. *The Irish Light*, Issue 12, Retrieved 16 November 2022 (https://irishlightpaper.com/issues/)

Wedel J. (1998), *Collision and Collusion,* New York: St. Martin's Press.

Witte G. (2018), "Once-Fringe Soros Conspiracy Theory Takes Center Stage in Hungarian Election", *The Washington Post*, 17 March 2018 (https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/once-fringe-soros-conspiracy-theory-takes-center-stage-in-hungarian-election/2018/03/17/f0a1d5ae-2601-11e8-a227-fd2b009466bc_story.html).

World Health Organization (2020), Managing the Covid-19 Infodemic: Promoting healthy behaviours and mitigating the harm from misinformation and disinformation. Joint statement by WHO, UN, UNICEF, UNDP, UNESCO, UNAIDS, ITU, UN Global Pulse, and IFRC. 23 September 2020 (https://www.who.int/news/item/23-09-2020-managing-the-covid-19-infodemic-promoting-healthy-behaviours-and-mitigating-the-harm-from-misinformation-and-disinformation).

Yablokov I. (2022), "The Five Conspiracy Theories That Putin Has Weaponized." *The New York Times*, 25 April 2022 (https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/25/opinion/putin-russia-conspiracy-theories.html).

Żuk P., P. Pluciński and P. Żuk (2021), "The Dialectic of Neoliberal Exploitation and Cultural-Sexual Exclusion: From Special Economic Zones to LGBT-Free Zones in Poland", *Antipode,* 53(5): 1571-1595.

Acknowledgments

The work on this article was supported by APVV and is an outcome of the PanTruth project 'Pandemic Truths: A Comparative Study of Conflicts Over Conspiracy Theories In Visegrad Countries' [grant number APVV-21-0394]

Notes on contributor

Elżbieta Drążkiewicz received her PhD in Social Anthropology from the University of Cambridge. She is a Senior Research Fellow at the Institute for Sociology, Slovak Academy of Sciences, She is a Principal Investigator of the ERC CONSPIRATIONS project (starting in 2023) examining conflicts over conspiracy theories in Europe. She is also a PI in the CHASE project REDACT analysing how digitalisation shapes the form, content, and consequences of conspiracy theories and the PL on the APPV project PanTruth analysing conspiratorial milieu in the Visegrad countries. In addition to researching conflicts over truth, Dr Drążkiewicz studies global development, democratic participation and the world of NGOs. She is an author of 'Institutionalised Dreams: the art of managing foreign aid' (Begrhahahn, 2020).