The Codex Conspiracy; globalized conspiracy theories, social movements and food in-security.

Conference paper – please contact author before quoting.

This is a version of a paper that I presented at the Institute of British Geographers in July 2012, I’ve since worked it up as a paper – it is not finished or final.

There are ethical difficulties with this paper as some people are named by sources that may be anonymous or use pen names. My intention here is not to discuss individuals but ideas and how they are debated, so I have tried to restrict the use of named individuals.

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the sinister colourfulness of the movement's mythology sometimes obscures its profile, and actually downplays its political and social significance (Castells, 1997:87)

So a conspiracy theory is the unnecessary assumption of conspiracy when other explanations are more probable (Aaronovitch, 2010:5)

The e-petition site of the UK Prime Ministers has received a number of calls for an end to the work of the Codex Alimentarius (CA), with one running in the spring of 2013. An earlier and more popular iteration of this call in October 2009 attracted 62,220 British subjects to sign, agreeing that:

We the undersigned petition the Prime Minister to oppose the adoption of the Codex Alimentarius (WHO/UN) proposals for restriction of the presently freely available herb/vitamin/mineral food supplements.

The official response was led by the Food Standards Agency (FSA), which in a bemused press release stated:

There are no plans to make vitamin and mineral or botanical food supplements available on prescription only.

Herbal remedies are subject to separate controls and are overseen by the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Authority. Herbal remedies do not fall within the scope of Codex guidelines

A search of the UK press would not have produced any results in probing for the supposed plans of the Codex, the joint FAO/WHO body responsible for setting the co-ordination of global food standards. Fortunately the head of the FSA had typed ‘codex conspiracy’ into an Internet search engine, and his part in a global conspiracy had been revealed to him. This paper is concerned

1 http://epetitions.direct.gov.uk/petitions/45121
2 This petition is not archived the National Archives and is no longer on the Number 10 site.
3 http://www.food.gov.uk/foodindustry/regulation/Codexbranch/
4 http://blogs.food.gov.uk/science/entry/curiouser_and_curiouser
with the conspiracy theories that have emerged about the Codex Alimentarius, how they provide insights into the operation of rural and food social movements in a time of insecurities about food.

As an example, in common with other movements in the history of British organic food movement there has been the notion that a conspiracy in some form is at work (Hobsbawm 1959). In the early years of the movement it was an international Jewish cabal, later it became ‘vested interests’, then the pesticide companies either promoting their chemicals directly or through genetically modified crops (Reed, 2010). Some have postulated that these conspiracies have led to direct sabotage, even murder (Fergusson 2007). The organic food and farming movement, as with many other social movements, is often beset by the constant appearance of those who wish to talk about the conspiracies that ‘actually’ explain contemporary events. Others have identified this tendency towards the conspiratorial in rural social movements that have led to violent outcomes, such as the Militia movement and other US farm-based movements (McNicol Stock, 1996; Wright, 2007).

Conspiracy theories are often associated with the United States, but in the last two decades they have become firmly part of British popular culture, with British journalists reporting consistently on those who both formulate and re-present conspiracy theories (Ronson 2012). David Icke, formerly of the BBC and the British Green Party, has built a global audience through lectures, books and his web-presence with his theories of a planetary conspiracy of extra-terrestrial aliens. Others theorize about events surrounding the attacks on 9/11 and 7/7, which are centred on the certain knowledge that Al Queda could not have conducted these attacks (Butter & Retterath 2010). Conspiracy theories surround events as diverse as the death of the UN weapons inspector Dr David Kelly or that of Princess Diana, the role of the Bilderbeg Group or the wiles of Rupert Murdoch (Aaronovitch 2010; Ronson 2012). As many have noted conspiracy theories have become an integral part of politics in the early twenty first century, just as actual conspiracies were part of the politics of the twentieth century (Olmsted, 2009)(Parish & Parker 2001).
That food and the regulation of food has become the subject of a conspiracy theory is hardly surprising given its societal importance and the recent high profile concerns about its security. Food, as many scholarly commentaries have noted, has become a topic where the local and the global, the starved and the obese, the collective and the personal meet (Godfray et al. 2010). That conspiracy theorists have identified it as a locus for social control is a recognition of its role in providing power to those who control it. They believe that if the powers that be are able to control food it would allow ‘them’ to variously or in combination; starve billions of people to death, make otherwise healthy people the clients of global pharmaceutical companies, rob them of the liberty to which they are entitled. These outcomes are just the means through which ‘they’ are achieving their nefarious ends, which are detailed in the conspiracy theory.

The term conspiracy theorists has become a pejorative one, even amongst those who believe and are in the business of articulating the activities of those plotting to rule the planet. This paper uses the less contentious term ‘theorist’ to describe those who are in pursuit of the secret groups that seek to shape our society to their own ends. Many of the theorists see a future for humanity that is at best bleak. Some of the theories are millenarian, in that the coming transformation will reveal those who are prepared and worthy as well as those who will be found wanting. The eschatology of these conspiracy theories has an optimistic inverse; if individual agency is so powerful then a handful of people can also save the world - or at least themselves. Liberty can be found in technologies and practices such as growing your own food, taking vitamin supplements or herbal remedies, as well as being ready to aggressively protect your freedom. In the conspiratorial globalised world dominated by big farma/pharma a packet of seeds can either be the beginning or the end of liberty.

This paper will first consider the role and status of social movements in creating social change, with a discussion of how they create new forms of knowledge and practices of knowing. In doing so it will reprise the
contemporary scholarly discussions of conspiracy theories and the particular role of the conspiracy theorist. It will link this discussion to those of populist politics, which appears to be the dominant modality of politics within conspiracy theorising. Using the case study of the conspiracy theories around the Codex Alimentarius and its supposed attempts to suppress organic farming, it considers the role of conspiracy theory in creating social change. It concludes by considering the role of academic scholarship in engaging with, and in some instances, challenging conspiracy theorising.

**Social movements**

Recent global uprisings and revolutions have demonstrated once again the power of social movements to effect social change (Mason 2012). Understanding analytically social movements and the forms of protests associated with the diversity of these social phenomena requires them to be understood in all of their complexity (Woods 2003). Diani and della Porta present a four-fold definition of a social movement. First, ‘informal interaction networks’ that movements are not hierarchically organised and are without the formal structures typically associated with political parties or pressure groups. Second, ‘shared beliefs and solidarity’ that those in the movement share a common set of ideas, sometimes only on a particular area, and will support other believers. Third, ‘collective action focusing on conflicts’ social movements are generally involved in contesting a social stake that is considered to be important materially and/or symbolically, either other groups are seeking to control that stake or those in the movement work together to wrest control of that stake and this leads to conflict. Four, ‘use of protest’ for many years the use of unconventional protests, beyond the norms of formal political participation, defined scholarly accounts of social movements (della Porta and Diani, 2006). Activities that signal dissent, build alternatives and change culture may not be the public displays typically identified with movements but they are central to not only the sustaining a movement but also prefiguring the social changes it wishes to see realised (Crossley, 2002; Purdue et al., 1997).
Accounts of social movements have often focused on the use of protest, what Tarrow and Tilly described as the ‘repertoires of collective action’ which change over time and across space but provide those engaged in protest with a set of practices that people broadly know how to take part in, with recognized aims and outcomes (McAdam et al., 2001; Tarrow, 1996; Tilly, 2004). Others have focused on how social movement activity can pre-figure the goals of the movement, realising the future in the present through what Crossley describes as ‘working utopias’ (Crossley, 1999) and taking control of places (Castells 2012). This extends to new ways of knowing, of generating the different knowledges that challenge the dominant forms, and it is here that rural sociology has been particularly significant. The organic food and farming has often been conceptualised as a challenge to the ways of knowing how to farm and often the ends of agriculture, through forming new ways of understanding the agro-ecological process and technologies of agriculture (Moore, 2005; Tovey, 2002; Hess, 2005). This work has emphasised how ‘protest’ can be found in farming and consuming in an alternative manner, in doing so creating structures that challenge the dominant norms of farming and food (Peters, 1979; Reed, 2010)

In contesting the social stake social movements have opponents, against which it mobilises or otherwise seeks to thwart. Often opponents are monitored and analysed in detail, with attributions made of the underlying motivations, the stratagems and tactics adopted, as well the demonising those involved in the opposition (Melucci 1996). Latent within this characterisation of the opponent is an account of how social and cultural power is manifested and used. Although the opponent is not a given but the result of considerable work by the movement (Goldstone, 2003). The ‘binary’ between genetically modified crops and organics, for example, took considerable effort by the organic movement to realise (Campbell 2004). This work to establish, understand and overcome an opponent is where the practices of conspiracy thinking intermesh with social movement activity. Part of this meshing can be the deployment of populist arguments - of ‘the people’ versus an elite (see below) - that many movements tactically deploy and that is an integral part of conspiracy theorising.
It has been noted by social movement scholars that accounts of ‘right-wing’ movements are less developed than those of the ‘left’ (Melucci, 1996); “the bulk of social movement attention and scholarship concentrated on progressive actors and organizations” (Wright, 2007: 26). Wright in his work demonstrates the utility of social movement theory to ‘right wing’ movements. Although his study emphasizes that the process of mobilization is more likely to begin with threat attribution rather than the presence of an opportunity, right wing movements are in this way reactive. Wright demonstrates that the Patriot movement was able to increase its scale of operations through the appropriation of other group’s networks, in the early 1980s protests by farmers and in the early 1990s the networks of those resisting more restrictive gun laws (Wright, 2007). This tactic of appropriation of rural protest would appear to have been attempted in the UK during the Tithe Tax protests in the 1930s and the Fuel Protests in the 1990s (Doherty et al. 2002, Reed 2004). Significantly one of the key aspects of the Patriot discourse was the coming of the New World Order (NWO) and conspiracy was a core bridge between the discursive elements of the Patriot activities (McNicol-Stock 1996). Conspiracy theories may provide the threat that hastens a movement’s mobilization, allowing movements to be active without the presence of an objective opportunity or hazard.

**Accounts of conspiracy theories**

Accounts of conspiracy theories vary between those who view them as pathological, either as a symbol of the state of contemporary society or of the condition of those who ‘do’ the theorising (Parish & Parker 2001). More pertinently for this discussion are those accounts that look to understand conspiracy theorising as a form of political practice and to analyse the forms of politics within it as both activity and community. Fenster provides a perceptive account of the role of conspiracy theory in US history and the dynamics of how conspiracy theories unfold (Fenster 1999). He argues that
conspiracy theories in part fill a democratic void when representation has withered:

a marginalized and shrinking sphere of collective public action and interaction, a politics modeled on consumption leaves little room for individuals to act (Fenster 1999:70)

The practice of conspiracy theory then fills this space, leading theorists into communication with others and to a never-ending chain of linkages. This Fenster describes as a ‘hyperactive semiosis’ of interpretation and over-interpretation. Those who are theorising are also expressing utopian ideals of democracy, of a form political participation that can never really be concluded otherwise they would be forced recognize the limitations of their theory, therefore the conspiracy moves continually forward whilst looking backward:

conspiracy theory masks the impossible ideals of representative, participatory democracy within a capitalist economy. Displacing the fears of this impossibility onto fears of conspiracy, condensing these fears into notions of murderous, licentious presidents and secretive cabals, the conspiracy theorist enjoys her/his symptom, indulging in its practice, reveling in its excess, never fully reaching the fulfillment of desire lest s/he be confronted with the realization that the notion of a willful, secretive conspiracy by an elite cabal is not quite right (Fenster 1999:94)

Fenster argues we need to recognize that small groups of people are disproportionately powerful. That finance capital has played a significant part in contemporary capitalism is hard to contest, which is quite different from the identification of ‘bankers’ as the conspiratorial agents of that influence. This Fenster argues is ‘ideological misrecognition’, as it identifies the instrumental power of some people as the entirety of the power system in contemporary society. It is not simply a populist response, but an unstable form of populism.

For Fenster the challenge in conspiracy theories is that it might be possible to recover a progressive politics from them, by working past the populism:

In order to theorize populism and articulate it in liberatory ways, one must confront and challenge the most virulent tendencies of populism’s antagonism between “the people” and “the power bloc” without simply dismissing populism as necessarily racist and reactionary, and as lacking significance as
a discursive formation that is symptomatic of a broader longing for a better, more significant position within a political and social order. (Fenster 1999:introduction)

He argues conspiracy theories do not need to be the dead end that so many accounts suggest.

It would appear that the modality of politics most closely associated with conspiracy theories is populism. Panizza divides the scholarly discussion of populism into three broad streams, a) empirical generalizations, b) historicist accounts and c) symptomatic readings. It is the final stream of discussion that allows us to characterise populism more accurately. The political actor is constituted as "the people", simplifying the political space by symbolically dividing society between ‘the people’ (as the ‘underdogs’) and its ‘other’ (Panizza 2005:3). The other can be constructed as foreigners, religious minorities, bankers, plutocrats or politicians. Populism is also opposed to the status quo, with the other being identified as holding a form of privileged or powerful position. In the contemporary situation where many argue that we live in a ‘post-political’ age, whereby choices between ‘Left’ and ‘Right’ are redundant with managerialism and incrementalism as the only governance choices - populism becomes the space in which the political demands that are beyond that managerialism can be expressed (Swyngedouw, 2010). Arter argues that in part this explains the upsurge of populist New Right parties; as they speak of topics ruled out of bounds by the mainstream electoral political parties (Arter, 2010).

Fenster’s argument is mirrored in contemporary critical theory. The contest is between those such as Laclau who present a new argument that populism is an empty ‘mode of articulation’ (Laclau, 2005: 35) which is available to a range of ideologies or political contents (Panizza, 2005). In contrast are those such as Zizek who argues that populism “harbors in the last instance a long-term protofascist tendency” (Zizek 2006:557). Zizek in his commentary on Laclau describes populism as a ‘temptation’, because it simplifies and in doing so refuses to engage in the hard task of dealing with the differences and antagonisms that constitute the democratic (Zizek 2006). He argues that the
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populist Right and the Left do share a common perspective, in that they both reject the concept of the post-political and share, “the awareness that politics proper is still alive” (Zizek 2006:567).

Sources

The pre-eminent site of conspiracy theory activity is the Internet, adding to the plethora of essays, articles, reports and postings (Fenster 1999). The evidence for this study was collected from the Internet using basic search terms as first to identify the key sites, and the following the hyperlinks of referencing between the websites, until these were exhausted. The physical location of those posting varied but was broadly through the English speaking nations, with discussants in the US, UK, Australia and New Zealand identifying their locations. There are clear differences in the legislation referred to, idioms used, as well as styles of debate but there were shared discursive elements.

A corpus of documents was collected from the internet, staring with the search term codex conspiracy and then using a snowballing technique of following weblinks to sources and articles linked to the documents collected. Press articles collected from British newspapers using the search term ‘Codex Alimentarius’ and ‘Codex Conspiracy’ which produced articles from regional and local newspapers augmented this corpus. In total 70 documents were collected and analysed for themes using qualitative analytic software (Nvivo 9) (Cook, Reed and Twiner 2009; Lockie 2006). The collection period ran from January through to February 2012, with the webpages being saved in pdf or webarchive format to preserve their formatting. The documents had been posted until the end of the collection period with the earliest being from 1998 through to early 2012, with the peak of activity being in 2008. Whether the sample is representative of the totality of materials posted about the subject is not possible to discern, but collection was only discontinued when the repetition of the materials appeared in the corpus (Sauuko et al. 2010).
Alongside the Internet texts a collection of YouTube videos and audiofiles, were respectively viewed and listened to, with key themes being noted. These sources range from videos of lectures through to radio and TV interviews, with some being translated into other languages. As an example the 90-minute lecture by Ian R Crane on the dangers of the Codex in the form of a lecture in Totnes, Devon in 2007 has been viewed in one form more than 78,000 times⁵. Whilst the frequently cited lecture on Nutricide by Dr Rima Laibow has been viewed in one posting at least 35,000 times but this lecture has been presented across several different platforms and in a range of languages making tracking difficult⁶. Both of these theorists have also given TV and Radio interviews that have been posted on the Internet, including through the syndicated ‘Prison Planet’ radio show⁷. It is clear from many of the comments in the Internet texts collected that these have been viewed by many active in theorising about the Codex.

The Codex

The secretariat of Codex Alimentarius narrates its development as stemming from a joint meeting of experts on nutrition from the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) and the World Health Organisation (WHO) in 1950 that noted that food regulations were not based on science, took no regard of nutritional principles, and were conflicting and contradictory between countries. By 1962 this had evolved from co-ordination across to Europe to a joint FAO/WHO body that was launched in 1963 as the Codex Alimentarius Commission. This started a programme of international meetings to establish regulations and guidelines to protect human health with regard to food that became the part of the WTO Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures in 1995. A review in 2002 re-emphasized the significance of the Codex, that the process needed to be more efficient, the science stronger and more needed to be done to build capacity of nations to participate. Although important, the

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⁵ http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O2D4-noTiCg
⁶ http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fb_y4tL3b3I
⁷ http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B1dqRjUc37E
Codex in this story is a technocratic aspect of the machinery of global governance.

In their analysis of the role of the Codex in the global food system Winicoff and Bushey argue that the Codex as it is currently configured is a product of the WTO's (World Trade Organisation) need for harmonised standards. The risk assessment discourse that governs the operation of the Codex is an example of the co-evolution of scientific with regulatory need, to create a form of ‘social regulation’, which fills the space where political legitimacy is short. In this risk based from of regulation from which two groups are systematically excluded; developing nations who lack the administrative and scientific capacity to contest claims and consumers “due to difficulties framing cultural, religious, and other concerns not strictly related to safety” (Winickoff and Bushey 2010:364). It is this gap that those who see a conspiracy around the Codex have located.

The Codex Alimentarius in the Media

The specific architecture of the conspiracy varies between the theorist, with a spectrum of details and actors but there are shared elements. First, is that the CA is part of a co-ordinated attempt to limit the availability of the vitamin supplements and herbal remedies, as well as restricting the ability of the organic movement to regulate itself. Second, this attempt is at the behest of global corporations to enhance their power over the food system. Third, that this can be thwarted by the efforts of citizens in the US, UK, Australia and New Zealand through their legislatures. From this point of departure the theories start to span a variety of positions, a one end this is the expected role of such corporations to maximise profit and power at the expense of the people. The narrative then stretches across those who view it as part of the coming New World Order (NWO) that will see the imposition of a global government under the control of the ‘Illumanti’ or ‘Aliens’ or a number of
conspiratorial groups\textsuperscript{8}. What the NWO will mean is a matter of dispute, but it commonly appears to involving the de-population of the Earth, with the death of billions of people and control over the food supply is an essential part of that eschatological scenario.

Some theorists do not recognise the evolution of the CA as described above rather they focus on it being founded by a Nazi, or those who had alleged Nazi connections. This centres on the supposed role of Fritz ter Meer, who was a member of the board of IG Farben, or Hermann Schmitz who was supposedly on the board:

> Just fifteen years after they were convicted in the Nuremberg War Crimes Tribunal, these companies were again the architects of the next major human rights offences. In 1962, they established the Codex Alimentarius Commission.\textsuperscript{9}

Brandon Tuberville writing at Infowars.com could find no connection between these corporations, as claimed by the Dr Rath Foundation and the founding of the Codex, although he hints at a connection with ‘war criminals’\textsuperscript{10}. Here Tuberville demonstrates that although different conspiracy theorists may repudiate each other’s work the process of theorising continues. The connecting of chemical businesses to the death camps and onto the Codex demonstrates the scale of the threat that the theorists ascribe to its operations. As well as the scale of the threat to human well-being represented by corporations particularly those associated with medicines and chemicals. No conspiracy theory, particularly one steeped in such a negative eschatology, is complete without a demonology (Gray 2008).

One of basic aims of the Codex within the conspiracy theory is to end the ready availability of herbal remedies, vitamin and mineral supplements, as well as limiting organic farming:

\textsuperscript{8} Some theorists appear to be using a well worn code about ‘Aliens’ as an anti-Semitic attack, others seem to mean actual extra-terrestrial beings.
\textsuperscript{9} http://www4.dr-rath-foundation.org/PHARMACEUTICAL_BUSINESS/health_movement_against_codex/health_movement24.htm
\textsuperscript{10} http://www.infowars.com/the-history-of-health-tyranny-codex-alimentarius-part-1/
Imagine a world in which no food product could be penalised because of its origins or the way in which it had reached the supermarket shelf. A world where it was impossible to tell if a food item was organic, genetically modified or impregnated with hormone, and where herbal remedies were outlawed, undermining the complementary and alternative health care industry.

The mechanisms ascribed to achieving this process are varied, but most common is the erosion of organic standards to the point were most agricultural practices would be permitted as ‘organic’. Herbal remedies and supplements would be outlawed at potencies that the discussants believe to be effective or only be available on prescription. The force behind this change is ascribed unanimously to being the multinational companies, generally the Pharmaceuticals (Big Pharma) and Agribusiness (Big Farma), who are looking to extend their control. For some of the theorists this is simply a facet of capitalism: “The pharmaceutical industry is an example of the worst parts of capitalism, capitalism at its least respectable low and capitalism at its most ludicrous high” (ref). For most of the theorists profit is synonymous with control, and control of food is the high point of corporate power “The implicit understanding of their philosophy is that if you control food, you control the world” (ref). This opens the possibility to those who believe in the NWO and the de-population of the planet as part of the take over by the conspirators:

Codex and an UN product is suspect. krappa NYC jew capital of the world is home base for the UN which wants to eliminate personal property rights and gun rights...basically the same as the communist manifesto. If it prevails watch out.... millions murdered in Russia after 1918 at their hands.

The status of the theory as a conspiracy theory was at times equivocal and at others was opposed, particularly in the comments below an article:

I, too, am leery of ‘everything is a conspiracy theory zealots....I’m more prone to believe something (like GMOs taking over the production of natural foods) may result in a devastating conclusion due to corporate greed, without conscience, than because there is a plot to kill the lower class.

As the discussion continued seemingly across the Atlantic and timezones;

A few of us were actually having a rather good discussion about the Codex and is possible threats (which IMHO [in my humble opinion], are rather exaggerated - living in the EU and under its food safety directives based on
the Codex should give me some perspective on this ...). agreeing on some issues, disagreeing on some - but you know our little clique of conspiracy theorists after some insults, ad hominems, hit-and-run manoeuvres etc we were practically told to bugger off and start our own thread because we’re ‘disruptive and irritating’.

These discussants resisted the stridency of the other conspiracy theorists on the basis that their claims about the Codex were not true in their lived experience. It also demonstrates that to be labelled as a ‘conspiracy theorist’ is to be dismissed even by those engaged in revealing conspiracies.

The first article on the Codex and its likely impact on the supply of supplements was in 1998 in the Utne magazine, which reported on the work of the Codex a “little known international agency”, which was working “under the guise of protecting public safety”, and that it was “regarded by many as a means for the pharmaceutical industry to eventually make all supplements available by prescription only” (ref). This set the tenor for future reporting, particularly that because is the Codex has a low public profile it is somehow underhand. A steady stream of articles began to point to the end of 2009 as being the moment when the Codex would be implemented across the planet:

Codex will go into global effect on December 31, 2009, unless we, the People, take action and avert it. Right now, we are like a frog boiled slowly, the heat raised gradually so we won’t jump out of the water. The media is used to make us believe that Codex is about ‘consumer protection’. Part of the media strategy is to tarnish the image of natural health options, through for-hire studies.

That this coincided with the enactment of Bill S.510 (FDA Food Safety Modernization Act) in the US and Food Bill 160-2 in New Zealand only added to the tempo of the theorising:

National laws such as S.510 and Food Bill 160-2 are merely the domestic ground-level implementations of international policy handed down from Codex Alimentarius, the World Trade Organization, and the United Nations, entities that are themselves nothing more than tools in the Great Work known as the New World Order.

The supposedly malign aspects of the nature of these bills was only re-enforced by the extraordinary spectacle of Police officers drawing their
weapons whilst raiding a store in California and mounting a sting operation against an Amish farmer, both for the offence of selling unpasteurised milk (Forbes, 2011). Neither of these police actions was actually conducted using the Bill, but rather existing state law, but that did not stop the theorists claiming it as part of the Codex inspired control of food. In this way for many of the theorists the actual lack of implementation was obscured by activities that they associated with their predictions of what would happen - the over-interpretation of marginal events.

The United States is the key location for this theorising, although there are Britons and Australians conducting similar work. For many of the theorists this is central to their opposition is based on a nationalist set of arguments about the autonomy of their nation in the face of globalisation. They argue that the Codex is alien to Anglo-Saxon jurisprudence as it is allegedly based on the Napoleonic Code of law as opposed to the common law system:

Codex is based on the Napoleonic Code, dating back to the Bonaparte. Under this code, anything not explicitly permitted is automatically forbidden. Under Common Law (our system), something does not have to explicitly permitted to be legal. The tyrannical Napoleonic Code allows the banning of natural health options by default.

The traditions of the US, Britain and Australia are based on individual rights for most of the theorists, a liberty that guarantees freedom from interference government, and as such a flowering society:

Put another way, individual liberty is organic - when not blocked artificially, it flows natural and creates healthy relationships in an ever-expanding web of mutually-beneficial interactions among people.

Liberty in this theorising is the basis of the polity and the Codex is a threat to democracy that the People desire:

It is my educated guess that most Australians want democracy for themselves and that they would want to preserve it for future generations. It is my guess that Australians do not want to be governed by trans-national corporations.

The answer to this threat to democracy is the popular means of a mass movement to reclaim and protect the democracy.
Thanks to the Internet, millions of health conscious Americans can unite to protect health freedom from Codex Alimentarius. We have the power to turn Codex into a blessing if all of us in the natural health community use it to get active, get organized, and stand up for health freedom. Together, we will let Big Pharma know that we see through their deception and will protect our access to natural health care.

In a discussion characterised by paranoia suspicions were laid against other theorists as they disrupted either the activities of established groups and/or could be seen to be making unsubstantiated claims. The more colourful the theorist the more likely it appeared that they would be the subject of scrutiny, Dr Rima Laiblow became a particular target – not least because she is married to the former General who tried to walk through walls in ‘The Men Who Stare at Goats’ (Ronson 2009). Laiblow’s foundation had gained observer status at Codex meetings, according to critics such as ‘Angry Scientist’ distracting from the constructive but oppositional role of other groups such as the National Health Federation at the Codex. Others saw Laiblow’s work as being informed by her husband’s former role in the esoteric areas of military psychology:

The answers start with the NSF [Natural Science Foundation?] founders, husband-wife team Albert Stubblebine and Rima Laibow. Now, when I accuse these people of being disinformation professionals, let me explain. I’m not saying they’re doing sloppy research, and I’m not saying they’re being overzealous. What I am saying is that they are working, for pay, to spread false information and to make their organization look like a legitimate activist group.

Anonymous Coward, User ID: 526155 Canada 09/22/2009 08:39 PM

Some of the theorists saw the ideas about the Codex being disseminated by other theorists as designed to discredit dietary supplements, organic food and herbal remedies so as make the work of the conspiracy easier. These claims about ‘controlled opposition’ or agents provocateur, turn aspects of the discussion into a hall of mirrors – particularly when the accuser is in turn accused. As Fenster archly notes the search in conspiracy theories can never end.
Discussion

“If people let government decide what foods they eat and what medicines they take, their bodies will soon be in as sorry a state as are the souls of those who live under tyranny”. Thomas Jefferson (1762-1821), Third President of the USA, author of the Declaration of Independence.

The picture of the global food system produced by these theorists is a grotesque cartoon, with certain features exploded to obscene proportions and others rendered in exacting detail. It is accurate in its observation as to the centrality of a particular form of science based risk analysis that characterises much of the legislation that is attempting to harmonise food regulations across the planet. This is particularly important for those such as those who subscribe to alternative health practices or forms of organic agriculture some of whom who reject the paradigms on which such risk analyses are conducted. They exaggerate certain aspects of the role of corporations in the Codex, such as in its foundation, but they are accurate in describing the exceptional role that large corporations play in these transnational bodies and close links to some of the powerful national food safety agencies. That food and food products can be related to the agendas of powerful corporations is also evident in not only the market for herbal remedies or vitamins but also the burgeoning market in functional foods (Bech-Larsen and Scholderer 2007).

The process of constructing and discussing the theories highlights the way in which evidence is marshalled, used and what is designated as evidence. The quality of evidence used in these discussion is often slight, frequently essays on the Internet or other Internet sources, which whilst they copy the form of evidence provided by the theorists, are not always reliable. The use of such evidence in discussions of complex issues such as those presented by the Codex, where the potential for misinterpretation is high, is problematic.

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11 [http://www.anh-europe.org/campaigns/codex](http://www.anh-europe.org/campaigns/codex) - this a misquotation of Jefferson who wrote in ‘Notes on the State of Virginia “Was the government to prescribe to us our medicine and diet, our bodies would be in such keeping as our souls are now” in the context of discussing the importance of free enquiry to society and to religion in particular – for the full original text see [http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/jeffvir.asp](http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/jeffvir.asp) and [http://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Notes_on_the_State_of_Virginia](http://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Notes_on_the-State_of_Virginia)
referenced reports they lack rigour. Noticeably absent from these discussion are books, newspaper reports, government reports or academic articles. Therefore although errors are observed and noted, they are rarely fatal to the process of constructing an explanatory theory. In contrast evidence that confirms the theory, even tangentially, is seized on and over-interpreted. Ineffectual denials or clumsy actions become amplified in importance and freighted with symbolic importance. Fenster and Olstrom both note the role of the motivated amateur in the creation of most conspiracy theories, that the citizen with an enquiring mind and some basic resources can play a pivotal role in understanding the world, particularly in dialogue with their peers. This is significant as all conspiracy theories are premised on an account of individual or small group agency rather than larger societal flows; the citizen theoriser is part of that sense of agency. Secondly implicit in the activity of theorising is a rejection of expertise; it is a participatory activity. A presumption of this theorising is that texts are of importance – be they radio broadcasts, YouTube lectures and discussions on the Internet. But what they are describing is their fears, experiences and the rituals of participation.

The term ‘conspiracy theorist’ has become a pejorative one, as is evident in the on-line disputes between those who are theorising about the coming NWO. What Fenster argues is the ideological misrecognition apparent in conspiracy theories often blurs the work of those not engaged in conspiracy theorising but concerned with the same topic. The EU directive on Traditional Herbal Medicinal Products came into force in April 2011, which limits the use of herbal medicines, requiring that their use is regulated along with restrictions of claims that can be made and placing quality requirements on their manufacturing. Trade bodies have complained on the restrictions this places on those manufacturing self-prescribed herbal remedies as the burden of registration both financial and evidential have to be met by them. The most immediate impact has been that products not registered may not be sold in the EU resulting in those remedies not widely used being withdrawn. Herbal medicines

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remedies more widely used (Echinacea or St John’s Wort) are unaffected, as those prescribed by an herbalist. Several trade bodies, including some that are campaigning against the Codex are campaigning against the strictures of the directive without resulting to explanations involving conspiracy\textsuperscript{13}.

Swyngedouw in his discussion of contemporary discourse of global warming notes that apocalyptic scenarios are a common feature of much climate change policy making, and we could add to that in many policy scenarios of food security, both past and present. He notes that the apocalypse is always postponed, if we really believed that these events would come to pass then we would act differently. A feature of the theories discussed in this example of the linking of the holocaust and catastrophic events from the past to the present, usually through a direct personal association. Participants are encouraged to take action to avert the crisis, either through taking part in their national polity or through practical actions such as gardening or producing their own food. Here Fenster’s observation that the end of conspiracy theorising is further theorising is confounded, as action is encouraged and seemingly taken. As the violence around some movements that advocate these narratives of imminent catastrophic peril indicate it is dangerous to assume that action will be postponed rather it is necessary to investigate how these millennial warnings are treated (Bartlett and Miller 2010, Castells 1998). As can be seen in this instance the threat moves forward in time, but the perception of peril remains.

Conspiracy theories have been explained as an attempt to regain a lost social status, an expression of anxiety in a world that is globalising rapidly shearing people from their roots and navigational aids. In this argument those thinking about the Codex are simply expressing their anxieties about the regulation of nutrients and farming exploding out the national envelope and into an international system. It becomes a mask for their prejudices about foreigners and those different to themselves whereby they understand power as personalised and held by an elite. Castells argues that the Militia movement

\textsuperscript{13} http://www.anh-europe.org/node/3113
was just such a conservative response to globalisation and loss of status, “a cultural and political movement, defenders of the traditions of the country against cosmopolitan values, and of self-rule of local people against the imposition of global order” (Castells, 1997: 96). It has been observed that right wing movements often mobilize in response to a perceived threat, and conspiracy theories ensure that such threats are ever-present.

Elements of the theories described above would fall into Castells’ account, but it is important to recognise that not all of the theorists are rejecting internationalism or cosmopolitanism but rather the versions they are being offered. Rejecting the form of globalisation dominated by a science in the service of transnational corporations, of the harmonisation of legislation to facilitate trade governed by a global body outside of most democratic controls is not just the defence of tradition. As many have noted in these theories there are elements that point to the possibility of a broader and collective political project. In the rejection of the dominant discourse or explanations the populism in these theories places those participating into a milieu where the only commonality is often the rejection of those ‘received wisdoms’. What most social movement accounts fail to explain is the role of insecurity and fearfulness in mobilising towards action. A constant in these discussion is a fear of not being in control of one’s own food choices, losing access to herbal remedies or not to being able to make informed decisions in the grocery store. This fear is not necessarily a ‘right wing’ phenomena but one that rejects the right of a neo-liberal food system to the bodies of every person on the planet. Much of this theorising would appear to be attempting to appropriate these fears to particular ideological ends.

Running throughout these discussion of the eschatology so pronounced in these conspiracy theories is also a millenarianism - that a utopia may be immanent. For some this is undoubtedly religious, New Age or Christian or a hybridity of the two, whilst others are preparing for a survivalist dystopia, stockpiling food supplies, weapons and seeds. As Gray notes, “Millenarian beliefs are symptoms of a type of cognitive dissonance in which normal links between perception and reality have broken down” (ref), certainly the hall of
mirrors presented in the conspiracy theories suggests such a fracture. But it also points to a clash of utopian projects (Busch 2010), as those opposing the supposed works of the Codex are confronted with the ascendant utopian project of neo-liberalism and the global market place:

The belief in the market as a divine ordinance became a secular ideology of universal progress that in the late twentieth century was embraced by international institutions (Gray 2008 loc1402).

It would certainly be an antidote to much of these millenarian tendencies to consider the language in which problems of food supply and production, as official documents often suggest scenarios of collapse and crisis (Beddington 2009).

Conclusions

_The future is already here — it’s just not very evenly distributed_ (William Gibson)

_An irrational faith in the future is encrypted into contemporary life, and a shift to realism may be a utopian ideal_ (John Gray – Black Mass)

Whilst the form and implications of the conspiracy theorizing are the most obvious element of these online debates and expositions, with a utopian vision of power and its dystopian deployment, these discussions also trace exactly the gap between citizenship and consumerism. The on-line discussions are based on the presumption of citizenship: the relation between the individual, the community of which they are part, and the State. The Codex exists in the space beyond the nation state, which it shares with other trans-national actors such as the United Nations, the European Union and multinational companies. As the discussants assert their citizenship they do so through postings on sites that are synchronizing their postings across continents. Yet the subject of the discussions, their place of experience, is their embodied experience of health, eating and feelings of well-being in a particular place.
The presence of conspiracy theorizing brings our attention the salient issues of the lack of democracy in the governance of food, the way in which social movement actors are debating topics with limited accounts of the operations of power and the role of fear in mobilizing these groups. It also begins to bring into question some of the tools used in analysing social movements, especially those concerning food, which have relied on the role of movements as representations of interests and/or symbolic actors. Studies of the embodied experience of movements, have pointed to the important of repetition, rhythm, ritual, experience and ‘timbre’ in movements, on what is ‘done’ in a movement (Jowers 1998; McDonald 2006). This focus on the experiences fostered by movements, the engagement of the body and senses would seem to be more pertinent to food movements than solely a focus on the textual.

As Fenster has argued conspiracy theorists should not be beyond the pale of engagement by critical scholarship but as Zizek powerfully counters there does remain in some of these populist arguments a kernel that is reactionary and exclusionary. The engagement that critical scholarship engages should not be solely based on the presumption of ‘correcting’ conspiracy theories but on a greater comprehension of their role in the lives of those who re/create them. In tracing this gap between an unobtainable utopian citizenship and a neo-liberal consumerist stakeholding, these conspiracy theories point to a space where many other people feel themselves to be. Many of the technocratic initiatives that place experts at the head of solving global problems of food security, using scientific theodicies – narratives of providence and redemption - may only serve to fuel the insecurities that drive these populist responses.
Bibliography


