

## Conspiracy theories are just lies spread by attention seekers

By Karen Brooks, Courier-Mail, 4 April 2019

*Editor's note: This article propagates the view that everyone should just believe the 'official' version of events without question – clearly, she supports the 1984 Ministry of Truth approach. In-depth search and analysis of most significant 'conspiracy theories' invariably results in the conclusion that the 'conspiracy theory' is either factual or at least reveals dubious aspects.*

When secret footage from an Al Jazeera investigation exposed Pauline Hanson and her colleagues discussing the 1996 Port Arthur massacre as if it was a conspiracy, and referencing 9/11 as well, disbelief and outrage ensued.

While much has been said about the Al Jazeera sting and Hanson has roundly condemned it describing it as a “hit job” and that the comments as shown were “taken completely out of context”, the sad truth is that the viewing and dismissing of major traumatic events as part of some worldwide or government conspiracy is an all too frequent occurrence.

What is it about these shocking incidents — where the facts are boldly manifest — that nevertheless provokes conspiracy-type responses?

According to political scientist, Professor Emeritus, Michael Barkun, a conspiracy theory is an “intellectual construct”, a “template imposed upon the world to give the appearance of order to events”.

One Nation leader Pauline Hanson with staffer James Ashby was filmed insinuating the Port Arthur massacre was part of a conspiracy. Picture: Al Jazeera  
It also has a strong emotional component.

Whether it's Elvis, the moon landing, vaccinations, Holocaust deniers, 9/11 being an “inside” job, the Christchurch murders being staged and now Port Arthur (I never knew doubt was cast upon that atrocity), there are people who, despite all the evidence and the trauma of survivors, loved ones and communities, prefer to accept an influential agency or shady, powerful figures are responsible, and we're all being duped.

While no one is accusing Hanson and her cohorts of denying the Holocaust, there's something so wilfully ignorant about those who would scorn mass murder and even genocide as conspiracy theories. Not only were these all highly politicised moments — watersheds in the countries in which they occurred — but they rippled outwards to impact the global community.

To declare these tragedies as “fake” is not only cruel and, frankly, defies all proof to the contrary (including eyewitness accounts and confessions of the perpetrators), but shines a light on the kind of people who would put their desires/beliefs and racist ideologies above anyone else's pain and suffering.

Perceiving the majority as vapid sheep, conspiracy theorists not only confirm their “special” status by searching out material that appears to support their ideas (confirmation bias), but any attempt to debunk their notions, even solid evidence and facts, simply shores them up.

It would be easy to dismiss conspiracy theorists as those who wear tin hats and swallow red pills while whispering in the shadows of the internet. Or, more generously, as trying to impose order upon apparent chaos. But their efforts to undermine official accounts and recruit others to their way of thinking is growing.

Not only are they using Instagram to encourage young followers to “drink their Kool-Aid”, but they have visible mouthpieces in the form of extreme Right-wingers such as Alex Jones, Lauren Southern and Candace Owens to bolster their views.

Conspiracy theorists believe the moon landings were staged by NASA.

In these spaces, anti-sentiments about Jews, Muslims, feminists, vaccinations, climate-change and government not only thrive, but are presented as legitimate. It’s the trolls new lair. What’s also problematic is that, as Jan-Willem van Prooijen and Mark van Vugt identify in their study on conspiracy theories, “belief in one conspiracy theory is an excellent predictor of belief in different unrelated conspiracies”.

This can lead, as psychologists Daniel Jolley and Professor Karen Douglas noted in *The Conversation*, not only to prejudice (against minority groups) but “can make people less inclined to vote, reduce their carbon footprint and have children vaccinated. (Conspiracy theories) ... can also make people more likely to engage in everyday criminal behaviour”.

While there are many attempts to understand, explain and even excuse conspiracy theorists, I’m tired of conceding to this kind of nonsensicality in the face of hard, bloody and gut-wrenching facts.

Denying the Holocaust, Port Arthur, 9/11, or Christchurch happened or that they’re part of a government or some mysterious agency’s scheme, is to trample on the dignity and graves of the victims and the suffering of those left behind. It’s also to forget the meaningful legacies and incredible positives that have arisen as a consequence of acknowledging the truth of such terror and bloodshed.

In the end, conspiracy theories are all about those who peddle them. It’s about feeding their desire for attention, paranoia, financial gain and delusions of grandeur, and always at the expense of those who lived the brutal reality.