

Classifying Conspiracy Theories in the Albanian Context

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Abstract: This theoretical article proposes a unified framework for analyzing conspiratorial narratives pertinent to Albanian history, politics, and culture. It advances a two-tier lens—macro and micro levels of observation through which conspiracies can be situated, compared, and interpreted across time. On this basis, the paper introduces a three dimensional typology (geopolitical; ideological and intellectual–cultural; community, bloodline, or clan-based) and a cross-cutting schema of “strategic targets” (systems, structures, people, ideas) to describe how such narratives ascribe agency, distribute culpability, and claim epistemic authority. A foreign-policy oriented taxonomy is then outlined to show how conspiracies map onto the actors and alignments that have historically structured Albania’s external relations (empires, coalitions, states, collectives, individuals). A final section theorizes multi-scalar intersections—how macro frames, meso alignments, and micro mechanisms cohere into persuasive stories.

Keywords: classification; typology; macro–micro analysis; foreign policy; ideology; Albania

Binding Framework for JACT. This classification model is foundational for all case studies in this and future volumes of the *Journal of Albanian Conspiracy Theories*.

1 Introduction

This article establishes a single, unified framework for the analysis of conspiracy theories in and about Albania. The aim is not merely descriptive taxonomy but methodological consolidation: to provide a common language for comparative work across historical periods, ideological currents, and discursive registers. The framework rests on three premises.

First, conspiratorial narratives are *constructed systems of meaning* that organize facts, suspicions, and symbols into an intelligible causal order. Second, these narratives operate simultaneously at multiple scales: a macro level that claims to disclose the architecture of power, and a micro level that specifies agents, motives, and mechanisms. Third, conspiracy discourse is a *political technology*: it legitimizes certain actors, delegitimizes others, and calibrates the field of permissible knowledge.

The article proceeds in six steps. Section ?? defines the macro–micro distinction and specifies how observations at each level are to be made. Section ?? sets out a basic typology: geopolitical, ideological/intellectual–cultural, and community/bloodline/clan-based conspiracies. Section ?? introduces “strategic targets” as a transversal analytic layer distinguishing whether a narrative aims at systems, structures, people, or ideas. Section ?? reframes conspiracies through a foreign-policy lens, mapping narratives to empires, coalitions, states, collectives, and individuals. Section ?? formalizes multi-scalar intersections

and coherence conditions. Section ?? concludes with editorial guidance for authors and reviewers.

2 Levels of Observation: Macro and Micro

A useful way to classify conspiratorial narratives is by the *level of observation* from which they operate. Distinguishing macro from micro does not imply hierarchy but analytical focus.

2.1 Macro level

At the macro level, narratives adopt a bird 's-eye vantage point. They situate local episodes within expansive architectures (civilizational blocs, imperial designs, transnational networks, meta-ideologies). Macro narratives specify:

1. **Frame:** the global schema within which local events are rendered meaningful.
2. **Teleology:** the directionality or end-state presumed by the narrative (decline, capture, purification, redemption).
3. **Integration:** how disparate events are linked (diffusion, coordination, infiltration, contagion).

2.2 Micro level

At the micro level, narratives specify the *internal mechanics*: origins, actors, alliances, motives. Micro accounts should articulate:

- (m1) **Origin:** external importation vs. endogenous emergence.
- (m2) **Actors:** state, para-state, institutional, communal, or individual roles.
- (m3) **Mechanisms:** recruitment, funding, blackmail, propaganda, doctrinal revision, ritualization.
- (m4) **Payoffs:** material, symbolic, spiritual, reputational, or strategic outcomes.

Coherence condition. A rigorous analysis must show how (M1–M3) constrain and are realized by (m1–m4). Macro frames without micro mechanisms collapse into mere “grand narratives”; micro accounts without macro frames fail to explain persistence, spread, or resonance.

3 A Typology of Conspiracies

From this two-level vantage, three large families of conspiratorial narratives are analytically salient. These are not mutually exclusive; overlap is expected and must be made explicit by the author.

3.1 Geopolitical conspiracies

Typically external in origin, these cast neighboring states or imperial powers as orchestrators of internal destabilization. They rely on macro frames of encirclement or partition and micro mechanisms of influence, penetration, or coercion. *Diagnostic markers*: cartographic anxieties (borders, corridors, ports), references to treaties/alliances, and narratives of orchestration via proxies.

3.2 Ideological and intellectual-cultural conspiracies

These foreground doctrinal vectors: religions, philosophies, scientific paradigms, aesthetic programs, and moral codes. They posit infiltration through schools, media, clerical structures, or NGOs. *Diagnostic markers*: emphasis on curricula, publishing circuits, cultural institutions, rites, and the re-coding of symbols and festivals. This family includes religiously inflected and “secular” ideologies alike.

3.3 Community, bloodline, or clan-based conspiracies

These treat hereditary, familial, or patronage networks as primary. *Diagnostic markers*: genealogical charts, marriage alliances, mentorship lineages, and narratives of succession. Mechanisms center on access control (appointments, licenses, tenders), reciprocal obligations, and ritualized loyalty.

Mixed types. Authors must specify admixtures (e.g., a geopolitical-ideological hybrid) and indicate which level (macro/micro) is dominant in their analysis.

4 Strategic Targets in Conspiratorial Narratives

Beyond family resemblance, conspiracies may be classified by their principal *targets*—what, in practice, the narrative seeks to undermine or capture.

- **Systems**: monetary regimes, energy grids, information infrastructures, educational standards.
- **Structures**: ministries, courts, militaries, religious hierarchies, universities.
- **People**: leaders, technocrats, clerics, dissidents, financiers.
- **Ideas**: doctrines, values, taboos, aesthetic canons, sacred geographies.

In any given narrative, multiple targets will appear; authors must indicate the *primary* target and any *secondary* ones. This improves comparability across cases and clarifies claims about intent.

5 Conspiracy Through the Lens of Foreign Policy

Conspiratorial narratives often mirror Albania's actual diplomatic history. A foreign-policy lens, therefore, provides an additional taxonomy keyed to actor type:

Empires Ottoman, Roman/Italian, Soviet, British, contemporary American, or other civilizational formations. *Temporal horizon*: long arcs. *Mechanisms*: expansion, partition, absorption, doctrinal hegemony. *Analytic note*: cultural/civilizational conspiracies typically instantiate imperial logics whether or not the discourse recognizes this.

Coalitions Eastern Bloc, NATO, EU, or informal security/economic alignments. *Mechanisms*: conditionality, realignment pressures, interoperability mandates. *Risk frame*: forced repositioning within a shifting international order.

States Neighboring and regional actors as proximate threats or patrons. *Mechanisms*: border disputes, minority leverage, economic dependency, diplomatic vetoes. *Narrative posture*: immediacy and existential framing.

Collectives Religious orders, diasporas, NGOs, foundations, media consortia, professional guilds. *Mechanisms*: funding flows, norm diffusion, agenda-setting, elite cultivation. *Role*: "shadow diplomacy" that primes or frustrates state agendas.

Individuals Adventurers, financiers, ideologues, private intelligence operators, technologists. *Mechanisms*: philanthropy, lobbying, data control, targeted reputational warfare. *Risk*: agility and deniability unmoored from formal accountability.

Mapping requirement. Analyses must map their narrative onto this actor set, specify dominant actors, and describe cross-level coordination (e.g., empire → coalition → collective → individual).

6 Multi-Scalar Intersections and Coherence

Conspiratorial narratives rarely operate at a single scale. Their persuasiveness depends on *interlocking claims* across levels:

1. **Scale articulation**: authors must state the macro claim(s), the meso alignments (coalitions, institutional fields), and the micro mechanisms (actors, instruments).
2. **Causal plausibility**: show how mechanisms at lower scales suffice to realize macro trajectories.
3. **Symbolic economy**: identify the repertoire of symbols, rituals, and taboos that carry the narrative across scales (e.g., sacred geographies, national myths, technocratic metrics).
4. **Temporal stitching**: indicate how short-term shocks are woven into long arcs (e.g., policy cycles, doctrinal reforms, generational handovers).

7 Operationalizing the Framework for Authors and Reviewers

To ensure consistency across submissions, unless you have a reason to thing otherwise, JACT requires the following structure in every manuscript:

1. Framework declaration: A brief paragraph stating the family classification (geopolitical; ideological/intellectual-cultural; community/bloodline/clan), any hybridization, and the dominant level of observation.

2. Actor mapping: A concise mapping of implicated actors to the foreign-policy lens (empire, coalition, state, collective, individual), including directionality of influence and channels (finance, law, media, ritual, education).

3. Target specification: Declaration of primary and secondary strategic targets (systems, structures, people, ideas) and the hypothesized mechanism of effect.

4. Evidence ecology: Description of the material from which the narrative is reconstructed: archives, media corpora, doctrinal texts, ethnographic observation, rumor networks, judicial records, financial filings, speculations. Explicitly mark *stigmatized knowledge* sources versus institutional sources.

8 Norms of Argumentation and Citation

JACT recognizes that conspiracy discourse is often a hybrid of empirical tracework and interpretive synthesis. To avoid category errors:

- **Distinguish registers:** mark when you are reporting, inferring, or speculating.
- **Source stratification:** weigh institutional documents, eyewitness accounts, and rumor differently; justify any elevation of stigmatized knowledge.
- **Conceptual discipline:** use terms like “network,” “infiltration,” “coordination,” and “capture” in operationalized ways (define actors, channels, time horizons).
- **Reproducibility of reading:** provide enough textual or archival citation that a reader could *reconstruct* your chain of inference, even if they reject your conclusion.

9 Positioning the Case Studies in This Volume and Beyond

The present framework is intended as the suggested methodology for all *JACT* case studies. Analyses of religiously inflected or overtly secular ideological narratives—for example, those concerning transnational messianisms or civilizational programs—must be positioned as *ideological and intellectual-cultural* conspiracies and then mapped, where appropriate, onto geopolitical and community/bloodline dimensions. Future volumes will admit no departures from this protocol; rather, refinements to the model, if warranted, must be formulated as *extensions* that preserve the macro-micro architecture and the actor/target mappings.

10 Conclusion

This article has defined a single, enforceable framework for conspiracy analysis within JACT. The model comprises:

- **Macro–micro levels of observation** — distinguishing broad structural frames (macro) from detailed actor–mechanism accounts (micro), and requiring coherence between them.
- **A tripartite typology** — categorizing narratives as:
 - (a) Geopolitical,
 - (b) Ideological and intellectual–cultural,
 - (c) Community, bloodline, or clan-based.

Authors must specify type(s) and indicate any hybrid forms.

- **Strategic targets** — identifying whether a conspiracy narrative primarily aims at:
 - (a) Systems,
 - (b) Structures,
 - (c) People,
 - (d) Ideas.
- **Foreign-policy actor mapping** — situating narratives in relation to:
 - (a) Empires,
 - (b) Coalitions,
 - (c) States,
 - (d) Collectives,
 - (e) Individuals.

This mapping clarifies cross-scale coordination and directionality of influence.

- **Coherence conditions for multi-scalar articulation** — evaluating narratives by:
 - (a) Scale articulation (macro, meso, micro),
 - (b) Causal plausibility,
 - (c) Symbolic economy,
 - (d) Temporal stitching.

By adopting a shared analytical vocabulary and procedure, JACT ensures comparability across contributions, reduces equivocation in the use of key terms, and clarifies the methodological status of claims.

Editorial notice: This framework is binding for all submissions to JACT in the current and all future volumes. Manuscripts that rely on alternative models

will be returned without review, *unless* the author demonstrates that their framework is indispensable for the case under study. In such exceptional instances, the journal's fee policy applies: authors convinced of the necessity of publication despite the editors' lack of agreement may proceed under the special publication fee of 10 000 EUR as stipulated in the *JACT* author guidelines.