

**T.C. IBN HALDUN UNIVERSITY  
SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH PROJECTS  
FINAL REPORT FORM**

**1. GENERAL INFORMATION**

<b>PROJECT NO</b>	2105
<b>THE REPORT NO</b>	<i>Final Report</i>
<b>PROJECT TITLE</b>	Young People's COVID-19 Narratives from an Argumentative Perspective and Normative Implications
<b>REPORT DATE</b>	Haziran 2023
<b>PROJECT MANAGER</b>	Dr. Merve Aktar

**2. PROJECT DURATION**

<b>Starting Date</b>	<b>Due Date</b>	<b>Total Project Duration (Month)</b>
July 2021	October 2022	15 months

**3. BUDGET MANAGEMENT**

<b>Total Project Budget Approved by BAPK</b>			
<b>TOTAL BUDGET OF THE PROJECT</b>			
<b>ITEM</b>	<b>Approved Budget by BAPK</b>	<b>Spending</b>	<b>Remaining Amount</b>
<b>Machinery-Equipment</b>			
<b>Consumables</b>	-	-	-
<b>Procurement of services</b>			
<b>Project Manager Allowance</b>			
<b>Researcher (1)</b> <i>(If any add lines for other researchers)</i>			
<b>Scholarship Student (1)</b> <i>(If any, add lines for other Scholarship Students)</i>			
<b>TOTAL</b>			

\* Field Studies, Domestic Conference, International Conference, Domestic Study Visit and International Study Visit

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<b>TRAVELS IN THE PROJECT (If any)</b>					
Name of Person	Type of Travel (*)	Route	Date	Time (day)	Total Expenditure (TL)
Merve Aktar	Conference	Albania	June 2022	15 <sup>th</sup>	Used KAF funds and not BAP project budget.
Mehmet Ali Üzelgün	Conference	Germany	October 2022	22 <sup>nd</sup>	International (non-IHU)
Önder Küçükural	Conference	Germany	May 2022	21 <sup>st</sup>	KAF
Rahmi Oruç	Conference	Germany	May & October 2022	May 21 <sup>st</sup> October 22 <sup>nd</sup>	KAF

<b>TRANSFER AMONG BUDGET ITEMS DURING THE PROJECT (If any)</b>			
Reduced Budget Item	The Project Budget Approved by BAPK	Increased Budget item	Transferred Budget (TL)
Grammarly		Atlas Ti	1,102.95
<b>ADDITIONAL PAYMENT INFORMATION RECEIVED DURING THE PROJECT (If any)</b>			
Budget Item	The Project Budget Approved by BAPK	Additional Allowance (TL)	Total (TL)

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**4. PROJECT MANAGEMENT PROCESS**

**SCIENTIFIC STUDIES AND FINDINGS ABOUT THE PROJECT**

**1. INTRODUCTION**

The majority of our time and resources were utilized in the oral interview process: formulating the interview questions and method, navigating the dynamics of student appointments and actual engagements, interview transcriptions, and finally, the present stage of coding and analysis.

**2. MATERIAL AND METHOD**

We concentrated our interview questions on three key areas of research: university freshman experiences (personal and educational) of the Covid pandemic, their exposure to conspiracy theories, and their future imaginaries. Questions were designed to be open-ended, so as to stimulate narrative answers, stories, rather than affirmative or negative statements. We then proceeded to code these narratives under 18 conceptual headings, so as to collect our findings in research categories.

**3. RESEARCH FINDINGS**

Research findings are theorized and discussed in the body of conference papers prepared and presented by our team members, listed in the next section.

**PUBLICATIONS MADE IN THE SCOPE OF THE PROJECT AND PAPERS  
PRESENTED AT THE MEETINGS \* (If any)**

Open-Source Online Publications:

October 2022: Mehmet Ali Üzelgün; Merve Aktar; Hossein Turner; Rahmi Oruç, *Narrative and Argumentative: Towards a Joint Framework for Examining Everyday Discourse*. "Young people's COVID-19 narratives from an argumentative perspective," Munazara and Argumentation Ethics Research Center online.

Conferences:

22 October 2022: Rahmi Oruç; Mehmet Ali Üzelgün; Salih Doğan, "Association and Disassociation of Self in Generation Z Crisis Narratives," *L'imaginaire en temps de crisis*, Junges Forum 2022, Berlin, Germany.

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15 June 2022: Merve Aktar, ““It tempered me (like iron) a little:” Pandemic Metaphors by University Students in Turkey,” *Sixth ASSE International Conference on British and American Studies*, Albanian Society for the Study of English, Vlore, Albania.

7 June 2022: Mehmet Ali Üzelgün; Rahmi Oruç; Salih Doğan, “Between Pending Narratives: Evaluation of COVID-19 Conspiracy Theories by University Students in Turkey.” *4<sup>th</sup> International Conference Between the Worlds: Narratives and Notions of Pandemics*, Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Studies with Ethnographic Museum – Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, Sofia, Bulgaria.

21 May 2022: Önder Küçükural; Merve Aktar; Goncagül Şahin Kaya, “Dynamics of Vaccine Skepticism Among Turkish Youth,” *Crisis Narratives and the Pandemic*, International Academic Conference of the Regensburg Center for International and Transnational Area Studies, Regensburg, Germany.

“Transformation of the self amid crisis: COVID-19 narratives of young people after the lockdown in Turkey”

(in Conference: Epidemic Diseases and Social Transformation in the Perspective of Social Sciences) \*

“The elites are after us”: the hidden elites COVID-19 conspiracy theory as a pending narrative”

(in Conference: Epidemic Diseases and Social Transformation in the Perspective of Social Sciences) \*

\*These two abstracts were accepted to the *Epidemic Diseases and Social Transformation in the Perspective of Social Sciences Conference*, but due to high registration fees that were communicated only after the acceptance, were retracted.

Manuscript in Progress:

Rahmi Oruç, Salih Doğan, Mehmet Ali Üzelgün,

SWINGING BETWEEN TWO PENDING NARRATIVES: THE RECEPTION OF COVID-19 NARRATIVES AMONG FRESHMEN STUDENTS IN TURKEY.

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Conference: "Epidemic Diseases and Social Transformation in the Perspective of Social Sciences"

#### **Transformation of the self amid crisis: COVID-19 narratives of young people after the lockdown in Turkey**

Mehmet Ali Üzelgün

The impact of COVID-19 prevention and containment measures on human well-being is pervasive. The study of the impact of, experiences with, and coping mechanisms against COVID-19 related stress may equip mental health practitioners with better means to intervene the problems experienced by different segments of the population. The goal of this study is to get an in-depth understanding of the lived experiences of university youth in Turkey and their coping with the COVID-19 crisis. The premise is that a narrative approach distinguishing the levels of story, discourse, and norms can be useful in the in-depth understanding of such lived experiences. 27 semi-structured online interviews were conducted with 1<sup>st</sup> year university students across the country. The verbatim transcriptions were examined using narrative analysis, and specific attention was paid to the meaning-making and coping mechanisms. Drawing on the tension between the experiencing self and the narrating self, the analysis identified three master narratives: (1) apprehension, (2) stimulation, (3) normative otherness narratives. Each master narrative is discussed by taking into account the representation of the threat and the transformation of the self.

Keywords: COVID-19 narratives; discourse analysis; self and other; symbolic coping

#### **"THE ELITES ARE AFTER US": THE HIDDEN ELITES COVID-19 CONSPIRACY THEORY AS A PENDING NARRATIVE**

Rahmi Oruç

Due to the surmounting uncertainty and vulnerability it creates, the COVID-19 outbreak has enabled the proliferation of conspiracy theories. In this paper, I argue that "the hidden elites" conspiracy theory can be powerfully examined as a pending narrative (Törrönen, 2021). Pending narratives are future-related stories that operate on three levels: 1) Depicting a state of affairs through a story in which the dangers of inaction against the enemy are qualified; 2) Identifying the audiences as the agents who will bring about future salvation, and 3) Positioning the agents vis-a-vis the state of affairs in an ideological trajectory that challenges the official narrative. The data I employ come from 27 semi-structured online interviews conducted this year with freshmen university students. The analysis shows that on the first level the hidden elites Covid-19 conspiracy theory paints a state of affairs in which the pandemic is a hoax fabricated by the elites to oppress people. On the second level, the audience is invited to awaken and deny preventive measures against the outbreak. On the third level, the global preventive measures are positioned as the official narrative, the rejection of which is the only way out for alleviating the oppression.

Keywords: COVID-19 narratives; conspiracy theories, pending narratives, COVID-19 preventive measures, the hidden elites, official narratives, master narratives

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## **Dynamics of Vaccine Skepticism Among Turkish Youth**

Önder Küçükural,  
Merve Aktar,  
Goncagül Şahin Kaya

To receive a vaccine shot, or not to receive a vaccine shot, has become a life or death decision of sorts, and the range of alternatives contending for public attention, if not trust, pose a puzzle for individual processes of practical reasoning and argumentation. This is especially true for young people. With the goal of examining how vaccine hesitancy is articulated and dealt with in personal narratives, we conducted in-depth oral interviews (online) with twenty-seven first-year university students– enrolled in more than fifteen universities spanning most of Turkey– in 2021. We quickly observed that individuals' decision-making processes are directly affected by the rhetorical strength of the public media narratives circulating among youth. Practical decisions are made depending on the argumentative plausibility of these narratives, bringing to mind Michael Bamberg's (1997, 2020) positioning theory that suggests a three-tiered analysis: story content (story), storytelling interaction (discourse), and social norms. In the Turkish context, the sharp divides and fissures on the level of social norms explain the dynamics of youth vaccine skepticism. Our paper outlines the variants of such skepticism in the midst of Covid-19 and related uncertainties.

Specifically, the vaccine-skeptic participants in our interview pool share narratives that reflect widely-circulated conspiracy theories that mostly appear in a form of "argument from explanation" (Floris & Walton, 2016), depending on our participants' value orientation. Specifically, participant students oscillate between nationalistic versus cosmopolitan value judgements. We can name these as master narratives. Interview participants who conform to nationalistic values frame their position as skeptics with anti-capitalist, anti-big pharma discourses. These participants express readiness to reconsider this positioning in the case that the Turkish government develops its own vaccine; i.e., Turcovac. On the other hand, the participant students who reflect a cosmopolitan value-orientation mostly frame their positions via scientific discourse, referencing the noticeably rapid development of Covid vaccines. Stories of lab-leaks and related accounts were also shared in lieu of explanations in this process of accounting for vaccine hesitancy. We recorded that the underlying concern for this grouping is the uncertainty surrounding the long-term side-effects of vaccines. However, in their interviews, cosmopolitan youth tended to show willingness to leave aside their skeptical position in the case that vaccine restrictions or bans are imposed on travel abroad, especially Europe, or even on local daily activities like visits to shopping malls.

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SWINGING BETWEEN TWO PENDING NARRATIVES: THE RECEPTION OF  
COVID-19 NARRATIVES AMONG FRESHMEN STUDENTS IN TURKEY

Rahmi Oruç  
Salih Doğan  
Mehmet Ali Üzelgün

With the high levels of uncertainty and vulnerability created in everyday activities, the COVID-19 outbreak has prompted a proliferation of narratives. Against the official narrative crosscutting the worlds of science, medicine, social measures and personal responsibilities, many conspiracy theories have emerged. Among these, “the hidden elites” conspiracy theory is a particularly influential one refashioned and rejuvenated in the context of the outbreak. In this paper we argue that both the official COVID narrative and hidden elites conspiracy theory conform to a narrative format called the pending narratives (Törrönen, 2021). Pending narratives are future-directed stories operating on three levels: the story, the discourse, and the norm. On the story level, characters are positioned vis-a-vis each other, such as heroes and villains. On the discourse level, the audience is positioned as agents called for action. On the third level of norms, the agents are positioned vis-a-vis the state of affairs in an ideological trajectory, confirming or challenging the dominant narratives. The data we employ come from 27 semi-structured online interviews conducted between June-October 2021 with freshmen university students across Turkey. Our analysis shows that both pending narratives, the official and the conspiracy, have purchase among the interviewees, at varying degrees. We thus divide the interview responses into three groups: adhering to the official narrative, adhering to the hidden elites conspiracy, and those oscillating between the two pending narratives. In the official narrative, the public and the state are positioned as the heroes fighting against COVID-19 virus, the villain. The audience is invited to adapt to the new normal by applying preventive measures. On the norm level, this represents a reproduction of the dominant modern science and bio-political government trajectory. In hidden elites conspiracy theory, on the other hand, the villain is not the virus but the elites hidden behind it, specified and located outside the national borders. Its unfolding invites the audience to an awakening, self-empowerment and denial of bio-political measures. On the norm level, this represents the official narrative as oppressive, the rejection of which is the only way to claim authenticity and freedom. Finally, in the narratives swinging between the two poles, we identify a series of villains and motives, distinguished geographically across the national borders, structuring the narrative context and mediating the appeal of the two pending narratives.

**Keywords:** COVID-19 narratives; conspiracy theories, pending narratives, COVID-19 preventive measures, the hidden elites, official narratives, master narratives

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ASSE 2022: Pandemic metaphors in language, literature and culture  
Conference Paper Abstract  
Merve Aktar

Paper Title:

“It tempered me (like iron) a little:” Pandemic Metaphors by University Students in Turkey

Is the virus a “natural” or “artificial” phenomenon? Will it “catch” you or will you “escape” its grip? Were the mandatory precautions “sacred” or did you feel “imprisoned?” These are some of the metaphoric expressions used by students in Turkey to describe the virus and their lives during the first year of the Covid 19 pandemic. From journeys of self-discovery to admissions of “feeling crippled” by the inability to exert agency, my proposed conference paper has an end to introduce and discuss the narratives of twenty-seven Gen Z’ers from across Turkey. I obtain this data from the ongoing academic research project that I am involved in, titled, “Young people’s COVID-19 narratives from an argumentative perspective and normative implications.” Referencing George Lakoff and Mark Johnson’s seminal text, *Metaphors We Live By*, I will critically compare students’ engagement in and critique of master metaphors surrounding the virus and public aspects of the pandemic, including the traditional expressions of the virus as a “trap,” and the disputed public narrative of unity—or lack thereof— “we are all in the same boat.”

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**Narrative and Argumentative:  
Towards a Joint Framework for Examining Everyday Discourse**

*Mehmet Ali Üzelgün, Merve Aktar, Hossein Turner, Rahmi Oruç<sup>1</sup>*

Since what may be called the "narrative turn" in the 1980s, it is widely recognized that narrative constitutes a fundamental conceptual and analytical framework for the understanding of human experiences and existence (Bakhtin, 1981; Bruner, 1986; Culler, 1984; Fisher, 1984; Ricoeur, 1981). Accordingly, we not only make sense of and give order to our aleatoric and fragmented experiences through stories, but also maintain a coherent sense of self in the otherwise fragmented roles and positions in which we find ourselves.

As fundamental as the above are the relations and interactions we enter in our daily lives in constructing a sense of agency and identity, as well as in coordinating with others to reach otherwise unattainable goals. The exchange of positions in these interactions, and reasons justifying the adoption of those goals, are captured by another paramount conceptual and analytical framework of argument (Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1969; Toulmin, 1958).

This paper explores the links between the two fundamental discourse analytic perspectives - narrative and argumentative - and the possibilities of their combined analytic potential. The potential of their intersection, we cautiously contend, is greater when circumscribed within clearly identified boundaries. Hence the paper also aims to identify when a narrative argument or argumentative narration framework can prove more useful, and some of the ways it could reach its potential. This is done with the awareness that in many contexts, what is understood as narrative and argumentative are often blended together. Thus, it is critical that we start by distinguishing what is meant by an argumentative perspective and by a narrative perspective.

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<sup>1</sup> This is a report prepared in the exploratory project ***Young people's COVID-19 narratives from an argumentative perspective*** conducted by Ibn Haldun Munazara and Argumentation Ethics Research Center, with the support of Ibn Haldun University. We are thankful to Önder Küçükural, Goncağül Şahinkaya, Salih Doğan, and Didem Arvas, the members of the project who, through their reflections in joint project meetings have contributed to the conversation behind this article.

**\* Please share the publication and images via e-mail with the BAP Coordinator in accordance with the BAP Directive, Section 6, Article-16.**

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**IS THE PROJECT SUITABLE FOR WORK CALENDAR? REASONS IF IT DOES NOT WORK \***

We took the three-month extension so as to continue deciphering the Atlas-ti codes and to perform the necessary analytical assessment. The continuing remote – online communication between interviewer and interviewees led to unforeseen and required calendar revisions, leading to a delay in the coding process as well. This was coupled by the time-lapse caused by student research assistant changes during this time.

**\* If you have an extra time request for the project, please tell the BAP Coordinator with a petition.**

**SUSTAINABILITY PLAN POST-PROJECT \***

Career-wise, this project provided some of its researchers their valuable first experience with project development, coordination, execution, in addition data analysis. Specifically in terms of the topic, the project facilitated:

- deeper understanding in three dimensions of the undertaken work: the experiences and coping strategies of students in Turkey during the pandemic lockdown,
- the extension of the analytical focus of argument analysis from propositions to narrative stories.
- the formation of a competent core research team in performing argument analysis of everyday discourse and narratives
- endeavors to write and apply to large-scale projects with the core research team and partnerships.
- a PhD dissertation on the project topic, in progress, by ACI student, Hossein Turner.

Institutionally, project members represented IHU and gathered attention from academic and public audiences through invitations to and participations in research-based events. For example, Dr Önder Küçükural delivered a talk to high school students at the Mümtaz Turhan Sosyal Bilimler Lisesi, titled "Dilin İmkânları: Söylemler, Argümanlar, Hikâyeler." Students from the school remained in active contact with Dr. Küçükural and participated in Project-related reading groups and events. Conference participation in European countries garnered active interest from universities and led to collaborative interest. A notable example is that the Dean of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences at the University of Ismail Qemali, Vlore, in Albania, contacted Dr. Merve Aktar post-conference, and proposed a teaching and research collaboration under the umbrella of the Erasmus+ KA171 mobility program. The application has been submitted, and IHU and the University of Ismail Qemali have already signed a Memorandum of Understanding.

Project-wise, in the Fall of 2022, the BAP project 2105 team applied in the capacity of potential project researcher from research consortium member country, to the Horizon Europe Framework Program Call: "Disaster Resilient Society 2022." Project Proposal title: *Modelling Positive Crisis*

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*Behavior to Increase Individual and Societal Wellbeing in Times of Health Crises.* This project proposal was coordinated by the Institute for Population and Human Studies in Sofia, Bulgaria. The Horizon project was declined, but network ties were established between the team and project teams/researchers from Bulgaria, Romania, and other European countries.

Research-wise, the project in general has opened the space for international research partnerships such as in the examples of the University of Ismail Qemali and of the Institute for Population and Human Studies. On the other hand, the white paper output serves as a survey of the fields of narrative discourse and argumentative discourse, wherein the two fields are considered not just separately, but in interconnection with each other. While not a break-through, this comparative analysis offers an informed and detailed analysis in a relatively emerging, limited locus in scholarship. The paper also serves as a base for specific, focused manuscripts on narrative and argumentative discourses that are in the making.

**\* State the impact and benefit of your project (career development, institutional and academic aspects) and how it will be maintained after the project is over.**

**ADMINISTRATIVE / FINANCIAL PROBLEMS ENCOUNTERED IN THE PROJECT PROCESS (If any)**

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