Thank you very much for your message. I’m happy to attempt to answer your questions.

1) With regard to the first sentence, it needs ‘unpicking’ so that I can understand your intended messages and reformulate it for you. It all depends on who or what you are referring to when you say “their”: the defenders of conspiracy theories or the conspiracy theories themselves?

Is the point you want to make connected to one of the following ideas?

1. The word ‘cognitive’ is used in connection with a thinking person with conscious mental processes, so when you say “their cognitive shortcomings” it sounds like you are referring to the defenders of conspiracy theories, in which case cognitive shortcomings/failures/weaknesses is not very diplomatic. Are you perhaps thinking of the argument that people with lower cognitive complexity have increased belief in conspiracy theories, according to some studies (e.g. see [Jan‐Willem van Prooijen](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/action/doSearch?ContribAuthorStored=Prooijen%2C+Jan-Willem), 2016, “Why Education Predicts Decreased Belief in Conspiracy Theories” in the journal Applied Cognitive Psychology).
2. Or perhaps when you say “their cognitive shortcomings” you are referring to the weaknesses/failures of the conspiracy theories themselves? (But as I said ‘cognitive’ can only be connected with a thinking person). If this is the case, you could refer to the tendency of conspiracy theories to offer oversimplified solutions to complex ideas and situations.
3. “…epitomizing anti-hegemonic discourse” would only make sense if “their” refers to conspiracy theories themselves (following from b).

Please clarify your meaning and I’ll be happy to reformulate the points!

2) I would suggest the following minor changes:

"This is the reason why critics of the notion of “conspiracy theory” often think that it is just an accusatory label used to discredit criticism (Coady 2012; Barkun 2015; Champagne and Maler 2012) in the same manner as Hofstadter, and in this sense, it greatly resembles the term “populism.”