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Policies of radicalisation as anti- and countercult ideologies

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The similarities between research in ‘new religious movements’ and radicalization has been noticed by several scholars. This article however attempt to view the entire logic of ‘radicalization controversies’ through the lens of ‘cult controversies’. With a point of departure in material from Denmark, similarities are found between the position of scholars attempting to provide nuanced understandings of complex phenomena as well as in dynamics between radical groups and counter-jihad groups. The article suggests that current understandings of processes of radicalisation, de-radicalisation and securitisation may benefit from insights from comparisons with anti-cult movements setting the agenda for public discourses on NRM movements In the 1980s.

Keywords: Radicalisation, Denmark, Counter-Jihad, New Religious Movements, Hizb ut-Tahrir

Over recent decades, radicalisation has become the most prominent framework for public discussion on Islam. The radicalisation framework connects religious expression with violence, disruption of social order and threats to basic rights so that debates on radicalisation resemble a series of debates and policy initiatives in the 1970s and 1980s, which are commonly referred to collectively as “cult controversies”¹ or more dramatically the “cult war”.² The aim of this article is to investigate debates and policies on radicalisation and radicalisation controversies in Denmark as a phenomenon that is in many ways similar to the cult controversies. The empirical material will come from Denmark, a small north European country hosting a population of 5.5 million people, which has been centrally positioned in both cult and radicalisation controversies.

In a small but growing number of publications, it has been argued that research on new religious movements (NRM) may be fruitful as a means of gaining an understanding of radicalisation by comparing recruitment to NRMs and homegrown terrorism,³ the role of

¹ Beckford, James A, *Cult Controversies: The Societal Response to the New Religious Movements* (London & New York: Tavistock, 1985).

² Barker, Eileen, “The Not-So-New Religious Movements: Changes in ‘the Cult Scene’ over the Past Forty Years”, *Temenos*, 50: 2 (2014) 235-256.

³ Dawson, Lorne L, “The Study of New Religious Movements and the Radicalization of Home-Grown Terrorists: Opening a Dialogue, Terrorism and Political Violence”, *Terrorism and Political Violence* 22: 1 (2009) 1-21, p. 2.

charismatic authority in NRMs, and violent radicalisation⁴ or jihadism as a religious innovation.⁵ Other publications have dealt with the trajectories of fighters⁶ or the way radical groups grow from milieus comparable to the “cultic milieus” identified by Colin Campbell in his famous study of a religious/spiritual counterculture.⁷ Obviously, NRMs and radicalised collectivities have certain elements in common but, moving beyond these elements, this article proposes that cult controversies and radicalisation controversies share basic structural elements. Tracing similarities between debates and policies beyond the movements and ideologies themselves, it will draw striking parallels between the dynamics of the controversies.

Cult controversies are heated debates about the nature of NRM – general term that includes a number of quite different groups, ranging from Christian-inspired groups such as the Unification Church, para-scientific groups such as Scientology, and Eastern groups such as Hare Krishna and Rajneesh. NRMs were established in or imported into Western Europe and the US, Canada, Australia and New Zealand in the 1950s to 1970s. The range of theological positions they propose varies enormously, and it seems that their newness in a Western context and their controversiality are the only common denominators: NRMs are almost *by definition* religious groups that cause conflict.⁸ In the 1970s and 1980s, NRMs were accused of breaking up families, exerting undue psychological pressure (brainwashing), economic fraud, sexual abuse and maltreatment of children. In some cases, the allegations were true, as some NRMs were involved in

⁴ Hofmann, David C., and Lorne L. Dawson, “The Neglected Role of Charismatic Authority in the Study of Terrorist Groups and Radicalization”, *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 37: 4 (2014) 348-368.

⁵ Firestone, Reuven, “‘Jihadism’ as a New Religious Movement, in *The Cambridge Companion to New Religious Movements*, Mikael Rothstein and Olav Hammer (eds) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp. 263-285.

⁶ Shterin, Marat, and Akhmet Yarlykapov, “Reconsidering Radicalisation and Terrorism: the New Muslims Movement in Kabardino-Balkaria and its Path to Violence”, *Religion, State and Society* 39: 2-3 (2011) 303-325.

⁷ Kühle, Lene, and Lasse Lindekilde, *Radicalization among Young Muslims in Aarhus* (Aarhus: Centre for Studies in Islamism and Radicalisation & Department of Political Science, Aarhus University, 2010). http://cir.au.dk/fileadmin/site_files/filer_statskundskab/subsites/cir/radicalization_aarhus_FINAL.pdf (accessed August 2017).

⁸ The fact that Jehovah’s Witnesses have been regarded as an NRM, even if their history in a Western context long predates that of the other NRMs, supports this analysis.

illegal and violent behaviour. Some of the most infamous NRMs (those in Jonestown and Waco, and the Solar Temple, Aum Shinrikyo and Heaven's Gate) were even involved in mass suicide, murder and terrorism.⁹ NRMs started to attract public attention through events such as Jonestown, Guyana, where more than 900 people died in a combined mass murder and mass suicide in the jungle in 1978,¹⁰ but the construction of "cults" as an overall category of dangerous religions was critically dependent on the work of the anti-cult movement (ACM) – or, perhaps more suitably, movements because there were several of them, – was very successful in the 1970s and early 1980s in bringing the existence of the NRMs, the cults, to the attention of the public. The message of the ACM was based on a specific group of theories – "brainwashing" theories – which are theories on why anyone with a sane mind would join a "crazy cult". Brainwashing theories claim that NRMs, in order to recruit new members, apply techniques similar to the techniques used in Chinese prisoner-of-war camps during the Korean War (1950-1953). These theories did not comply with academic standards, but they were popular among parents of members of NRMs as well as (regretful) former members, because they "explain" why people join. As a powerful weapon in the cult controversy, the brainwashing theories prepared the ground for an entire "deprogramming" industry, that entailed members of NRMs being kidnapped or lured into giving up their "deviant" views.¹¹ In the end, the ACMs were largely unsuccessful but they have nevertheless left traces in the public and academic imagination: the *topos* of brainwashing perhaps being the most important one.

Previously, radicalisation was a concept used informally to describe a development towards more radical politics. However, from about 2004, it became the central notion in public debates on terrorism and integration as well as the key concept for the deprogramming industry,

⁹ Wessinger, Catherine, *How the Millennium Comes Violently* (New York & London: Seven Bridges Press, 2000); Dawson, Lorne L. *Comprehending Cults: The Sociology of New Religious Movements* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

¹⁰ Wessinger, *How the Millennium Comes Violently*, p. 30.

¹¹ Richardson, James T., "A Critique of 'Brainwashing' Claims about New Religious Movements", in *Cults and New Religious Movements: A Reader*, ed. Lorne L. Dawson (Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2003), pp. 160-166.

which developed and implemented government policies of counter-radicalisation.¹² Along with the Netherlands, the UK and Norway, Denmark was one of the first European countries to launch government initiatives to counter radicalisation.¹³ The Danish approach, which includes the famous so-called Aarhus Model, is perceived as a “typically Scandinavian soft-handed approach”.¹⁴ It involves the comprehensive inclusion of different actors in counter-radicalisation policies – not only the police and the intelligence and security services, but also the educational system, the health-care system, and various social services providers. A highly critical article questions the assumptions of mainstream literature on radicalisation by suggesting that “the radicalisation discourse should be considered as performative security knowledge – a discourse that actually produces (discursively) the threats it claims to identify for the performance of governance, rather than as reacting to the existence of such risks”.¹⁵ Following this lead, the radicalisation discourse resembles how the discourse on NRMs created the idea of “cults” as dangerous religious communities, whose actions should be surveilled and constrained. The this article’s point of departure is the proposition that the cult controversies and in particular the ACM provide fruitful points of reference for discussing radicalisation in this perspective. The aim of the article is thus to use the discussion on NRMs and (in particular) ACMs as a lens that may provide new perspectives on the debates and the dynamics embedded in the debates on radicalisation and anti- or counter-radicalisation.

The cult controversies were more or less confined to Western countries and Japan (and did not reach Eastern Europe and Russia until after the collapse of the Eastern bloc) and mainly took place within the framework of the nation state. However, the NRMs were like “multi-

¹² Kudnandi, Aron, “Radicalisation: the journey of a concept”, *Race and Class* 54: 2 (2012) 3-25.

¹³ Vidono, Lorenzo, and James Brandon, *Countering Radicalization: A Policy Report Published by the International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation and Political Violence (ICSR)* (London: ICSR, 2012) <http://icsr.info/wp-content/uploads/2012/12/ICSR-Report-Countering-Radicalization-in-Europe.pdf> (accessed February 2018), p. 8.

¹⁴ Hemmingsen, Ann-Sophie, *An Introduction to the Danish Approach to Countering and Preventing Extremism and Radicalisation* (Copenhagen: Danish Institute for International Studies, 2015) http://pure.diis.dk/ws/files/470275/DIIS_Report_2015_15_2_ed..pdf (accessed February 2018), p. 7.

¹⁵ Heath-Kelly, Charlotte, “Counter-Terrorism and the Counterfactual: Producing the ‘Radicalisation’ Discourse and the UK PREVENT Strategy”, *The British Journal of Politics & International Relations* 15: 3 (2013) 394-415, p. 408.

and transnational corporations in so far as they operate in different countries without apparent detriment to either their unity or their standardization”.¹⁶ The NRMs transferred resources between countries “in accordance with international strategies for development”,¹⁷ yet the boundaries of the nation states mattered to NRMs as bases for the movements’ administrative divisions. The NRMs were not a local phenomenon as such, but they were localised, and the specific form, timing and intensity with which they became established varied substantially. James Beckford, for instance, estimates the level of NRM activity as high in Canada, Britain, West Germany, France and the Netherlands and low in Italy, Greece, Spain, Ireland, Switzerland and Austria, with Scandinavia and Belgium in the middle.¹⁸ Furthermore, the reactions in the various nation states also differed, presenting quite dissimilar patterns of cult controversies. In some countries, such as the Netherlands and the UK, the anti-cult movement was not so strong, while in other countries, such as France and Germany, it had a much stronger impact and even managed to attract public funding to support anti-cult efforts. In general, it must be said that the “pattern of official anti-cultist activity in Europe is not monolithic”.¹⁹ Radicalisation is often presented as a global issue and recruitment to movements such as IS has indeed been global. This should not, however, distract attention from specific contexts, whether national or regional. Radical groups do not have the same success in all places. Hizb ut-Tahrir, for instance, is present in 40 countries, including Denmark, the UK, Germany and the Netherlands, but the branches work with some autonomy and ability to adapt to local circumstances and grievances, despite having a strong global identity.²⁰ In addition, countries have quite different ways of approaching radicalisation, even to the extent that the official definitions of

¹⁶ Beckford, *Cult Controversies*, p. 218.

¹⁷ Beckford, *Cult Controversies*, p. 218.

¹⁸ Beckford, *Cult Controversies*, p. 25.

¹⁹ Richardson, James T., and Massimo Introvigne, “‘Brainwashing’ Theories in European Parliamentary and Administrative Reports on ‘Cults’ and ‘Sects’”, *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 40: 2 (2001) 143-168, p. 164.

²⁰ Taji-Farouki, Suha. "Hizb ut-Tahrir." *Islamic Movements in Europe: Public Religion and Islamophobia in the Modern World*(2014): 44-50, p.49.

what constitutes radicalisation differ quite substantially.²¹ Countries vary in how quick they are to react with a ban of radical groups like Hizb ut-Tahrir or Al Muhajiroun, the former being banned in many countries. A ban of Hizb ut-Tahrir has been discussed in Denmark, but never implemented, and when Al Muhajiroun was banned in the UK in 2005, only to be reorganised in the form of a number of other organisations, the Danish branch, the “Call to Islam” (Kaldet til Islam), has not been banned but is defunct because many of its members left for Syria.

According to the current approach, it is a precondition that radicalisation controversies, though generally regarded as a global phenomenon, have strong nation state characteristics as well. The main thrust of this article is theoretical, although examples will be provided to illustrate the points made with reference to Danish contexts. While the arguments presented here deal with Denmark, I believe that the general dynamics are of a more global nature, and that the debates on NRMs can provide a lens through which the dynamics of the radicalisation controversies in other contexts may be viewed and studied.

Research agenda: What can we learn from research on anti- and counter-cult movements?

The study of anti-cult movements is an integral part of the NRM research tradition. NRMs, the establishment of which was often connected to the countercultural activities of the 1960s and 1970s, may be considered as counter-movements, i.e. as “conscious, collective, organized attempt[s] to resist or reverse social change”.²² However, the anti- and counter-cult movements may, as reactions

²¹ Schmid, Alex P., *Radicalisation, De-radicalisation, Counter-radicalisation: A Conceptual Discussion and Literature Review*, ICCT Research Paper 97 (The Hague: International Centre for Counter-Terrorism, 2013), p.12.
<https://www.icct.nl/download/file/ICCT-Schmid-Radicalisation-De-Radicalisation-Counter-Radicalisation-March-2013.pdf> (accessed July 2017).

²² Mottl, Tahi, “The Analysis of Countermovements”, *Social Problems* 27 (1980) 620-635, p. 620; quoted in Bromley, David G., and Anson Shupe, “Anti-cultism in the United States: Origins, Ideology and Organizational Development”, *Social Compass* 42: 2 (1995) 221-236, p. 222.

to NRMs attempting to reverse secularisation, similarly be considered as counter-movements.²³ As counter-movements, anti- and counter-cult movements are closely connected to the movements they are resisting. British sociologist of religion James A. Beckford argues that

studies of NRM in isolation or of anti-cult associations cannot do justice to it. This is because it emerges from the interaction of numerous individual and collective actors drawn from circles extending far beyond cults and anti-cults. It is a social product which is simply ignored in studies which artificially separate NRMs from anti-cults.

My belief is that they cannot be properly understood in isolation from each other.²⁴

Similarly, David Bromley and Anson Shupe forcefully argue that “movements and counter-movements should be studied in tandem as a dialectical analytic unit”.²⁵ If we accept that there are significant similarities between radicalisation and NRMs, the claim that the existence of the movement is inseparable from the counter-movement leads to the first research question, i.e. does radicalisation have counter-movements similar to the ACM?

In relation to NRMs, the first counter-movement was the American anti-cult movement, which started as a grass-roots movement and included parents, church groups and professional associations.²⁶ Some anti-cult movements also often included former members of the “cult”, the apostates. While some scholars were connected to the anti-cult movement, the general role of scholars was as a strong, independent voice, which means that there were “three types of players in the cult scene: the movements themselves, the anti-cult movement, and scholars of religion”.²⁷ The Italian scholar Massimo Introvigne has made an important distinction between anti-cult groups (which he suggests should be called counter-cultural movements), namely between the

²³ Bromley and Shupe, “Anti-cultism in the United States”.

²⁴ Beckford, *Cult Controversies*, p. 7.

²⁵ Bromley and Shupe, “Anti-cultism in the United States”, p. 222.

²⁶ Bromley and Shupe, “Anti-cultism in the United States”.

²⁷ Barker, “The Not-So-New Religious Movements”, p. 250.

secular and the religious.²⁸ A main point for Introvigne is that the two types of anti-cult movements are separate and substantially conflicting. The secular anti-cult movement prioritises legal and police measures, and sees cults as formed by unscrupulous gurus looking for power and money. They want to free people from “cults” and emphasise deeds not creeds. The religious anti-cult movements, on the other hand, regard the boundary between deeds and creeds as less clear; they find “false beliefs” to be dangerous and do not regard defection as the objective, but rather a commitment to “true” beliefs. Introvigne also distinguished between rationalist and post-rationalist explanations, where the rationalist focuses on prevention and the susceptibility of people, while the post-rationalist focuses on the power of gurus and cult leaders and how to stop them.²⁹ A more detailed distinction between members of the “anti-cult movement”, the “counter cult movement”, the “cult apologist groups”, the “human rights groups”, and the “research oriented groups” is suggested by Eileen Barker.³⁰ A related question would therefore be: who is involved in the anti-radicalisation movements? Is it the same constituencies that characterised the ACM? Similarly, the radical part of the ACM was known to propagate a very distinct agenda utilising certain strong images, the issues of brainwashing probably being the most conspicuous, alongside those of charismatic leaders and money. To what extent are the themes and rhetoric similar?

Another group of questions might concern the role of the media. The media are generally perceived to have approached NRMs with “suspicion”³¹ and to be particularly susceptible to the reporting “about the shocking, the exotic, or the novel and much less likely to be interested in ordinary, everyday occurrences”.³² Both NRMs and their opponents are, however, aware of the

²⁸ Introvigne, Massimo, “Anti-cult and Countercult Movements in Italy”, in *Anti-cult Movements in Cross-cultural Perspective*, A. Shupe and D. Bromley (eds) (New York: Garland, 1994), pp. 171-197.

²⁹ Introvigne, Massimo, “Anti-cult and Countercult Movements”, p. 178.

³⁰ Barker, “The Not-So-New Religious Movements”, p. 247.

³¹ Richardson, James T., and Barend von Driel, “New Religious Movements in Europe: Developments and Reactions”, in *Anti-Cult Movements in Cross-Cultural Perspective*, A. Shupe and D. Bromley (eds) (New York: Garland, 1994), 129-170, p. 130.

³² Barker, “The Not-So-New Religious Movements”, p. 243.

“power of media in setting agendas and defining issues”.³³ Questions on who gets to define the agenda were crucial for the construction of the cult controversies and are likely to be no less important for the construction of the radicalisation controversy. A third group of questions may relate to the role of the state and official policy. The attitude of the state differs between the various countries. Beckford notes that the NRMs that are most controlled by the state are those that provide the most comprehensive services.³⁴ He also notes that there is a discrepancy between official disclaimers of anti-cult biases and the actions taken towards the groups by states³⁵ under a veil of official detachment.³⁶ This obviously creates a major difference compared with the radicalisation controversy, where states (particularly since 2005) have been actively engaged in countering radicalisation.

Radicalisation and radicalisation policies in Denmark

As previously mentioned, the approach advocated in this article takes Denmark as its point of departure. In relation to NRMs, Denmark has hosted a range of different movements, though generally in small numbers, and despite the fact that their size has been further reduced since the era of the cult controversies, Copenhagen remains the site of the European headquarters of Scientology. Denmark has also hosted an internationally influential anti-cult movement, the Dialog Center (Dialogcenteret), established in 1973 by Johannes Aagaard, a Protestant theologian and professor at Aarhus University. Aagaard was well known for his direct and confrontational approach and, when he died in 2007, an obituary praised him for his “spiritual warfare against some of the new religious movements”.³⁷ Following criticism of Aagaard’s approach, the splinter group IKON was formed in

³³ Richardson and von Driel, “New Religious Movements”, p. 118.

³⁴ Beckford, *Cult Controversies*, p. 283.

³⁵ Beckford, *Cult Controversies*, p. 285.

³⁶ Beckford, *Cult Controversies*, p. 286.

³⁷ Mortensen, Viggo, “Johannes Aagaard: 29/4 1928 – 23/3 2007”, *Mission Studies: Journal of the International Association for Mission Studies* 24:1 (2007) 7-8, p. 8.

1992/1993, and internal conflict following Aagaard's death finally caused the disestablishment of Dialogcenteret in 2011. The international wing of Dialogcenteret, the Dialog Center International (DCI), continued as various independent organisations in the UK,³⁸ Germany³⁹ and Russia.⁴⁰ DCI also operates in Bombay, Delhi and Bangkok, where the main objective is to establish dialogue with Hindus and Buddhists.

Turning to the radicalisation controversy, a heuristic starting point for this may be set in 2005/2006, when the so-called "Cartoon Crisis" made Denmark the centre of worldwide attention, as the publication of twelve cartoons allegedly depicting the Prophet Muhammad caused what Prime Minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen has termed the biggest foreign policy crisis in Denmark since WWII. More than ten years later, *Jyllandsposten*, the newspaper that commissioned and published the cartoons, remains a potential target of international terrorism. Until 2005, relatively little attention was given to the existence of radicalism or terrorism among Danish Muslims, even if some Muslims residing in Denmark had been involved in international terrorism.⁴¹ In 2005, four people were arrested, one of whom was later convicted (the Glostrup case). In 2006, four people were charged and three convicted on charges of planning Islamist terrorism (the Vollsmose case) and, in 2007, eight people were arrested and two convicted in the Glasvej case.⁴² Besides these cases of attempted (homegrown) terrorism, Said Mansour, known as the bookseller from Brønshøj, was convicted in 2007 for advancement of criminal activity with the aim of developing a terrorist organisation.⁴³ The first action plan to prevent radicalisation, set out in 2009, provided the first official definitions of the connected processes of radicalisation and extremism.

³⁸ <http://www.dialogcentre.org.uk/index.php> (accessed August 2017).

³⁹ <http://www.sekteninformation.de/19.html> (accessed August 2017).

⁴⁰ <http://iriney.ru/> (accessed August 2017).

⁴¹ Taarnby, Michael, *Jihad in Denmark: An Overview and Analysis of Jihadi Activity in Denmark* (No. 2006: 35). DIIS Working Paper 35 (Copenhagen: Danish Institute for International Studies) 2006) <https://www.econstor.eu/bitstream/10419/84540/1/DIIS2006-35.pdf> (accessed August 2017).

⁴² Year report 2006/7 of the Danish Security and Surveillance Service https://www.pet.dk/~media/Aarsberetninger/PET_%C3%A5rsberetning_2006_2007.ashx (accessed August 2017).

⁴³ Ibid. p. 39.

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The dual background of the Danish interest in radicalisation is evident in the action plans, with their emphasis on both the violent and the non-violent (anti-democratic or undemocratic) aims of radical groups. In the revised action plan from 2014, the definition of radicalisation was changed to a less rigid position,⁴⁴ stating that there is no single definition. While both action plans focus on a broader range of radicalisation(s), including right-wing and left-wing radicalisation, the revised action plan of 2014 highlights the potential religious element in radicalisation. The 2014 action plan was intended to mark the formation of a new government and was also a reaction to an emerging focus on “foreign fighters”. The Center for Terror Analysis (CTA), a centre under the Danish Security and Intelligence Service, estimates that at least 145 persons have left Denmark for Syria/Iraq, most of them in 2014. About half of them have returned to Denmark, a quarter have been killed, and the rest, one-third of whom are women, are still in the conflict zone. Because travel to conflict zones has more or less stopped, the main concern of the CTA is that returnees may have been radicalised, brutalised and prone to violence.⁴⁵ From 2015, the CTA also had worries about “lone actor” terrorism, following attacks and the killing of two people at a public event on freedom of expression and outside the Copenhagen Synagogue by Omar el Hussain, who had recently been released from prison. After the attack, budgets for counter-radicalisation were raised by DKK1.9 billion (about €240 million), and changes to legislation provided the security service with better access to information from, for instance, airlines.⁴⁶ The amended action plan from 2016 continues the initiatives presented in former action plans, but also includes new initiatives, such as the prevention

⁴⁴ Lindekilde, Lasse, “Dansk forebyggelse af ekstremisme og radikalisering 2009-2014: Udviklingstendenser og fremtidige udfordringer” [Danish prevention of extremism and radicalization 2009-2014: Tendencies and future challenges], *Politica: Tidsskrift for Politisk Videnskab* 47 (2015) 424-444, p. 431.

⁴⁵ <https://www.pet.dk/~media/VTD%202017/VTD2017ENpdf.ashx> (accessed August 2017).

⁴⁶ <file:///C:/Users/AU78339/Downloads/Redegrelse%20-%20Indsatsen%20mod%20terrorisme%202016.pdf> (accesses September 2017).

of online radicalisation, targeted intervention in criminal circles, and a hard line against foreign fighters.⁴⁷ Several of the initiatives aim at empowering civil-society-driven counter narratives (corpus of “digital voices of reason”, a support and training programme providing professional assistance for civil-society actors, and strategic cooperation to mobilise and empower young people to use online media).⁴⁸ This new approach in Danish counter-radicalisation policy has been received with criticism on the grounds that there is insufficient evidence to show that it works, and that it may instead be a “scattergun approach, which can lead to unintended or even counter-productive side effects”.⁴⁹ However, compared with other action plans, such as Britain’s Prevent, the Danish strategy has only received limited public criticism. Overall, it may be said that “aside from these isolated cases [a few right-wing politicians and, to a lesser degree, some Muslim voices], there has been little debate and virtually no controversy about the strategy and its implementation”.⁵⁰

The broad focus of Danish debates on radicalisation and extremism with regard to both violent and “soft” issues such as “simplified world views”, “hostile imagery”, and “lack of respect for the viewpoints, freedom and rights of others”, has worked to limit and almost exclude explicit Muslim representatives and organisations from formal cooperation and consultation with the state. A partial exception is the security service (Politiets Efterretningstjeneste; PET), which invites representatives of Muslim organisations and authorities to its regular “dialogue meetings”, an initiative the service has conducted since 2008.⁵¹ A 2016 report on Muslim representation in the media concluded that very few Muslim voices are heard in the Danish media, where public debates are dominated by politicians. Experts and politicians are the source in 52% of the articles on

⁴⁷ <http://uim.dk/publikationer/preventing-and-countering-extremism-and-radicalisation> (accessed September 2017).

⁴⁸ Hemmingsen, Anne-Sophie, and Karin Ingrid Castro, *The Trouble with Counter-narratives*, DIIS Working Paper 1 (Copenhagen: Danish Institute for International Studies, 2017) http://pure.diis.dk/ws/files/784884/DIIS_RP_2017_1.pdf (accessed February 2018).

⁴⁹ Hemmingsen and Castro, *The Trouble with Counter-narratives*, p. 11.

⁵⁰ Vidono and Brandon, *Countering Radicalization*, p. 57

⁵¹ <https://www.pet.dk/Forebyggende%20Afdeling/Dialogforum.aspx> (accessed August 2017), http://www.globalct.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/brett_policybrief_121.pdf (accessed February 2018).

Muslim faith and practice, while Muslim representatives are the source of 31%. The politicians taking part in the debates are primarily from the Danish People's Party, while the Muslim representatives are associated with a very small group of mosques and organisations, predominantly the controversial Salafi mosque and Hizb ut-Tahrir.⁵²

Anti-cult and anti-radicalisation movements in Denmark

The first question to be addressed is whether there is a clear-cut candidate for an anti-radicalisation movement (ARM) in Denmark. The answer is affirmative – and surprising: the Danish Defence League (DDL). Established in 2010 as the Danish branch of the English Defence League, the DDL presents itself as a human rights association with the “official” objective of fighting “radical Islam”. It states that:

we think that spokespersons of radical Islam have power over Danish Muslims ...

Radical elements misinterpret the points of view of Muslims, reject freedom of speech, and indoctrinate their children, while discrediting Muslims who want peaceful coexistence with other Danes.⁵³

On its Facebook page, the DDL states that its aim is to ensure a nuanced public picture of Islam. The key to this is public education and mainstream media, which, according to the association, has long presented Islam (erroneously) as harmless. It has therefore been “impossible to find solutions to concrete societal problems. Through the pursuit of this destructive politics, the government has in reality become the propaganda branch of the Muslim Brotherhood”.⁵⁴ In interviews, however, the

⁵² “Muslimer spiller kun sekundær rolle: Politikere tegner medie billedet af islam i Danmark”. [Muslims only play a secondary role in the media representation of Islam in Denmark] (Copenhagen: Sameksistens.dk, 2016). <https://www.sameksistens.dk/temaer/religion/medieanalyse/muslimer-2016/samlet-analyse/> (accessed July 2017).

⁵³ <http://danishdefenceleague.com/om-os/> (accessed August 2017).

⁵⁴ https://www.facebook.com/pg/The-Danish-Defence-League-223250204422741/about/?ref=page_internal (accessed August 2017)

chairman of the DDL has admitted that their actual enemy is Islam as a whole.⁵⁵ In this, the DDL resembles another organisation, Stop Islamisation of Denmark (SIAD), which according to its website was established in 2005 by “a number of concerned citizens trying to stop the slowly advancing Islamisation that no other organization at that time was addressing.”⁵⁶ In 2007, the organisation Stop Islamization of Europe was established, and made SIAD its Danish branch.⁵⁷ According to the description on their website, SIAD consists of ordinary people from almost all political parties (except the Social-Liberal Party), professional backgrounds and religions, including Atheist and “apostate” Muslims. The objective of SIAD is to “warn and awaken the population against the greatest threat in Danish history: the advent of Islam”.

The DDL and SIAD both belong to the “counter-jihad movement”, a transient and under-researched range of groups, loosely organised in a number of countries around criticism of Islam.⁵⁸ In counter-jihad ideology:

Islam is not seen as a religion but a political force hostile to the West. The West is regarded as culturally, politically and demographically weak and in long term decline. The West is seen as undergoing a process of Islamisation in which Muslim immigration leads to changes in the cultural, racial and religious composition of the West and Europe in particular. Western leaders and elites such as the media and

⁵⁵ Nørgaard, Marie, “Leder af Danish Defence League: - Islam burde forbydes” [Leader of Danish Defence League: - Islam should be banned], *Ekstrabladet*, April 28, 2012. <http://ekstrabladet.dk/nyheder/samfund/article4035217.ece> (accessed July 2017). My translation

⁵⁶ <https://siaddk.wordpress.com/hvem-er-siad/> (accessed August 2017). My translation

⁵⁷ Pedersen, Lisbeth, *Antidemokratiske og ekstremistiske miljøer i Danmark* [Antidemocratic and extremist milieus in Denmark] (Copenhagen: SFI-rapport, 2014), p. 35. <https://www.sfi.dk/publikationer/antidemokratiske-og-ekstremistiske-miljoer-i-danmark-3094/> (accessed July 2017).

⁵⁸ Goodwin, Matthew, *The Roots of Extremism: The English Defence League and the Counter-Jihad Challenge* (London: Chatham House, 2013). <https://www.openbriefing.org/docs/rootsofextremism.pdf> (accessed July 2017).

academia are regarded as either being complicit or incapable of preventing this process; often they are described as cultural Marxists.⁵⁹

The counter-jihad environment in Denmark also includes other groups besides the DDL and SIAD, such as Den Danske Forening⁶⁰ and Frit Danmark/Folkebevægelsen mod Indvandring,⁶¹ and it has its own alternative media, such as the blogs *Uriasposten*, *Den Korte Avis* and *180 Grader*. Research on the movements has been scarce, but the 2014 mapping of extremist groups in Denmark, which included Islamist as well as left- and right-wing extremists included most of the above-mentioned organisations and initiatives.⁶² Their activities were described as demonstrations, distribution of material on the street and on the Internet, and individual attacks and incidents of harassment, including vandalism of mosques. The counter-jihad movement in Denmark thus uses both legal and illegal methods to further their agenda of countering (radical) Islam.

Islamisation as the explanation

The key concept of the counter-jihad movements is the process of “Islamisation” (or “Islamification”), this concept, sometimes referred to as “insidious” or “Islamification by stealth”, often comes undefined. In an article in *180 Grader*, psychiatrist and founder of Pegida in Denmark, Nicolai Sennels, however, explains Islamisation as the process of “converting a country from a ‘kufr’ country to an ‘enlightened’ Islamic society”.⁶³ According to Sennels, the process is inherent in Islam and has been successful to the extent that the second-largest international organisation today is the OIC, the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation. Islamisation works in three ways:

⁵⁹ Lee, Benjamin, “Why We Fight: Understanding the Counter-jihad Movement”, *Religion Compass* 10: 10 (2016) 257-265, p. 259.

⁶⁰ <http://www.dendanskeforening.dk/side527.html> (accessed August 2017).

⁶¹ <http://www.fritdk.dk/index.php/fritdk-islam> (accessed August 2017).

⁶² Pedersen, *Antidemokratiske og ekstremistiske miljøer*.

⁶³ Sennels, Nicolai “Hvad er islamisering? En ukomplet liste”, *180 Grader*, March 24, 2011.

<https://www.180grader.dk/Politik/hvad-er-islamisering-en-ukomplet-liste/> (accessed April 2018).

removal of all non-Islamic traditions and symbols in order not to offend Muslims, inclusion of Islamic traditions in public institutions and life, and creation of areas with a very high concentration of Muslims.⁶⁴ Sennels presents a long (and, in his own word, incomplete) list of cases of Islamisation. Islamisation plays a role similar to that played by the concept of “brainwashing” as understood by the ACM. Brainwashing/Islamisation is the explanation for the current problematic situation as well as for recipes for counteract it. In the case of “cults”, the alleged brainwashing techniques entail the use of abduction to free the persons from other influences, and in the case of Islamisation, where it is not individual persons but the country that is being changed, the solution is to actively combat the presence of and accommodation to Islam as well as the acceptance of “parallel societies”.

It is difficult to assess the influence of the counter-jihad movement. There are very few active members; Pedersen suggests there are as few as 50 active members of SIAD.⁶⁵ But the number of Facebook “likes” (10,939 for SIAD and 12,006 for the DDL) suggests a much larger group of sympathisers. Little is known about the constituency of the DDF and similar organisations. The Facebook page of the English Defence League includes divisions for Sikhs (1,126), Hindus (873 supporters), Jews (796), Greeks and Cypriots (290), Pakistani Christians (58) and women (1,914), as well as lesbian, gay, bisexual and transsexual people (LGBT) (720).⁶⁶ This shows its ability to arouse anti-Muslim feelings across different boundaries. In a Danish context, the counter-jihad movement consists of a broad political constituency of, for instance, left-wing politicians and others with various religious and atheist backgrounds, including prominent Lutheran pastors and Buddhists. Both the DDL and SIAD are considered “radical” by Danish authorities.⁶⁷ In an

⁶⁴ Sennels, “Hvad er islamisering?”.

⁶⁵ Pedersen, *Antidemokratiske og ekstremistiske miljøer*, p. 35.

⁶⁶ Allen, C., “Opposing Islamification or Promoting Islamophobia? Understanding the English Defence League”, *Patterns of Prejudice* 45: 4 (2011) 279-294, p. 287.

⁶⁷ Pedersen, *Antidemokratiske og ekstremistiske miljøer*.

extensive study of the change of discourse in the US after 2001, Christopher Bail concludes that counter-jihad arguments moved from being marginal to being part of mainstream politics in less than a decade.⁶⁸ Similar studies have not been conducted in Denmark, but it is likely that some of the arguments of the counter-jihad movement have acquired legitimacy in mainstream politics.⁶⁹

Other movements and associations in “the radicalisation controversy”

Following Introvigne’s typology, the counter-jihad groups resemble the secular anti-cult movements, as they want to free people (Muslims as well as non-Muslims) from the constraints of religion, the practice of Sharia (the deeds), and the influence of imams. Other important groups in the cult controversies were the apostates, the families, the religious anti-cult movement and scholars. All of these groups seem to have played only minor roles in the Danish “radicalisation controversies”. Unlike the UK-based Quilliam Foundation, a think-tank established by former members of Hizb ut-Tahrir, no ARM in Denmark caters directly for former members of radical milieus. There are former members of, for instance, Hizb ut-Tahrir, such as Muhammed Hee, who work with anti-radicalisation in the municipalities or with the state. The role of parents and religious anti-radicalisation movements is not very visible. The above-mentioned Dialog Center, the primary focus of which was the “classical” NRMs (Scientology, Unification Church), actually tried to expand its focus of interest when public attention moved away from “cults” towards radical Islam and, for instance, in 2001 called Hizb ut-Tahrir a “cult”,⁷⁰ but its efforts to enter the scene were unsuccessful. In 2003, the desperate mother of a son who had joined Hizb ut-Tahrir cried out for

⁶⁸ Bail, Christopher A., *Terrified: How Anti-Muslim fringe Organizations Became Mainstream* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014).

⁶⁹ Many of the recent political initiatives, such as the 2018 ghetto plan and plans to control the accommodation of religiously-based claims in institutions, can thus be seen as direct responses to the three steps of “Islamisation” (removal of Christian symbols, inclusion of concern for Muslims in public institutions, establishment of ghettos) as construed by, among others, Sennels.

⁷⁰ Rasmussen, Morten, “Hizb-ut-Tahrir er en sekt” [Hizb ut-Tahrir is a cult], *Kristeligt Dagblad*, October 27, 2001. <https://www.kristeligt-dagblad.dk/kirke-tro/hizb-ut-tahrir-er-en-sekt> (accessed August 2017).

help in an article in a major newspaper, claiming that her son had been brainwashed: “If he had joined the Moonies, there would have been support groups. Or if he had been part of Scientology, I could have contacted *Dialogcenteret* in Aarhus, but with Hizb ut-Tahrir I don’t know where to find help.”⁷¹ The mother went on to form the association “People against Fundamentalism” (Mennesker imod Fundamentalisme), directed at parents with children involved with Islamist fundamentalism.⁷² This organisation, established in 2003 by 13 people, most of whom had children who had joined Hizb ut-Tahrir,⁷³ has played no role in the public debates since.

The role of religious anti-radicalisation movements

The role of religious ARMs in the radicalisation controversies in Denmark has been generally insignificant. The disestablishment of *Dialogcenteret* in 2011 was interpreted as a sign of a general decline in the public visibility of interreligious dialogue and criticism.⁷⁴ While many organisations have been discontinued, those that remain, such as IKON and IKS (Centre for Co-existence – Islamic-Christian Study Centre), contribute little to debates on radicalisation. IKON describes its work as focused on dialogue with Buddhists, Muslims, Theosophists and others, with the aim of “exploring the faith of each other and creating communities with people we normally would not engage with”.⁷⁵ IKS, an organisation established in 1996 with a strong commitment to the equality of Christians and Muslims, as reflected, for instance, in the equal number of Christian and Muslim board members and its support from both Christian and Muslim organisations, has the objective of

⁷¹ Termansen, Jesper, “Hizb-ut-Tahrir har taget min søn” [Hizb-ut-Tahrir took my son], *Berlingske Tidende*, March 1, 2003. My translation.

⁷² <http://jyllands-posten.dk/debat/ECE5035194/Imamerne-m%C3%A5-juble/> (accessed August 2017).

⁷³ Rasmussen, Morten. “Forældrekamp mod fundamentalisme” [Parents fight against fundamentalism]. *Kristeligt Dagblad*, October 7, 2003.

⁷⁴ Gehlert, Jon, “Dialogcenteret, der blæste til angreb, men tabte” [The dialogue center which sounded the attack, but lost], *Kristeligt Dagblad*, January 13, 2011. <https://www.kristeligt-dagblad.dk/kirke-tro/dialogcentret-der-bl%C3%A6ste-til-angreb-men-tabte-pusten> (accessed August 2017).

⁷⁵ <https://danmission.dk/ikon/om/os/> (accessed August 2017). My translation.

creating good and equal relations between Muslims and Christians, nationally and internationally. The centre focuses on three main areas, the first of which is equal treatment, anti-discrimination, and co-citizenship, for which IKS creates, among other things, contacts between local churches and mosques in Copenhagen. Second, it focuses on counselling within the health and prison service system by volunteers and an imam, and the third focus area is on study tours.⁷⁶ Anti-radicalisation is not a priority for any of these organisations. The United Council of Muslims (Muslimernes Fællesråd; MFR) and the Danish Muslim Union (Dansk Muslimske Union; DMU), the two Muslim umbrella organisations in Denmark, are both struggling to survive. They have made efforts to disassociate themselves from terrorism and radicalism in press releases, but their role in anti-radicalisation is insignificant, though a few cases do exist. The MFR, for instance, has suggested introducing so-called Muslim confirmation training similar to what the majority of the Christian population receives, with the aim of combatting radicalism.⁷⁷ Along similar lines, Muslim scholars have on occasion made a public stand against the misuse of Islam that is taking place among IS and other terror groups.⁷⁸ This argumentation is obviously in line with Introvigne's religious anti-cult rhetoric, and has consistently been presented by the Ahmadiyya community, for instance, which through the "Muslims for Peace" initiative attempts to distance itself – and Islam – from terrorism.⁷⁹ In 2001, the terrorist act on September 11 was condemned almost unanimously, but public condemnation in the media of terrorist attacks committed in the name of Islam has in recent years been presented more as stand-alone statements than as the general opinion of Muslims, after discussions have taken a turn towards whether Muslims are (particularly) obliged to condemn such attacks. In addition, there are a number of individual Muslim critics of radicalisation, including two

⁷⁶ http://ikstudiecenter.dk/?page_id=103 (accessed August 2017).

⁷⁷ <http://www.dr.dk/nyheder/kultur/tro/muslimsk-konfirmationsundervisning-skal-forebygge-radikalisering> (accessed August 2017).

⁷⁸ <http://dicenter.dk/pressemeddelelse-verdenskendt-muslimsk-laerd-gaester-danmark-med-oplaeg-om-religioes-ekstremisme-i-vesten/> (accessed August 2017).

⁷⁹ <http://www.muslimforfred.dk/> (accessed February 2018).

of the main actors in the “Cartoon Crisis”, Naser Khader, who established an organisation for Democratic Muslims (disestablished in 2008), and Ahmed Akkari, the spokesperson of the campaigning imams during the crisis, but who has since disassociated himself radically from his former colleagues. Their contribution to the debate is directed towards “the imams” and can thus be termed “post-rationalist” and placed between secular and religious ACM rhetoric, with an emphasis on deflection from radical ideas to a “moderate” or even “secular” Islam formed by a strong commitment to democracy. The lack of strong and visible Muslim counter-radicalisation movements in Denmark is a recurring theme in the Danish public discussion. A survey conducted by Megafon in 2016 suggests that three out of four Danes want “moderate” Muslims to have a more active voice in denouncing Islamist terrorism.⁸⁰ However, the lack of a visible counter-radicalisation movement in the Islamic environment does not reflect a lack of resistance to radicalisation, although the evaluation of how widespread radical views are among Danish Muslims varies. In interviews with eight prominent Muslims (two of them imams) on what Muslims do to fight IS, one imam stated that they condemned their actions, which are against Islam’s well-known principles on warfare and the treatment of prisoners, while another imam stated that, in Denmark, we must strengthen the Danish-Muslim identity, so that young people understand how Islamic State ideology differs from the Islamic faith and creed.⁸¹ These are again clear examples of religious anti-cult rhetoric. A closer look at processes taking place in mosques also shows the “internal struggles” over radical Islam, but these are hardly ever picked up by media or politicians and therefore play no part in public debates. One example concerns a man who, after the Friday prayer in a Copenhagen mosque with a reputation of being radical, had expressed his support for IS and had been asked to leave. Apparently, he later asked someone to beat up the people at the mosque who were

⁸⁰ <http://nyheder.tv2.dk/samfund/2016-07-25-tre-ud-fire-danskere-moderate-muslim-og-imamer-skal-tage-mere-afstand-fra> (accessed August 2017).

⁸¹ <http://www.b.dk/globalt/fremtraedende-danske-muslim-aaadan-bekaemper-vi-islamisk-stat> (accessed August 2017).

responsible. The story received brief media coverage, but with no contextualisation. The exclusion of people with radical opinions is even known to have taken place at the most radical mosque in Denmark, the Grimhøj mosque. During research among Muslims in Denmark, stories of “dealing with radicalism” occasionally emerge.⁸² Interestingly, these are rarely shared with the public, probably because it is uncertain how they will be perceived. The media coverage of a 2014 demonstration against IS arranged by Muslim debaters, focused on the question of whether Muslims have a particular obligation to condemn terrorism.⁸³ Similarly, a march for peace and against terrorism arranged by Minhaj Ul Quran on the occasion of the birthday of the Prophet in 2015, was covered under the headline “Danes are afraid of us”.⁸⁴ All in all, the major actors presenting counter-radicalisation narratives in the public sphere are think-thanks, individual security experts, and the counter-radicalisation departments of, for instance, the Ministry of Integration, local municipalities and police departments.

The role of scholars

The cult controversy was in many ways an academic conflict between scholars (mainly psychologists) who produced explanations of the various phases and aspects of brainwashing and other scholars (mainly sociologists and specialists in the academic study of religion) who questioned the existence of any brainwashing process. In Denmark, the cult controversy often played out as a conflict between the leader of Dialogcenteret, Johannes Aagaard, and specialists in the academic study of religion, particularly Mikael Rothstein (Copenhagen University) and Tim Jensen (University of Southern Denmark). A major study by British sociologist Eileen Barker that

⁸² Kühle, Lene, and Malik Christian Reimer Larsen, *Moskéer i Danmark ii* (Aarhus: Aarhus University, 2017) <http://samtdsreligion.au.dk/moskeer-i-danmark-ii/> (accessed March 2018).

⁸³ <https://www.information.dk/indland/2014/09/siger-muslimere-samfundsborgere>. (accessed April 2018).

⁸⁴ “Muslimsk fredsmarch i København: Danskerne er utrygge ved os”, *Nyheder*, December 13, 2015. <http://nyheder.tv2.dk/2015-12-13-muslimsk-fredsmarch-i-koebenhavn-danskerne-er-utrygge-ved-os> (accessed April 9, 2018).

operationalised brainwashing in detail gradually changed the agenda (in Denmark and other Western countries) because of its conclusion that brainwashing was a normal social process that could be successful only with a small group of (psychologically normal) people who were looking for meaning and belonging.⁸⁵ The role of scholars in the “radicalisation controversy” is ambivalent. Discourses on radicalisation are generally concerned with research-based understandings of the process. When radicalisation was first put on the political agenda in 2006 (in budget discussions leading to what was to become the first action plan in 2009), much emphasis was placed on the lack of knowledge about radicalisation. Research-based knowledge thus had to be generated through generous funding for a research project at the Danish Institute for International Studies, and another at the Center for Studies in Islamism and Radicalisation at Aarhus University.⁸⁶ This funding plan, however, led to immediate conflict. A politician from the Danish People’s Party wanted to ensure that the money was not allocated to a particular research environment at the University of Copenhagen.⁸⁷ This mistrust of scholars of Islam as “politically correct” or “out of touch with reality”⁸⁸ has been part of the debates from the start. In a 2008 article, Garbi Schmidt sees the criticism of scholars of Islam as due to a popular “positivist” misunderstanding of the existence of different perspectives in research. At that time, she found that scholars of Islam were generally lucky as they “receive and enjoy the status of experts, and their research is prioritized by research councils and research institutions, even finding its way into the state budget”.⁸⁹ Since then, the delegitimisation of approaches taken by scholars of Islam has intensified. Left-wing social constructivist scholars are some of the favourite objects of criticism by *Uriasposten* as well as other outlets of the counter-jihad industry. Criticism of research on Islam and Muslims for being

⁸⁵ Barker, Eileen, *The Making of a Moonie* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1984).

⁸⁶ http://www.stm.dk/multimedia/En_f_lles_og_tryg_fremtid.pdf, s.25.

⁸⁷ Schmidt, Garbi, “From Granting the Right (!) Answers to Posing Odd Questions: Perspectives on Studying and Presenting Muslim Minorities in a Politicized, Western Context”, *Tidsskrift for Islamforskning* 3: 2 (2008) 11-26, p. 16.

⁸⁸ Schmidt, “From Granting the Right (!)”, p. 13.

⁸⁹ Schmidt, “From Granting the Right (!)”, p. 15.

“uncritical” and biased has also been presented by other Danish scholars in newspaper interviews and essays⁹⁰ as well as in scholarly work.⁹¹ Criticism of scholars and the situation during the cult controversy initially appears to have been very similar: Eileen Barker was on several occasions accused of being a cult apologist in ways that echo the experience of scholars of Islam. On taking a closer look, however, the similarities are limited: the political debates in 2006 about money for research on radicalisation laid the foundation for discussions, because they cemented a practice whereby some scholars could legitimately be deprived of research money (and/or the privilege of being listened to or taken seriously) because of their alleged failure to be critical enough. The counter-jihad ideology is also, to some extent, “cleverer” than the anti-cultist ideology, as the potential opposition from left-wing social constructivist scholars was “innate” in the ideology and only adds to the “reality” of the picture it paints. In addition, the quick and sudden change to counter-radicalisation strategies during the 2000s caused by the fear aroused by terrorist attacks differs from the pattern of slower and more reluctant state reactions to cults. With the strong establishment and legitimisation of action plans (as well as discourses and industries) of radicalisation from 2009, the ability of scholars to critically intervene has been seriously curtailed.

Dialectical relations: Radical groups striking back?

The direct interaction between cults and the anti-cult movement was an element often emphasised by NRM scholars and examples of these kinds of relations can also be found in the radicalisation controversy. These types of relations are present, for instance, in material produced by “The Call to

⁹⁰ Ejlsing, Jens, “Er islamforskning tilstrækkelig kritisk?” [Is the study of Islam critical enough?], *Berlingske Tidende*, December 16, 2016; Holm, Thue Ahrenkilde, “Professor: Meningsløst at kalde sig islamforsker, hvis man ikke mener, at islam spiller en rolle.” [Meaningless to call yourself a scholar of Islam if Islam doesn’t matter], *Kristeligt Dagblad*, December 15, 2016; Broberg, Mads Bonde, Michael Thykier and Jette Elbæk Maressa, “Islamforskning kritiseres for berøringsangst over for islam” [Islam Research criticised for squeamishness regarding Islam] [Jyllandsposten](#), March 11, 2016.

⁹¹ Magaard, Tina, “Desiderata i Tidsskrift for Islamforskning” [Desiderata in Journal for the Study of Islam], *Tidsskrift for Islamforskning* 10: 1 (2016) 117-133.

Islam” (Kaldet til Islam), an organisation associated with Al-Muhajiroun, a splinter organisation from Hizb ut-Tahrir formed in the 1990s.⁹² In a press release posted in January 2015 after its spokesperson, Abu Ubaydillah, was charged with incitement to terror, The Call interpreted the indictment as an attempt to pressure Muslims in Denmark to remain silent about “the injustices faced by Muslims in Europe”, which include a “direct call by right extremists to attack mosques and Muslims”. The Call claimed that “Danish politicians turn a blind eye”, exposing the “hypocrisy of democracy”.⁹³ The same rhetoric can be found in the prolific writings and lectures produced by Hizb ut-Tahrir, which was established in Denmark in the 1990s and follows Danish politics closely. After the political debates caused by TV2’s programme “Mosques behind the veil”, Hizb ut-Tahrir posted a handful of flyers and a number of YouTube lectures, and their annual conference in 2016 was entitled “Ban and coercion”. The general message in the material is that Denmark tries to curb Islamic identities and prevent the population from seeing the light of Islam. Danish politicians are self-contradictory: while claiming that they will protect democracy against Islamist fundamentalism, they undermine it themselves by curbing their own values of freedom. It is striking that the enemy in Hizb ut-Tahrir’s material is not “Denmark”, “the West”, or “the Danish population”, but the Danish politicians, who “attempt to anaesthetise people with scaremongering and empty rhetoric” in desperation due to “a lack of capacity to face Islam in a dignified way”.⁹⁴ In another flyer, the responsibility of the politicians for “the failure to create harmonious societies which can contain Islam and Muslims without creating hatred, animosity, and polarization”⁹⁵ is

⁹² Taarnby, Michael, *Recruitment of Islamist Terrorists in Europe: Trends and Perspectives*. Research Report funded by the Danish Ministry of Justice, 14 January 2005, p. 42.

http://www.justitsministeriet.dk/sites/default/files/media/Arbejdsomraader/Forskning/Forskningspuljen/2011/2005/Rekruttering_af_islamistiske_terrorister_i_Europa.pdf (accessed August 2017).

⁹³ <https://www.scribd.com/doc/252500073/Kaldet-Til-Islam-Pressemeddelelse> (accessed August 2017). Other examples of clashes between The Call to Islam and people associated with counter-jihad discourse can be seen at:

<https://www.mx.dk/nyheder/danmark/story/26139385> (accessed August 2017). My translation.

⁹⁴ “Demokratiets undergang vil komme fra jer selv” [The destruction of democracy comes from yourselves] (2016).

<http://www.hizb-ut-tahrir.dk/content.php?contentid=743> (accessed July 2017). My translation

⁹⁵ “Danske politikere jævner egne værdier” [Danish politicians ruin their own ideas] (2016). <http://www.hizb-ut-tahrir.dk/content.php?contentid=736> (accessed July 2017). My translation

shared with the media, who have “insisted on the same hostile approach which is now continued with stigmatising, Islam-hostile politics and manipulating, hostile media discourse”.⁹⁶ In conclusion, there is clearly a dialectical relation between The Call to Islam and Hizb ut-Tahrir and other actors in the “radicalisation controversy”. The direct opponent is “right-wing extremists” in the case of The Call to Islam, and (often right-wing) “politicians and media” in the case of Hizb ut-Tahrir. Hizb ut-Tahrir, however, in at least one case, specifically targets Thomas Hoffmann, a professor of Qur’anic studies, who has made an argument about the relations between Islam and terrorism.⁹⁷ In comparison with the cult controversy, which mostly took place between two groups of civil society organisations (cults and their opponents), the radicalisation controversy is an unequal match between radical groups and the media and the political community. According to Hizb ut-Tahrir, the opponents also include the Danish government, which is said to have attained its methods from “totalitarian regimes ... using fire and iron”.⁹⁸ The criticism has received a more direct reply from Abu Khattab, former chairman of The Call, who has posted a video on YouTube filmed in Syria,⁹⁹ where he fires with an automatic weapon at pictures of former prime minister Anders Fogh and five prominent voices in counter-radicalisation debates, including Naser Khader and Ahmed Akkari.¹⁰⁰

The “radicalisation controversy” in Denmark

What, then, can be said about the “radicalisation controversy” in Denmark? What important insights are to be gained from comparing recent controversies over radicalisation with the cult

⁹⁶ Hizb ut Tahrir; “Danske politikere jævner egne værdier”.

⁹⁷ “Tilbagevisning af Thomas Hoffmans påstand om, at Islam ikke kan adskilles fra terrorisme” [Refuting the claim by Thomas Hoffman that Islam cannot be separated from terrorism] (2015). <http://www.hizb-ut-tahrir.dk/content.php?contentid=705> (accessed July 2017).

⁹⁸ “Demokratiets undergang vil komme fra jer selv”.

⁹⁹ <https://www.b.dk/nationalt/danskere-i-syrien-skyder-efter-fotos-af-kendte> (accessed August 2017).

¹⁰⁰ The others were Kurt Vestergaard, a cartoonist, Lars Hedegaard, an Islam critic, and Morten Storm, a former member of radical groups and police informant.

controversies? The cult controversies included a number of important actors, including, besides the groups themselves, family members and former cult members, as well as church organisations, scholars and professionals. These individuals and groups often formed counter-movements that worked to bring the existence and work of the “cults” to public attention. In their current form, Danish radicalisation controversies are strongly focused on the so-called counter-jihad movements (CJM), which are considered radical by Danish authorities and featured side by side with radical Islamist groups in the 2014 mapping of radicalised and extremist groups in Denmark. The report mentions some of the hostilities between the two groups (and the controversies do in fact involve a third group of left-wing extremists). The question is, however, whether, unlike the situation in Denmark during the cult controversies, the significance of the (secular) ARM reaches far beyond the quarrels of the radical triangle. It is well known that “Islamophobic” attitudes are widespread in Denmark – as is also the case in other parts of Europe¹⁰¹ but it is obvious that no direct line can be drawn between the CJM and these more mainstream opinions. The CJM is categorised as radical for a reason, since, according to Lee, “echoes of the ideas from the CJM narrative are often present to some degree in mainstream political thinking”¹⁰² and “further analysis is needed in order to properly contextualize the links between government and counter-jihad narratives; however, this initial speculation highlights the salience of the counter-jihad narrative given the wider political climate.”¹⁰³ More research is also needed to address the presumably changed role of the media, which is catering to an interest in the exotic and strange and giving airtime to Hizb ut-Tahrir apostates such as Christian Mathias Kriznjak.¹⁰⁴ Apostates, whether from a particular version of Islam or from Islam in general, often have a very strong and critical voice in European debates on

¹⁰¹ Hafez, Farid, “Shifting Borders: Islamophobia as Common Ground for Building Pan-European Right-wing Unity”, *Patterns of Prejudice* 48: 5 (2014) 479-499.

¹⁰² Lee, “Why We Fight”, p. 259.

¹⁰³ Lee, “Why We Fight”, p. 262.

¹⁰⁴ <http://nyheder.tv2.dk/tema/kvinderislamiskstat> (accessed August 2017).

Islam.¹⁰⁵ More comparable work will highlight similarities and differences between countries as well as the existence of path dependencies.

Conclusion

Many Western countries experienced controversies over NRMs in the 1970s and 1980s. Anti-cultists – both religious and secular – were strongly engaged in the “cult war”, as were representatives of the cults themselves. States, though often regarding the cults very critically, were trying to play the part of the neutral arbitrator. The similarities between the NRMs and “radicalised collectivities” have already been addressed by scholars. The current article aims to expand the comparison with the whole dynamics of the “radicalisation” controversy, including the dynamics of movements and counter-movements. It has presented a discussion of radicalisation from “the perspective of the cult controversy” with reference to empirical material from Denmark. The concept of radicalisation became prevalent in Denmark after 2009, when the first action plan for countering radicalisation was drafted. A number of important concerns, topics and questions arise from this approach. Importantly, it confirms the fruitfulness and relevance of investigating the dynamics of radicalisation controversies and the importance of embedding discussions in specific contexts. Even though radicalisation (and the discourses thereof) is commonly seen as a global phenomenon, specific debates and controversies will always be (g)local. The dialectic between radical groups and counter-radicalisation is obvious and in many ways similar to the relationship between movements and counter-movements. Arguments and criticisms presented by Muslim and secular voices are in many ways strikingly similar to those presented by secular and religious anti-cultists. Nevertheless, many things are also quite different. The position of the CJMs is stronger than the position of the secular and religious anti-cultists, and through their attempt to delegitimise

¹⁰⁵ See, for example, Larsson, Göran, “ ‘Most Muslims Are Like You and I, but “Real” Muslim...’: Ex-Muslims and Anti-Muslim Sentiments”, *Journal of Muslims in Europe* 5: 2 (2016) 205-223.

the position of scholars, their arguments – but not necessarily the groups proposing them – have retained a position in mainstream political and media debates. Another important difference concerns the relationship between the state and civil society. In the cult controversy, the initiative to investigate and regulate the “cults” came from civil society organisations concerned with the work of the cults. In the radicalisation controversy, the initiatives come from the state rather than being caused by pressure from civil society. It may be the case that the difference between the “cults” and radicalisation is due to a difference in character. At the end of his book on cult controversies, Beckford emphasises that:

state control over specifically *political* organizations and movements is considerably more strenuous and effective. And, in comparison with attempts to curb terrorism, drug trafficking, smuggling, and espionage, the state’s interest in controlling NRMs pales into insignificance.¹⁰⁶

From this perspective, the major task for scholars and others who want to intervene in the radicalisation controversy is to be extremely clear about how to distinguish between violent and non-violent radicalisation. These conclusions are drawn from analysis material from the Danish radicalisation controversy. More research is needed, however, to compare different conceptualisations, policies and patterns of radicalisation and extremism in different countries; in short, their different “radicalisation controversies”. Case studies may reveal how the dynamics between radical groups and their counterparts may accelerate or decelerate the levels of conflict and controversy.

¹⁰⁶ Beckford, *Cult Controversies*, p. 283.