

The Cultic Milieu

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The development of a European Islam has not followed the expectations of most researchers. Instead of forming and reforming in a liberal and secularized manner, radical Islam has developed as perhaps the most distinctive form of European Islam. But the question of why some Muslims become radical has not been easy to answer. Studies propose that there is no single pattern which can explain how and why some young European Muslims become radical. Marginalization, deprivation and resentment may provide part of the explanation, but Muslims who are radicalized are often fairly well integrated and at least not any more marginalized and deprived than large part of the Muslim community. Studies have failed to find any psychological deficiencies and while the impact of radical religious authorities seems in some cases to have had an influence, in others the process seems to be one of self-radicalization. When it comes to the social organization, Marc Sageman claims in his recent book, *Leaderless Jihad*, that informal networks and independent groups are the new faces of jihadism.



This research project will suggest that Colin Campell's concept of 'the cultic milieu' can be employed to help our understanding of radical Islam in Europe. Campell coined the notion of the cultic milieu to describe a counter-cultural environment in a society, where different religious and philosophical currents flourished and intermixed and occasionally provide the background for formation of cults. The concept of the cultic milieu has primarily been used to describe the emergence of alternative religiosity from belief in flying saucers to neo-shamanism, but has also proved its value in studies of neo-nazism and radical racialism. It puts emphasis on a milieu of seekers and a diversity of coexisting counter-cultural ideologies which may prove useful to understanding how some Muslims may become radicalized.

The project will place Islamic radicalism within a broader framework by concentrating on one locality, Århus, and by focusing on the different discourses, radical or not, used by young Muslims. The project will use individual interviews and focus group interviews to get an understanding of how radicalism may fit into the lives of young European Muslims.

Biography:

Lene van der Aa Kühle is an associate professor at the Department of the Study of Religion at Aarhus University. Lene holds a PhD in sociology of religion from the Faculty of Theology, Aarhus University and has comprehensive theoretical, empirical and research experience in the following thematic fields: sociological theory (Bourdieu), religious pluralism, religious minorities, Islam in Europe, religion and politics. Among Lene van der Aa Kühle's recent publications are: "Globalization, Bourdieu and New Religions" in Geertz, A.W., Warburg, M. (red.), *New religions and globalization*, vol. 8, Aarhus University Press, Aarhus, p. 95-118, 2008; "Det Danske Pluralismeprojekt" [The Danish Pluralism Project] in Warburg, M., Jacobsen, B. (red.), *Tørre Tal om Troen*, Forlaget Univers, Højbjerg, p. 127-142, 2007; "Pluralisme eller mangfoldighed?" [Pluralism or diversity?] in Berit Schelde Christensen, Viggo Mortensen & Lars Buch Viftrup (eds),

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