



Christianity Betrayed

Conspiracy Theory about a Leftist-Muslim Plot against Christianity in Norway

Torkel Brekke, University of Oslo, Norway

Abstract

This article explores the way that members of a political milieu of the New Christian Right in Norway reason about an alliance between local and global forces to open the borders to Muslim immigrants as part of a plot to remove Christianity from Norwegian society or weaken its influence. The context for the research is the refugee crisis of 2015 and 2016, which made these topics politically and culturally salient. The article looks at how this milieu understands the most important elements in the alleged plot against Christianity: the Labour Party, the Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation (NRK), Muslim immigrants, and the Church of Norway.

Keywords: Christian fundamentalism, the New Christian Right, conspiracy theory, Eurabia, Norway, Labour Party

Introduction

Conspiracy theories and their role in politics have been the subject of research in the social sciences and the humanities at least since Hofstadter's 1964 essay and book about the paranoid style in American politics, and a recently compiled bibliography on the subject runs to almost 100 pages (Conspiracy Theories). Scholarly interest in the possible connections and interfaces between religion and conspiracy theories seems to be growing too (see, for instance, Dyrendal et al.). Conspiracy theories about a Muslim takeover of Europe have been circulating for a long time in the West (Carr; Lopez; Fekete), and they have inspired terrorism (Bangstad

2014). Christianity plays a role in conspiratorial ideas about an Islamic takeover of Europe on the populist right and the extreme right (Woodbridge; Lindberg). Famously popularized by Bat Ye'or in her 2005 book by that title, the term “Eurabia” refers to a process where Muslims take over Europe assisted by Europeans who are blind to the threat. In Ye'or's vision, Europe is changing from a Judeo-Christian civilization into a civilization of *dhimmitude*, or subjugation, to the Arab-Islamic world and its civilization. Ye'or is not very interested in Islam, Christianity, or Judaism *as religions*, but uses them as labels for large civilizational entities. Christianity plays a role in much of the Eurabia discourse as a marker of civilizational identity but hardly ever comes into play in the shape of religiosity, faith, or theology. In this article, I am going to refer to this as a “secular” Eurabia theory without implying anything else by my use of the contested term “secular.”

In debates about Muslim immigration, then, Christianity – or Christendom – has become a shorthand for Western civilization, while Christianity is hardly ever taken seriously as *religion*. But what happens if and when Christianity enters the picture as strong *belief* rather than just *belonging*. Nobody has to my knowledge investigated the role of Christian fundamentalists in the construction of Eurabia tropes in Europe. In this article I use qualitative data collected in Norway in 2015 and 2016 to ask if there is a distinctly fundamentalist Christian conspiracy theory about a Muslim takeover. In other words, is there a variant of this conspiracy theory that takes religion more seriously than a general cultural or civilizational marker?

Historical and Political Context

It is necessary to begin with a brief introduction to the landscape of Christianity in Norway before we turn to the empirical data underpinning the main analysis of this article. During the Middle Ages, Norway was an integrated part of the Catholic Church, but it was reformed in 1537 in a complex process that also led to the country becoming part of the Danish state in 1536 (Rian; Lausten 1987a, 1987b). King Christian III (1503-1559), who ruled Denmark and Norway following the Reformation, was a devout Lutheran, having witnessed with his own eyes the intense religious and political struggles in neighboring Germany, but he was also inspired by Luther's position on secular authority, which allowed the king to confiscate the riches of the Catholic Church in Denmark and Norway. Over the following centuries the Lutheran State Church held a religious monopoly over Norwegian society as was the case in the rest of Scandinavia. With the Reformation, the position of the Catholic bishop was changed to that of the *superintendent* of the king who was the head of the church including in theological matters (Lausten 1987a). The Danish-Norwegian state in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was among the most centralized in Europe and its kings saw the church as a powerful tool to control society (Petersen and Rode). Early in the 1800s the tight grip of the church started to loosen as liberal political values from France and the U.S. were introduced in political debate and as laws prohibiting religious life outside the context of the church were challenged (Brekke 2002). From the mid-1800s the religious history of Norway is one of slow reform and liberalization, but the formal entanglement of state and church continued until 2012 when the position of the church in the Constitution was changed in fundamental ways.

Norway is by most accounts still a Protestant Christian society, although diversity has increased with immigration from the 1970s. In 2017, the Church of Norway had around 3.74

million members, or just over 70% of the population, but it faces increasing competition from organized atheism and from Christian and non-Christian minorities (Brekke 2016). Alongside the Church of Norway is a prominent lay movement, which is associated with the extraordinary Norwegian lay preacher Hans Nielsen Hauge (1771-1824) and which has its inspiration and origins in the eighteenth century Pietist movement of northern Europe, particularly Germany. This lay movement takes the form of missionary societies, educational activities, and philanthropy organized by Christians who are mostly members of the Church of Norway. Most of the time, there is no strong opposition or conflict between the Norwegian lay movement and the Church of Norway, and the main section of the lay movement tends to be politically moderate. At the same time, this lay movement has had recent offshoots that feel that the Church of Norway has yielded to modern influences. These offshoots call for a different politics on matters of immigration, same sex marriage, and the place of Christianity in education and in society more broadly. They are strongly anti-socialist and pro-Israel; they tend to be literalist in their approach to the Bible; and they seem to have become ever more integrated in the global discussions of an Islamic threat against the West. It would be reasonable, I think, to say that these people belong to what scholarship has referred to as the New Christian Right (NCR) (see Liebman and Wuthnow). This is the type of milieu that is in focus here.

It is important to mention briefly the political context of the research carried out for this article. My interviews (details below) were carried out during the so called “refugee crisis,” the situation that started in 2015 when large numbers of migrants from Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, Eritrea, and other countries arrived in Scandinavia and the rest of Europe. Some of the migrants were refugees fleeing wars, while others were people escaping political or economic hardship in their home countries. The influx of refugees rapidly became the most important political topic in Norway, as it did in the rest of Europe, and while the plight of the refugees resulted in numerous initiatives to help, it also caused a sense of crisis in some sections of Norwegian society. A large percentage of the migrants arriving in Europe were Muslims and to my informants the refugee crisis was interpreted in the context of what they see as a global conflict between Christianity and Islam. Doing research in this context necessitated reflection about my own position as researcher coming from an institution devoted to the study of extremism. The Center for Research on Extremism: The Extreme Right, Hate Crime and Political Violence (C-REX) was established as a national response to the terrorist attacks in Norway in 2011 and its mandate is to do research and public outreach about the extreme right in a broad sense. My informants could not be called extremists in any meaningful sense of the word. Explaining and justifying my interest in the ideas and attitudes of this milieu to my informants took time and energy, and I think it is fair to say that most interviews and conversations started with deep suspicion about the motives of the researcher. Moreover, the very concept of conspiracy theory has a negative ring to it and few would readily agree that they hold conspiratorial ideas. I want to stress that I do not make any judgments here about the truth or untruth of the statements and ideas that I find in my research. Conspiratorial ideas are, in the broad sense, ideas about negative political processes or events being orchestrated by more or less hidden forces, and I believe it is important to heed the findings of research indicating that conspiratorial views of politics cannot be explained as the simple products of

political extremism, authoritarian personality, or of ignorance or misinformation (Oliver and Wood).

The structure of the conspiratorial ideas that is the subject of this article is as follows: the Labour Party and other forces on the left have tried to remove Christianity from Norwegian culture and society through the past century. An important strategy in this attempt has been to take control over the Church of Norway and over the Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation. In recent years, these forces on the left have gained a new ally in the Muslim immigrants traveling to and settling in Norway. There is a variety in the degree to which representatives of the New Christian Right see these internal and external enemies of Christianity as *conscious* participants in a conspiracy. In some parts of my material, the plot is relatively explicitly formulated while in other parts it is more implicit and expressed through rhetorical questions or references to the opinion of others.

Data

In 2015 and 2016 I carried out a study of a Christian political party in Norway called *Partiet De Kristne* (The Christian Party, abbreviated PDK). My sources of data were (1) interviews with 17 persons with leadership roles in the party, (2) other direct communication, like e-mails and informal conversations with leaders and with voters of the PDK, (3) articles in the media, particularly the party magazine, which is not available online, and (4) official documents like party platforms. The interviews are my most important source. In my sample of 17 persons, there were 12 men and 5 women (see the Table below). The informants were interviewed in five different municipalities in Norway during the period from January to April 2016, and all had some official role in the party organization of PDK. One was a *former* member and reported to have left the party. My informants were *literalist* in their approach to scripture and religious truth. In the words of informant 12 – a well-educated 39 year-old woman: “Of course we read the Bible because that is God expressed, it is His word, as we think. So, we do not simply think we can find some wise words in the Bible, but we think the Bible IS the word of God” (No. 12, 5.20-30).¹ In this sense, my informants were *fundamentalists*, but I want to emphasize that I do not use this term to suggest political extremism or tendencies to violence. *Fundamentalism* as I use it here is about attitudes to scripture and religious truth and about social values.

The PDK was established in 2011 and got roughly 18,000 votes (0.6%) in the parliamentary elections of 2013 and 8700 votes (0.3%) in the parliamentary elections of 2017. It is a political party that belongs to the New Christian Right, by which I mean that they have a program that combines strict social conservatism with very liberal economic policies. They also use Christian doctrine and symbols to justify political positions, but this is often toned down for strategic reasons. The immediate background for the establishment of the PDK was that a large section of Christian voters no longer felt at home in what has for a long time been the party of choice for this group: the Christian People’s Party (*Kristelig folkeparti*). The Christian People’s Party was founded in 1933 but had its best period in terms of support and impact

¹ Throughout I am going to refer to interviews with the abbreviation “No.” and a number, corresponding to the Table of Informants Interviewed, followed by how many minutes and seconds after the start of the recorded interview the citation can be found.

during the late 1990s and early 2000s. However, during the 1990s and the 2000s the “Christian vote” changed. In particular, the populist right Progress Party made efforts to appeal to Christian voters in the parliamentary elections in 2005 and managed to attract a large number of voters from the Christian People’s Party (Holberg; Jupskås).

Table of Informants Interviewed

No	Gender	Age	County
1	M	70	Telemark
2	M	36	Telemark
3	F	44	Oslo
4	M	45	Sunnmøre
5	M	51	Møre og Romsdal
6	F	68	Møre og Romsdal
7	M	69	Møre og Romsdal
8	M	49	Telemark
9	M	80	Telemark
10	M	44	Østfold
11	F	67	Østfold
12	F	39	Hordaland
13	M	46	Hordaland
14	M	50	Oslo
15	M	61	Aust-Agder
16	M	66	Aust-Agder
17	F	52	Aust-Agder

The Left and the Muslims in Conspiracy Thinking

Suspicion and hate against the Labour Party in Norway has in recent years been associated with the extreme right terrorist who committed the massacres in Oslo and on Utøya on July 20, 2011 (Gardell; Bangstad 2014), but this hate has long historical roots. The Labour Party was established in 1887 and for a period around the Russian Revolution there was a significant Communist fraction in the party, which generated hostility among conservatives. From the parliamentary elections in 1927, the Labour Party was a social democratic party that had broken decisively with revolutionary Communism, but in some circles suspicion about the party’s loyalties have remained or resurfaced at different historical crossroads. After the Second World War, skepticism against social democracy was expressed not least in the alternative culture inspired by Rudolf Steiner, which is highly critical of government and state institutions, like the public school system and elements of the health system, like psychiatry and child care (Færseth).

The theory that the Labour Party conspires to destroy Norway and Norwegian culture by flooding the country with Muslims can be traced at least back to the early 1990s and probably earlier. This position was expressed, for instance, by the Fatherland Party, an extreme right party established in 1990. It saw Christianity as a key ingredient in Norwegian national identity and believed from its inception that there was a conspiracy between politicians on the left and Muslims wanting to colonize Norway and convert the nation to Islam. The Fatherland Party explained that the left – represented by the Labour Party – used immigration from Muslim societies as a weapon to destroy Norway as a nation and as a culture. In the party platform in 1993 we can read:

The political extremists on the left have already expressed that their goal is to “disband Norway as a national state, remove the Norwegian flag from the Parliament building.” They see immigrants as comrades in the battle and want Norway to take in “a million immigrants in our time.” But then the immigrants will become a power group in our country. It seems that their long-term goal is to take all power in the country once they are many enough as in the statement of Muslim leaders in NRK (i.e. Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation) that their wish is to make Norway into an Islamic state.

In statements like these, the Fatherland Party is in alignment with the extreme right conspiracy theories of what has later come to be known as theories of Eurabia, and it is interesting to note that these ideas and attitudes were expressed clearly in official documents by the Fatherland Party already in the early 1990s. We should also note that this party got over 11,000 votes in the Norwegian parliamentary elections in 1993. In the Party platform for 2001 (written before 9/11) the Fatherland Party framed the issue of immigration of Muslims as defense policy. The program said that we (Europeans) are experiencing an Islamic attack on Western Europe in the shape of migration that is peaceful only in appearance (Party platform 2001). In short, the Eurabia theory was present on the fringes of political culture in Norway from the early 1990s.

Christianity Undermined by the Labour Party

In an essay from 2001 called “The Labour Party: Satan’s Ploughshare in Norwegian Politics,” the Christian fundamentalist politician Ivar Kristianslund wrote:

For more than a generation (*mannsalder*) the Labour Party has been the leading brains and power in the struggle to de-Christianize the laws, the home, the school, the church, yes, the whole of society. And over time the Labour Party has managed to get the other political parties to take part in this destruction of Christianity. When Christian people do not see all this, they must at best be sleeping, if they are not dead! This is obviously a spiritual catastrophe! (quoted in Brekke 2002: 103).

Kristianslund was a founder of a small Christian political party called *Kristent Samlingsparti* (Christian Unity Party), which is now defunct. In his words, then, the Church of Norway has been de-Christianized by the Labour Party. This idea is also present in the thoughts of many of my informants from The Christian Party (PDK). The members of the PDK see the Norwegian Labour Party as a threat to Christianity. This threat is not simply about Norwegian

national and cultural identity since Islam is also talked about as a theological threat. If the Left and the Muslims have their way, the conditions for salvation will be lost or narrowed down because only a Christian culture can provide the freedom for the believer to choose the right faith. Islam is taken seriously as a religion by these people and in interviews many informants would compare Islam to Christianity according to scripture and doctrines. The main contrast would often be in the perception of Christianity as a true religion of freedom and Islam as a religion of laws.

In the opinion of most of my informants, the threat against Christianity posed by the Labour Party and Islam has been present for some time and is growing larger with the refugee crisis because the Labour Party and their allies on the left are believed to use the crisis as part of their strategy. All my informants talked about the attempts by the Labour Party to de-Christianize Norway. In the words of one informant: “We had for instance Edvard Bull of the Labour Party who already in 1923 said he had an agenda to get rid of Christianity from the public sphere. So that there has been an agenda there at least among quite a few” (No. 11, 4.20-40). She explained that the Socialist Party has worked along the same lines to take Christianity out of schools and other institutions.

Informant No. 12 explained at length how the Labour Party has always wanted to “hoist the red banner high,” as she put it, and remove Christianity. They have been successful, she said, but this is really a dangerous experiment, as the country has been Christian for 1000 years. She felt that the consequences may be grave. In her own words: “If we now destroy the Christian values, we get complete dissolution (*opplosning*). The families, and . . . everything. Then we are left with a very fragmented society. History has shown that this not always has a good end, that experiment” (15.10-25). Later in the interview (20.20), she returned to what she saw as dissolution in society and the reactions against it. She said that PDK wants to protect society against “the total dissolution” that comes from one side in the shape of coercive Islam and from the other side in the shape of complete moral relativization where kids six years of age are allowed to choose what sex they are (24.00-40). A 61 year-old man explained how his traditions had slowly been purged from Norwegian society because the largest party in Norway has had this as their official policy. In his words: “The Labour Party has worked actively to remove Christianity from Norwegian society” (No. 15, 15.00).

Truth Suppressed by Mainstream Media

All my informants would talk about how the truth about immigration and the dangers of Islam is being suppressed by the establishment and the elites in Norway. The Labour Party was seen to be able to suppress media coverage of these topics by its power over the public broadcaster NRK (the Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation). Many of my informants said that the media is actively concealing facts about immigration, and many would say that the media is biased in favor of refugees and Muslims and against Christianity and Israel. Informant No. 11 said that in her experience the media is very biased (16.00): “I feel that one puts a lid on . . . One does not want to have information, . . .” she said and asserted that the whole debate about Islam, immigration – and about Israel – was being censored by the politically correct. On the positive side she mentioned Christian Tybring-Gjedde as a “public person who is clear” (17.40). Tybring-Gjedde (long-time MP for the populist right Progress Party) is a controversial politician in Norway because he has compared Islam to Nazism, claimed that

the Labour Party is working to Islamize Norway, and engages with Eurabia ideologues and their literature (Borchgrevink 2013: 124). Several other of my informants would also mention Tybring-Gjedde as a man who dares to speak frankly and openly, where everybody else would brush truth under the carpet.

Informant No. 3 asserted that everyone is so afraid of being racist that all serious debate about Islam is stifled and suppressed. She said that the present “leftist government” has experiences with the negative sides of Christianity but not with the negative sides of Islam. It was unclear what she meant by talking of the government as “leftist” as the government at the time of the interview was in fact made up of the Conservative Party and the Progress Party, both of which are decidedly on the right of the political spectrum. Describing her feelings about how immigration was being handled in the media, she said: “The debate today is terrible, excuse me for saying so! On all levels it is like shit (*bedriten*), I think” (44.50). She explained that public debate is politically correct and deeply ideological in favor of the left. Mirroring common themes in populist and extreme right milieus in Europe, informant No. 7 explained that Islamophobia and racism are concepts that were invented by Muslims in order to stop the media and the public from talking about the grave problems in Islam (19.00).

The hostility against the Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation (NRK) in the milieu we are looking at here is part of a broader international trend of hostility and skepticism against what is seen to be elite, liberal broadcasters and publications. Some of my informants also placed the Norwegian situation concerning the perceived bias in public information about immigration and Islam in an international context. Erik Selle, the leader of the Christian Party, tweeted on June 29, 2017, “CNN is seriously a propaganda machine which has lost it’s relevance as news channel,” and he added the hashtag #fakenews. On September 5, 2018, Selle tweeted, “CNN is the incarnation of bullshit news.” In the same tweet, Selle retweeted a tweet by U.S. President Donald Trump attacking CNN as “fake news.” Selle has other similar postings or tweets on Twitter and Facebook, through which he reaches members of the party. By throwing himself into the larger international debate about fake news – often on the side of President Trump – Selle sends a signal to his constituency about how they should understand the information coming out of established, elite news channels at home and abroad. He also places political debates in Norway in a large, international context in ways that demonstrate deep engagement with politics on the world stage. Similar statements by Selle and other figures of authority in The Christian Party indicate that the New Christian Right in Norway cannot be understood as a simple local phenomenon. While attacking Norwegian and foreign elite broadcasters, Selle often comes to the defense of several “alternative” news outlets in the Norwegian context, in particular Human Rights Service, Document.no, and Resett.no, three news agencies that have become controversial for their hostility against Islam and their suspicion of elite politics. To both Selle and other leaders of the Christian Party, and probably to many of its voters, the battle for truth is being fought at home in Norway as part of a broader global struggle to confront liberal political elites that wittingly or unwittingly undermine Christian civilization.

Christianity Betrayed by the Church of Norway

If there is one point where we can see an important difference between secular and fundamentalist Protestant versions of conspiracy theories about a Muslim takeover, it is in the

views about the established church. To understand this difference, let us briefly return to the extreme right party called the Fatherland Party mentioned above. The Fatherland Party saw Christianity as a marker of national identity and never expressed any interest in religion as such other than stating that the Church of Norway was a bearer of essential cultural heritage. In other words, the established church was seen to be an important organization in the maintenance of Norwegian culture in the face of the threat of Islam and immigration. This is a common position also on other points of the political spectrum and is not something that characterizes far right political ideology in particular. However, if we look at the worldview that is the subject of this article, we find a different idea about the modern role of the Church of Norway.

An open question about views concerning the Church of Norway was an element in the interviews with all my informants. Among them, the Church of Norway is seen as a bastion of the Labour Party. The official position of the PDK program is that all faith communities should be independent from the state and receive no direct public funding. This is also their position regarding the Church of Norway as links to the state are seen as a source of corruption and secularism. In the worldview of most of my informants, the Church of Norway has been hijacked by leftist politicians and particularly the Labour Party. In the words of No. 8: “The Church of Norway was for centuries the bearer of Norwegian culture, but it has been taken over by the Labour Party” (22:00). Sometimes informants would mention or discuss the profile of individual bishops of the Church of Norway and how they are close to the political elite and execute social democratic policies rather than taking care of the church and its historical role as the protector and bearer of Norwegian religion and culture. Talking about the church, No. 14 said: “They (the Church of Norway) are so afraid of not including everybody that they have become completely watered down (*utvannet*)” (18:30). To my informants, it is the links to the state and the economic dependence that are the roots of the problems. Some of them would also be very explicit about how the Church of Norway has been infiltrated by leftists and made into an instrument of destructive policies with regard to immigration.

In the statements about the Church of Norway/Labour Party/Islam axis, it is possible to distinguish two different positions. The first is that the accommodating policies and positions taken by the church are the result of a relativist ideology that is more stupid and shortsighted than immoral. In this sense, the Church of Norway is a reflection of the relativism seeping through modern culture and society in general. The second and more sinister position is that the Church of Norway has over the past few decades been hijacked by leftist politicians and consciously made into an instrument to undermine Christianity with the help of Muslim immigration as well as through other destructive policies. These two positions do not seem to be mutually exclusive in the worldview analyzed here and at least one of my informants would express both ideas at different points of the interview.

The betrayal of Christianity by the Church of Norway is not only about Norwegian cultural heritage in the view of the milieu we are looking at here: it is also about theology. My informants would tend to see Islam and Christianity as global forces competing against each other and they would see the presence of a true Christian society as a precondition for salvation. Several of my informants used the following theological argument: Islam is a religion that stresses laws, while Protestant Christianity is a religion concerned with human freedom in a specifically Lutheran theological sense of the word. A political system that ensures

freedom in both a political and a theological sense is a precondition for salvation, and for this reason Islam was seen as a specifically *religious* threat by most or all of my informants. They would foreground the tensions between Islam and Christianity when it comes to concepts of God and doctrinal truth claims. For instance, one of my interviewees explained the differences in this way: “The big difference is that, Allah and Jahve, . . . We think that . . . , it is grace and forgiveness that are the foundation of Christianity. Right? While the Muslims they do blood-revenge. Revenge is a very important thing for them. They revenge more or less everything. And there is punishment, and there is punishment and revenge . . . It is very hard and there is hate . . . While to us it is grace and forgiveness and love (*nåden og tilgivelsen og kjærligheten*). . . But with them it is like if somebody does not agree with you, chop his head off” (No. 17, 51.00-52.30)

In interviews like this, there is an attempt to relate presumed negative behaviors of Muslims and positive behaviors of Christians to their respective theologies. In this particular interview, there was also a sophisticated and detailed explanation of the historical and etymological differences between the gods and god-concepts in the sacred scriptures of the two religions. Here Allah and Jahve were held up as two real characters that demonstrated the fundamental differences between Islam and Christianity. This stress on Islam as a religious and theological opponent among fundamentalist Christians should make researchers more aware of the fact that Christianity can play a far more varied role than simply as a marker of national or civilizational identity in the articulation of attitudes to immigrants in Protestant Christian cultures today. We can see similar ideas if we look across the border to neighboring Denmark, which has a Lutheran tradition similar to the Norwegian one as explained above. A specifically Christian nationalist criticism of immigration to Denmark was clearly formulated from the mid-1980s not least as a reaction to the liberal “Refugee Law” passed in 1983, which, among other things said that refugees had a right to stay in Denmark and that refugees who were granted asylum had a right to bring their families. The law caused an increase in the number of foreigners seeking asylum in Denmark. Two priests of the Danish State Church, Søren Krarup and Jesper Langballe, founded a committee against the Refugee Law in 1986 and they also founded The Danish Association with its own newspaper, *The Dane*, agitating against the consequences of the law (Sedgwick). Søren Krarup’s daughter Marie Krarup has followed in her father’s footsteps and become an MP for Dansk Folkeparti or the Danish People’s Party, an anti-Islam populist party. Søren Krarup and Jesper Langballe’s Christian nationalism had a strictly theological aspect. They emphasized that Danish Christianity is Lutheranism and that a basic theological truth is the freedom of the believer. According to them, Danish Christians were not expected to visit church or follow laws, rules, or customs as salvation comes through God’s grace alone. The only road to salvation is faith in God. The opposite idea of religion, according to Krarup and Langballe, is Islam where the emphasis is on following of laws. The Lutheran freedom to have faith in God can only be realized in a Christian land and thus the immigration of Muslims is seen as a *religious* threat to Denmark, just as it is in Norway (Sedgwick 2013: 221f.).

Overlap with Secular Eurabia Theory

In order to counter the effect of mainstream media silencing Christianity and underplaying the threat from Muslims, most of my informants would actively seek out

alternative sources of information about subjects like immigration. In fact, most of the informants got at least some of their information about Islam from what can reasonably be called secular Eurabia literature. One common point of reference was the Norwegian activist Hege Storhaug, who is well connected in the global world of conspiratorial theory about the Arab-Muslim takeover of Europe. Informant No. 8, a 49 year-old man, talked about Storhaug as a key source of information about Islam (35.00). Informant No. 7 said: “It builds up to a big conflict between Islamism and the civilization that we have built in Europe. I have just now read the book by Hege Storhaug called *Den 11. Landeplage*.² Great documentation. Brave work she has done there. Which is a report from different countries in Europe, and Sweden and Norway. Documents how Medina Islam works with determination to get its grip around Muslims” (13.30-14.00). The informant went on to explain the concepts of Medina Islam and Mecca Islam in the book by Storhaug, where – in the world of Storhaug’s Eurabia theory – Medina Islam is supposed to be an Islam that wants to implement Sharia law in Europe and in Norway. Hege Storhaug gave a 30-minute lecture at the national convention of the PDK in Oslo in May 2017, where she explained the threat posed by Islam against democracy. Storhaug is a controversial and highly divisive speaker and by inviting her to their national convention, the party associated itself with the most vocal anti-Muslim activist in Norway.

Marc Gabriel is another Eurabia author known to some informants. Informant No. 11 expressed the widespread view that the truth about Islam is being suppressed when she said: “I was also thinking about . . . I read a book by Marc Gabriel, who has been an imam and a Muslim and . . . and . . . a professor. So, when he becomes a Christian and relates what Islam actually is about, . . . one should not try to put a lid on that . . .” (32.00-20). Marc Gabriel caters to a global Evangelical Christian public with a personal story about how he left Islam and embraced Christianity. His religious and academic background serve to establish his credibility as a trustworthy source about the nature of Islam in these milieus.

PDK *as a party* does not support the standard conspiracy theory that claims that European social-democratic governments work in tandem with Islamic regimes to Islamize Europe. However, most people in this milieu see the Labour Party as systematically undermining the place of Christianity in society. They also believe that mainstream media – in particular the national broadcaster NRK – is strongly biased against Christianity, and they feel that national debate about immigration is dishonest and serves to hide the real issues. Some take the next step and associate these policies with a conspiracy to help Islam take over. In the words of informant No. 3, a 44 year-old woman: “There is a political ideology in Islam which entails jihad and Sharia, too. My experience is that they are very strong politically, and they get very strong support from the left” (17.00). This sentiment is shared by many people in the PDK, but I do not have data to say anything about *how many* of the leaders, members, or voters in the party support this worldview.

² This is the title of an islamophobic book published in 2015. An English translation of the title would be *Islam: The 11th Scourge*, a title that is a pun on a famous lecture against Christianity called “The 10th Scourge” given in 1933 by Arnulf Øverland.

Concluding Discussion

This article asked if there is a distinctly fundamentalist Christian conspiracy theory about a Muslim threat against Europe circulating in the political milieu I have labelled, the New Christian Right in Norway. We saw that the leaders of the political party that I investigated shared many concepts, beliefs, and attitudes with mainstream, secular anti-Muslim activists. They also read and engage with some of the same authors. There surfaced in interviews and in other sources a belief that the Labour Party had worked to destroy Christianity in Norway for several decades and that they now have gained a powerful external ally in Muslim immigrants. We saw that the conspiracy was supposed to incorporate mainstream media and the national broadcaster in particular by helping to hide what is really going on and serving up lies or half-truths about the refugee crisis and its consequences. In other words, the conspiratorial ideas and suspicions circulating in these milieus contain typical elements: there are internal powerful agents colluding with external agents to bring out about certain bad results through hidden schemes.

However, the Christian version of the conspiratorial ideas about a Muslim-leftist alliance against the West contains some elements that are not shared by the standard versions of these ideas as they are found among key Eurabia thinkers. Firstly, there is a greater emphasis on Christianity and Islam as *religions* in the thought of the PDK. Some of my informants would talk about the differences in the scriptures and in their truth-claims, and they would discuss the differences between Jesus and Muhammed. The threat from Islam and Muslims was seen to be more than a threat against Norwegian identity because the undermining of Christianity was also seen to entail an erosion of the conditions necessary to freely believe the right religion and attain salvation. Thus, to the Christian fundamentalists the threat from Islamization was about religion as a means of salvation, which is not the case in mainstream Eurabia theory.

Second, there is the issue of the established church, the Church of Norway. In much of the standard, secular anti-Muslim literature there is little mention of the old European state churches and if they are mentioned, they are mostly seen to be bearers of important cultural heritage. In my interviews and other material, however, the church is seen to be allied with the Labour Party, it is run by liberal elites, and colludes with Islam to create a multicultural society where authentic and true Christianity has no place. In other words, the Christian milieu I look at here does not see the established church in its present shape as a potential defender of national culture. Third, in much of my material there surfaces an idea that organized Atheists (which in Norway means the organization called the Norwegian Humanist Association) is part of the alliance against Christianity together with Muslims and Leftists. In the words of one of my informants, it is easy to live at peace with Buddhists or Hindus, while Atheists and Muslims are impossible because they are out to destroy Christianity with the help of socialists (No. 5, 5.20).

In sum, it seems reasonable to say that the data investigated in this article reveals a specifically religious variant of the conspiracy theory about a Muslim takeover. In this article, I have looked at Norway, where a large majority are members of the established church but where there is also a small fundamentalist movement belonging to the New Christian Right that sees itself in opposition to the Church of Norway. Ideas about a conspiracy between the political elite, the media, and the established church would probably look very different in a

society where these institutional realities are different. This article has been limited in scope and more research is needed on the roles of Christianity in anti-Muslim ideas and activism in Europe. In particular, it is clear that national histories and political and institutional contexts shape the way that Christian groups or movements in Europe understand the role of Christianity and the role of national churches in the large debates about immigration and about Islam. For this reason, a broad comparative research program is needed to better understand the topics that I have looked at in this article.

Acknowledgements

The research for this article was supported by Centre for Research on Extremism (C-REX) at the University of Oslo. I would like to thank Ingvild Fosse for excellent research assistance in collecting data.

Bibliography

Bangstad, Sindre

2012 "Terror in Norway." *American Anthropologist* 114, 2: 351-52.

2014 *Anders Brevik and the Rise of Islamophobia*. London: Zed Books.

Borchgrevink, Aage

2013 *A Norwegian Tragedy. Anders Behring Breivik and the Massacre on Utøya*. Cambridge: Polity.

Brekke, Torkel

2002 *Gud i norsk politikk*. Oslo: Pax forlag.

2016 *Faithonomics: Religion and the Free Market*. London: Hurst.

Carr, M.

2006 "You are Now Entering Eurabia." *Race & Class* 48, 1: 1-22.

Conspiracy Theories

n.d. "Bibliography of Conspiracy Theory Studies." Comparative Analysis of Conspiracy Theories in Europe. Available online at https://conspiracytheories.eu/_wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Bibliography-of-Conspiracy-Theory-Studies-2.pdf.

Dyrendal, Asbjørn, David G. Robertson, and Egil Asprem, editors

2018 *Handbook of Conspiracy Theory and Contemporary Religion*. Leiden: Brill

Fekete, Liz

2011 "The Muslim Conspiracy Theory and the Oslo Massacre." *Race & Class* 53, 3: 30-47.

Færseth, John

2015 "Det 'totaliære' Arbeiderpartiet." *Fri tanke*. Available online at http://fritanke.no/index.php?page=vis_nyhet&NyhetID=10001.

- Gardell, Mattias
2014 "Crusader Dreams: Oslo 22/7, Islamophobia, and the Quest for a Monocultural Europe." *Terrorism and Political Violence* 26: 129-55.
- Hofstadter, Richard
1964 *The Paranoid Style in American Politics*. New York: Knopf.
- Holberg, Sunniva E.
2007 "Kampen om de kristne velgerne: Mellom tro og tradisjon." Chapter 9 in *Norske velgere: En studie av stortingsvalget 2005*. Edited by Bernt Aardal. Oslo: Damm forlag.
- Jupskås, Anders Ravik
2015 *Persistence of Populism: The Progress Party 1973-2009*. Ph.D. thesis, Department of Political Science, University of Oslo.
- Lausten, Martin Schwarz
1987a *Christian den 3. og kirken 1537-1559*. Studier i den danske reformationshistorie 1. København: Akademisk forlag.
1987b *Reformationen i Danmark*. København: Akademisk forlag
- Liebman, Robert C., and Robert Wuthnow, editors
1983 *The New Christian Right: Mobilization and Legitimation*. New York: Aldine
- Lindberg, Jonas
2011 "The Uses of Christianity in Nordic Nationalist Parties' Opposition to Islam." *Swedish Missiological Themes* 99, 2: 137-54.
- Lopez, Fernando Bravo
2011 "Towards a Definition of Islamophobia: Approximations of the Early Twentieth Century." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 34, 4: 556-73.
- Oliver, J. Eric, and Thomas J. Wood
2014 "Conspiracy Theories and the Paranoid Style(s) of Mass Opinion." *American Journal of Political Science* 58, 4: 952-66.
- Petersen, Klaus, and Hans-Henrik Rode
1995 "Kirke og stat i 1600-tallet." *Kirkehistoriske samlinger*: 63-99.
- Rian, Øystein
1997 *Danmark-Norge 1380-1814*. Bind II. *Den aristokratiske fyrstestaten 1536-1648*. København: Universitetsforlaget
- Sedgwick, Mark
2013 "Something Varied in the State of Denmark: Neo-Nationalism, Anti-Islamic Activism, and Street-level Thuggery." *Politics, Religion & Ideology* 14, 2: 208-33.

Storhaug, Hege

2017 At PDK national convention 2017. Available online at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fd7HoUqPCgw>.

Woodbridge, Steven

2010 “Christian Credentials?: The Role of Religion in British National Party Ideology.” *Journal for the Study of Radicalism* 4, 1: 25-54.

Ye’or, Bat

2010 *Eurabia: The Euro-Arab Axis*. Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press.