

Haters Gonna Hate: An Investigation of the Danish Hate Preacher Entry Ban

Kirstine Sinclair

News

In March 2016, the Danish TV Channel TV2 broadcast a series of three documentaries on life in and around a number of Danish mosques. The programme series was entitled “The Mosques behind the Veil” and the bulk of the material from the mosques – including interviews with leading Imams – was recorded using hidden cameras. The documentaries sparked a heated debate as the featured Imams were demonstrating questionable morals in encouraging fraud and physical abuse of women and children. As a direct response to the disclosure of activities in the mosques, a political demand of a ban of so-called hate preachers arose, and a year later – on 2 May 2017 – a list of religious preachers banned from entering Denmark was published.

Summary

In March 2016, the Danish TV Channel TV2 broadcast a series of documentaries based on recorded conversations and meetings with representatives of Danish mosques. The TV Channel had planted two moles and instructed them to act as a married couple facing different difficulties related to their marriage. On this basis, they were sent to ask advice from Imams from eight mosques throughout Denmark. The Imams’ answers and suggested solutions raised a number of new questions regarding religious subcultures and failed integrations efforts and not least the role of Imams and religious preachers. Here, I take a closer look at the political responses aiming at preventing hate preachers which followed as a consequence of the mosque documentaries; the most debated of which involved a ban of named religious preachers.

Key Words

Hate preachers, Mosques, Imams, Islam

About the Author

Kirstine Sinclair, PhD, Associate Professor at the Centre for Contemporary Middle East Studies, SDU.

Analysis:

The Political Response

Two months after the mosque documentaries, four political parties (the social democrats, the conservatives, the liberal party and the more liberal party *Liberal Alliance*) reached agreement to limit the work of preachers with negative and counter-integration agendas; so-called hate preachers.

The agreement covered seven initiatives and adjustments to existing laws and regulations:¹

- 1) Preachers denied access to Denmark: The named individuals on the publicly known list are all non-EU citizens who are denied visas to the country and who will be denied access should they turn up at the border. EU citizens cannot be denied access in the same manner as that goes against the union's principle of freedom of movement for its citizens. Instead, EU citizens who are considered preachers of hate and who are therefore not welcome in Denmark are on a list which has not been made available to the public.
- 2) Criminalisation of certain utterances in connection with religious teaching: Minister for Church Affairs, Bertel Haarder from the Liberal Party (*Venstre*), has yet to be more precise about what this entails.
- 3) Limitation of public funding of associations and charities (in Danish: *foreninger*): Church Minister Haarder has explained to the Danish TV Channel *TV2* that associations and charities with anti-democratic values and aims can no longer receive public funding or make use of public venues for their events and meetings.
- 4) Increased inspection of Islamic schools: The Ministry of Education's supervisors will be allowed to conduct more unannounced visits to schools with special challenges. What "special challenges" entails has yet to be revealed, but it is likely to refer to schools with an explicit affiliation to Islam rather than schools for pupils with special needs .
- 5) Certain religious congregations and associations will be exempt from tax deduction: The deduction normally attributed to religious congregations and preachers can be withdrawn if the authorities find that basic liberties and human rights are undermined in a specific congregation.

¹ Mathias Mosskov, "Der er netop indgået en aftale, der skal dæmme op for hadprædikanter i Danmark", 31st May 2016, *TV2* via: <http://nyheder.tv2.dk/politik/2016-05-31-aftale-om-hadpraedikanter-paa-pladser-er-alle-stramningerne> (last accessed 14th May 2017).

- 6) Mapping of mosques: The politicians have agreed that more knowledge about Danish mosques is needed and that the latest mapping of Danish mosques dating back to 2006 must be updated. The agreement secures funding for such an update.
- 7) Introduction of special permits for wedding couples: As a new initiative, Imams will need to apply for and obtain a special permit before being allowed to wed couples.. As it is, in Denmark, representatives of religious communities other than the Lutheran Church may wed couples, but in the future permits will be given only to Priests, Imams, preachers and the like who live up to a so-called standard of dignity. What this standard implies has not been developed further as of yet.

So far, only two of the initiatives on the list have materialised into something concrete: The funding for the mapping of mosques has been given to the researcher behind the first mosque mapping from 2006, Professor Lene Kühle from Aarhus University, and a ban of entrance of six named Hate Preachers has been made public in May 2017.

The list is called “The National Sanctions List” (in Danish: *Den nationale sanktionsliste*) and is available from the homepage of the Foreigners’ Office under the Ministry of Integration (in Danish: *Udlændingestyrelsen*) and contains the following names: Mohamad bin Abd al Rahman bin Milhi bin Mohamad al Arefe, Kamal El-Mekki, Bilal Philips, Terry Dale Jones, Salman Bin Fahad Alodah and Mohammad Rateb Abdalah Al-Nabulsi.

These individuals are on the list because it is found they have conducted behaviour which may constitute a threat to the public order in Denmark (in Danish: *'udvist en adfærd, der giver grund til at tro, at de vil udgøre en trussel mod den offentlige orden i Danmark'*), and the entry ban stands for two years. The list is administered from the Foreigners’ Office both in terms of questions regarding grounds and possible extension of the ban.²

The Problem with the Mosques and Imams

In a news analysis written last year while the mosque documentary was still strongly debated, I discussed the content of the documentaries and the main points in the critique which followed.³ The investigation of Danish mosques took its point of departure in

² Trine Nørgaard, dr.dk: <https://www.dr.dk/ligetil/indland/seks-religioese-forkyndere-maa-ikke-rejse-ind-i-danmark> (last accessed 14th May 2017)

³ See the full analysis of the documentaries from April 2016 here: http://www.sdu.dk/om_sdu/institutter_centre/c_mellemoest/videncenter (last accessed 14th May 2017)

critique posed by young Muslims fleeing repressive families as well as Muslims voicing critique of such repressive environments informed by conservative religion. The aim was to give a “behind the scenes” impression of how influential individuals in these environments think and thereby understand the social and religious control young Muslims in Denmark are subjected to within patriarchal family and mosque circles. This impression, then, should lead to an understanding of what young Muslims in Denmark are struggling with when trying to accommodate and become fully integrated Danish citizens – and thus a wider discussion of the cluster of challenges related to integration in Denmark today and in the future.⁴

The documentaries gave evidence to the fact that one Imam in one mosque advised mosque goers to commit fraud, and that other Imams in different mosques had problematic views on child care and gender equality not living up to international standards as described in the United Nations’ Human Rights Declaration from 1948. And these problems are real and should be taken seriously. Thus, TV2 introduced their documentary series as an expression of concern for future integration of Muslims in Denmark, i.e. politically and socially motivated, however in their critique of the documentaries, Christian Suhr, an anthropologist from Aarhus University and Morten Skjoldager, a journalist from the daily *Politiken*, both pointed to a somewhat sensationalist approach to the mosques and Imams by TV2. Suhr claimed that the programmes showed only half the truth of what is going on in the mosques based on extensive field work in some of the same mosques, and Skjoldager posed the question: TV2 has singled out eight mosques – why these particular mosques? It so happens that these particular eight mosques were notorious for links to problematic and anti-democratic Imams, foreign fighter networks and involvement in the Cartoon Controversy in 2005-06. Thus, they were far from regular mosques. Furthermore, the documentaries never provided information about the majority of Muslims who approach neither mosque nor Imam. In other words: the documentaries painted a tainted picture and the production seemed preoccupied with creating headlines rather than increasing the general knowledge about Muslims and Islam in the Danish public.

The Problems with the Responses to the Problems

Politicians watched the documentaries and responded with the list of initiatives referred to in the above. As explained, two initiatives have materialised into something more substantial: funding for mosque mapping and the Hate Preacher entry ban. The Danish Minister for Integration, Inger Støjberg from *Venstre*, the Liberal Party, argues that the list is an important signal to individuals who are not conducive to the public good by

⁴ Please find the full description on TV2’s homepage: <http://omtv2.tv2.dk/nyhedsartikler/nyhedsvisning/moskeerne-bag-sloeret/> (last accessed 14th May 2017).

enticing terrorism, violence or violations of civil rights of minorities such as homosexuals or Jews.

One of the critical voices of this way of thinking stems from the Think Tank Justitia which – as implied by the name – deals with civil rights and legality and politically determined grey zones between security and civil rights. They argue that an entry ban has very limited effect in a digital age where all preachers can deliver their messages to global audiences online. But the Minister disagrees:

It is correct that one can find these people preaching on YouTube, but it is something else if these messages are delivered face-to-face, and we are no longer letting the country be used for this purpose, she states to Danish Radio.⁵

While the minister dismisses this point, her colleagues from *Liberal Alliance* agree that the initiative is symbolic, a point which Law Student Tarek Hussein appreciates as he posed the question: How many individuals are we talking about? There are six names on the list, but have any of them visited Denmark frequently? He argues that it would be more productive to focus on de-radicalisation work in existing Danish mosques rather than worry about a handful of international Hate Preachers.⁶

Other critical points have been made in Muslim and academic circles: The list will serve as advertisement for the individuals on it (have you googled the individuals on the list yet?), and having a list like that may infringe on the freedom of speech of the involved individuals. Minister Støjberg has dismissed both points without further arguments.⁷

Returning to the question of who the six individuals on the list are and how they ended up being banned from entering Denmark: Several European countries have made similar lists of individuals banned from entry. I have compared to the equivalent list in the UK and found only one name shared between the two lists, namely that of Terry Dale Jones, a pastor of a Christian Church in in Florida called *Dove World Outreach Center*, and Head of the political group *Stand Up America Now* which holds explicit anti-Muslim views. He is best known for having planned to burn the Qur'an in 2010 – and perhaps some will know him as independent candidate in the presidential elections in 2012 and 2016.

⁵ Anders Holm Nielsen, dr.dk, 2th May 2017: <https://www.dr.dk/nyheder/indland/stoejberg-liste-over-hadpraedikanter-er-ikke-bare-symbolpolitik> (last accessed 16th May 2017)

⁶ Matthias Mosskov, 31st May 2016: <http://nyheder.tv2.dk/politik/2016-05-31-debattoer-naivt-at-tro-liste-over-hadpraedikanter-loeser-problemet?cid=tv2.dk:Debatt%C3%B8r%3A%20Naivt%20at%20tro%20liste%20over%20hadpr%C3%A6dikanter%201%3B8ser%20problemet:article> (last accessed 14th May 2017)

⁷ Anders Holm Nielsen, dr.dk, 2th May 2017: <https://www.dr.dk/nyheder/indland/stoejberg-liste-over-hadpraedikanter-er-ikke-bare-symbolpolitik> (last accessed 16th May 2017)

Jacob Mchangama from the *Justitia* Think Tank noted the problematic aspect of having Jones on the list due to his past threats to burn the Qur'an which can only be explained with reference to the Danish blasphemy law; a law which this think tank finds anachronistic and useless in today's Denmark.

A colleague from Copenhagen University, Niels Valdemar Vinding, compared the list to a list published by the terror enterprise Islamic State and found that a majority of Danish members of Parliament and Islamic State agree on Bilal Philips being problematic. Islamic State refers to him as an apostate and "western minded" which is hardly the description applied by the Danish politicians.⁸

Finally, the Danish Bishops have uttered strong criticism. The fear is that youth organisations affiliated with the Danish Lutheran Church will be challenged whenever conducting activities "combining public and church interests" such as inviting to pray in connection with public meetings and other events; i.e. that they can no longer receive public funding if an activity involves a faith related element.⁹ Put in very direct terms, the bishops are of the understanding that the new political initiatives express a general suspicion of religion. This, however, Minister Haarder dismisses. He explains that the vast majority of congregations and associations working on public-church relations will continue to receive funding in the future.¹⁰

Thus, the question remains: Is it only Muslim congregations and Islam-related activities which will be affected in the future?

⁸ Niels Valdemar Vinding found Islamic State's list in *Dabiq*, vol. 14, p. 8-17.

⁹ Lise-Lotte Skjoldan, Altinget.dk, 27th October 2016: <http://www.altinget.dk/artikel/biskopper-advarer-hadpraedikant-lov-kan-ramme-skaevt> (last accessed 18th May 2017)

¹⁰ Lise-Lotte Skjoldan, Altinget.dk, 27th October 2016: <http://www.altinget.dk/artikel/biskopper-advarer-hadpraedikant-lov-kan-ramme-skaevt> (last accessed 18th May 2017)