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“America” as Conspiratorial Language: Americanization of Danish Conspiracy Theories in the Twenty-First Century

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As a staunch ally of the United States, a mass consumer of American popular culture, and with a population interested in all things American, Denmark has undergone a large degree of Americanization since the mid-twentieth century.¹ The allure of “America” was described by Dutch American studies scholar Rob Kroes as the language of freedom and modernity, spread through popular culture and economic and technological achievement, and adapted by Europeans in a creolized fashion, because it was a stronger cultural reference than anything locally available.² This has certainly also been part of the Danish experience.

But “America” as a potent image has also been used to express more negative feelings. The 2024 US elections showed with great clarity that conspiracy theories in Denmark, i.e., the suspicion that secret elites are planning to assume power at the expense of the people, are Americanized. Danish groups and individuals discuss and spread American conspiracy theories about the “Deep State” and “New World Order” on social media and use the history of American conspiracy theories (especially from the JFK assassination onwards) to explain the state of affairs in Denmark and the world. This process has been ongoing since 9/11.

Conspiracy theories are models of explanation. They reject coincidences, emphasize human intention and agency, argue that everything is connected, and that nothing is as it seems on the surface.³ By examining people’s belief in and engagement with conspiracy theories, we are afforded a view of what people value, what they oppose, and how they are positioned in relation to power. But the meaning-making qualities of conspiracy theories can also be weaponized by populist leaders and used to agitate, to polarize, and to foment violence.

Conspiracy theories have a long history in the United States. Imported from Europe, they were built into the fabric of the country's founding and its colonial past.⁴ From the dawn of the Republic, Americans have been extraordinarily concerned with threats and plots that might endanger their democratic experiment. Secret societies and immigrants made up the bulk of the presumed threats in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, but in the twentieth, the federal government grew and intruded into people's lives in a way that made them fear that government itself was assuming the role of tyrant. At the same time, federal agencies and elected officials, ever fearful of the risk of espionage and subversion, began monitoring the nation's own citizens and undercutting civil rights, especially from the Cold War onwards. Some of these plots were uncovered in the 1970s at a time when trust in government was already declining because of the Vietnam War and the counterculture movement and led to what British conspiracy theory scholar Peter Knight has termed "conspiracy culture," the notion that people tend to believe that their government is conspiring against them based on proven government conspiracies in the past.⁵ The twenty-first century has greatly exacerbated this tendency, which has been weaponized by populist leaders, Donald Trump among them.

From 9/11 to COVID-19

The Danish history of conspiracy theories differs somewhat from its American counterpart. While theories of plots by Freemasons and Jews were certainly part of the everyday life in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, fear of the state itself was largely absent until the new millennium. Beginning with the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks in 2001 and the ensuing War on Terror, Niels Harrit, a Danish chemist at the University of Copenhagen, launched a Danish version of the "9/11 Truth Movement" after seeing a video lecture by American physics professor Steven E. Jones, who argued that the WTC had been brought down in a "controlled demolition," pointing to the US government as the most likely culprit. Harrit voiced his views through hundreds of public lectures and became a fixture on international conspiracy theory shows, including Alex Jones's *Infowars*.⁶ Harrit's motivation was strongly related to his opposition to the War on Terror, where Denmark had sent troops to join the American war effort in Iraq and Afghanistan, and enacted "antiterror" laws that allowed for increased governmental authority, somewhat similar to the US Patriot Act. By engaging with American conspiracy theories about the Bush Administration's complicity in 9/11, Harrit and other Danish conspiracy theorists were able to express their dissatisfaction with the Danish government and its international role.⁷

Conspiracy theories are reactive phenomena that address current affairs but also exist in an attention economy that requires constant renewal to stay relevant. Consequently, Danish 9/11 Truthers moved on to a critique of unregulated international capitalism following the Great Recession of 2008, echoing content aired in Alex Jones's 2007 conspiratorial documentary *Endgame: The Blueprint for Global Enslavement*

presenting conspiracy theories about global elite organizations, among them the Bilderberg Group, which held its 2014 meeting in Copenhagen. Here, Niels Harrit criticized the “corporate tyranny” that plotted and profited from wars and the “mainstream media” (a term conspiracy theorists imported from American parlance) for hiding the truth. He praised John F. Kennedy as the last decent American president and quoted from Martin Luther King, Jr.⁸ These Americanized conspiracy theories allowed for criticism of the international political and economic system and Denmark’s role in it—hosting Bilderberg in Copenhagen and empowering transnational capitalism at the expense of the people, while obfuscating decision-making processes and enacting censorship.

A few years later, signs (in English) reading “It’s not about a virus, it’s about control” became omnipresent at Danish COVID-19 protests. Both text and sentiment were directly adopted from American sources as Danish conspiracy theorists built on earlier critiques in their efforts to make sense of the harsh Danish lockdowns and wide-ranging powers given to Danish authorities to curtail civil liberties. American conspiratorial narratives that Anthony Fauci, Bill Gates, and the World Economic Forum (WEF) were the true culprits behind the global pandemic became widespread. A direct Danish link was created through the idea that the Danish health minister Magnus Heunicke had been given orders about how to conduct the Danish lockdown by Gates and the WEF during a global pandemic tabletop exercise called “Event 201” in October of 2019, i.e., before the world knew of the existence of the virus, confirming long-held conspiratorial notions of a “plandemic.”⁹ While the minister *was* in the US at the time and *was* meeting with the Gates Foundation, he did not participate in Event 201, nor is there any evidence that he was given instructions of any kind. But because conspiracy theories do not accept coincidences and because they are driven by a need to create meaning, this incident fit the narrative.

The reelection of Donald Trump, whose consistent championing of populist, right-wing causes and virulent criticism of existing politico-administrative structures and cultures has reinforced conspiratorial views on both sides of the Atlantic and permitted those critical of political correctness, DEI, and climate change to express their views, reinvigorated hope for a new world based on right-wing values. This clearly emboldened the Danish conspiracy milieu.

“Welcome to B.O.O.M. ... The Danish version of D.O.G.E.,” wrote Danish member of Parliament Lars Boje Mathiesen on X in mid-February 2025.¹⁰ In English, “BOOM” translates to “Citizens’ Public Cleanup Department” (Borgernes Offentlige Oprydnings Myndighed), but the choice of acronym clearly denotes the wish to blow up a Danish Deep State, seen as bloated and corrupt. Mathiesen, currently in the process of launching a new “Citizens Party” after stepping down as chairman of the populist New Right party, has previously spread the so-called “Great Reset” conspiracy theory, arguing that the WEF was behind a plan to take over the world. Prominent vaccine critic and medical doctor Vibeke Manniche has used her praise of Trump and HHS secretary Robert F. Kennedy, Jr. to express her anger with the Danish government

in the areas of the war in Ukraine, COVID-19 vaccines, and the supposed continued censorship of her work.¹¹ Other Danish conspiracy theorists are more ambivalent towards Trump, whom they see as yet another cog in the wheel of a global New World Order conspiracy run by a Jewish elite, which historically has masterminded the JFK assassination, 9/11, and the current wars in Gaza and Ukraine.¹²

“America” provides Danish conspiracy theories a language that allows the expression of dissatisfaction with political decisions and cultural trends and the mobilization and reinforcement of group dynamics. The rich American conspiratorial history provides an image of both disease and cure, of culprits and heroes that has been used in Denmark since 9/11 to make sense of a chaotic and complex world. After the 2024 election, conspiratorial explanations have become more legitimate and are now weaponized further in a polarized discourse aimed at bolstering right-wing populist causes, challenging political culture and cohesion.

Notes

- ¹ Nils Arne Sørensen and Klaus Petersen, “Ameri-Danes and Pro-American Anti-Americans: Cultural Americanization and Anti-Americanism in Denmark After 1945,” in *The Americanization of Europe: Culture, Diplomacy, Anti-Americanism after 1945*, ed. Alexander Stephan (Berghahn Books, 2007), 115–46.
- ² Rob Kroes, “American Empire and Cultural Imperialism: A View from the Receiving End,” *Diplomatic History* 23, no. 3 (Summer 1999): 463–77.
- ³ Michael Barkun, *A Culture of Conspiracy: Apocalyptic Visions in Contemporary America*, 2nd ed. (University of California Press, 2013).
- ⁴ Bernard Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Belknap, 1967).
- ⁵ Peter Knight, *Conspiracy Culture: From Kennedy to The X-Files* (Routledge, 2000).
- ⁶ Alex Jones, “Alex Jones INFOWARS 2009 - Guest Niels Harrit Exposing Thermite in WTC 911 Dust,” *Infowars*, 2009, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6qWusjGT-jo>
- ⁷ Anastasiya Astapova et al., *Conspiracy Theories and the Nordic Countries* (Routledge, 2021).
- ⁸ Niels Harrit, “Speech at Bilderberg 2014 in Copenhagen,” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=r5fL-dOzVsA>
- ⁹ KonspirationDK, Facebook post, March 28, 2020, <https://www.facebook.com/photo?fbid=2578345552424333&set=a.1802172243375005>

- ¹⁰ Lars Boje Mathiesen, Post on X, February 12, 2025, <https://x.com/LBMathiesen/status/1889455980070707468>
- ¹¹ Vibeke Manniche, Facebook post, March 7, 2025, <https://www.facebook.com/share/r/1DkXn4cpTE/>
- ¹² Anastasia Maria Loupis, Post on X, December 15, 2024, <https://x.com/DrLoupis/status/1868387520402305160>

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