chapter 16

Norwegian ‘Conspirituality’ A Brief Sketch

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In November 2012, one of the first “graduates” of the Norwegian princess Märtha Louise’s “angel school” (Astarte Innovation) and the first to start her own, formally resigned her Norwegian citizenship. She handed in her passport and declared herself an independent “freewoman” of the land, without obligations to the state or its regulations.¹

Already a minor celebrity as a practitioner within the alternative religious scene, she had also attracted attention for claiming that vaccines contained CIA-made RFID nano-chips with GPS for tracking and capacity for thought control.² It was thus no surprise that her declaration drew a fair amount of media attention. The attention was given to the declaration, without any analysis of its ideological background. Thus, media missed the connection to what they had previously and all but simultaneously described as a conspiracy-driven, radical milieu, with sensationalist speculations about violence and terrorism.³

The latter speculations were farfetched, but not wholly without grounding in terms of what their ideological influences and connections had done. The declaration of personal independence was derived from the “Freemen-on-the-land” – movement, a rather haphazardly (dis)organized “movement” variously described as related to, part of, or partially intertwined with the American “Sovereign Citizen” – movement (Rooke 2012; Anti-Defamation League 2012: 4

Their rhetoric against government legitimacy is overlapping, and people involved in the latter “movement” have at times used it to effect violence. This has resulted in a series of murders of, for instance, law enforcement officers. The Sovereign Citizen movement is thus recognized as a domestic terrorist threat in the United States (Federal Bureau of Intelligence 2011). ⁴ “Freemen” internationally tend to be less prone to such extremes.

³ For example NTB 22.11.2012, “Politiet frykter voldelige konspirasjonsteoretikere,” reprinted in around 60 papers, and was widely quoted and discussed.
⁴ Moreover, “freemen” are seen as just one of the many names “sovereign citizens” ideology goes by in its individualized practice (Federal Bureau of Intelligence 2011).
The combination of “soft” alternative spirituality and a politics driven by all-encompassing conspiracy theories is part of an international trend recently termed “conspirituality” by Charlotte Ward and David Voas (2011). They use the term specifically to denote a combination of beliefs that a “paradigm shift” in consciousness is taking place, and that secret groups control, or try to control, the social order (Ward & Voas 2011: 104).

Ward and Voas present the combination of alternative spirituality and conspiracy theory as a relatively new and fairly paradoxical phenomenon. The phenomenon is complex, but it is neither as new, nor as paradox-riddled as they would make it (Dyrendal & Asprem 2013): As an emergent movement or semi-separate trend within contemporary “occulture” (see Partridge 2004; Partridge 2005) combining the specific elements mentioned above, conspirituality may be construed as fairly recent. As a broader phenomenon, the integration of conspiracy theories and spirituality has a long history in esoteric discourse, with conspiracy theory playing the role of, among other things, theodicy. And the combination of extreme politics and alternative, esoteric religion is certainly not new (for example Goodrick-Clarke 2002; Gardell 2003).

Although the phenomenon is not quite as surprising as Ward and Voas argue, their concept forces our attention on what may be construed as a narrower subset of dark occulture (Partridge 2005), namely a specific version of what Michael Barkun has termed improvisational millennialism (Barkun 2003). The latter term highlights the fact that the “paradigm shift in consciousness” denotes a millennial perspective. “Conspirituality” prompts us to focus on the cross-sections of conspiracy culture and alternative spirituality, and to the internal tensions here: The values and structure of the cultic milieu (Campbell 1972) means, as noted by Barkun (2003), that conspiracy theory is hard to avoid. Ward and Voas shift our focus to the spiritual imperative of positive thinking which ascertains that conspiracy thinking is also seen as at least partially problematic.

The "conspiritual" scene in Norway has received little attention for any historical period. The broadest treatment is a deep, journalistic study published just as this article was finished (Færseth 2013). Although a few, popularizing articles have been published, most of what we think we know is through “notes in passing” in research on related topics or figures. By necessity, then, this chapter presents an outline of the field as seen through earlier research with other foci, and a few sources from recent and not so recent history. I will, by

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5 A brief note on sources: I have looked at primary sources mainly in regard to the Brochmann movement and the contemporary scene. For the early period, I have been through 6 volumes of collected writings by Brochmann and his colleague Bonde. For the later period, I have read