

Radicalization and Recruitment in Islamic Activism: Insights from Social Movement Research

Thomas Olesen*

One of the central concerns of social movement research over the last 30 years has been to explain why some people choose to participate in activism, while others – the majority – do not. The focus of this research has mainly been on red-green and rights activism. In the current situation, however, there is a growing interest in the radicalization and recruitment processes related to Islamic activism. Until this point religiously inspired activism has only been dealt with sporadically in social movement research. Similarly, research on political Islamic – an academic growth area since 9/11 – has not systematically engaged with the social movement literature. With a view to stimulating more debate across these disciplinary fields, this paper presents an overview of existing theories and results within social movement research that deal with aspects of recruitment and radicalization. On the basis of this overview the paper proposes a tentative list of areas where social movement theory might be particularly fruitful for the analysis of Islamic activism and radicalization. The paper distinguishes between four different types of explanation of recruitment and radicalization: 1) Individual or social-psychological explanations; 2) relational or network explanations; 3) structural explanations; and 4) media and diffusion explanations.



*Biography:

Thomas Olesen is associate professor, Ph.D. in the Department of Political Science, Aarhus University, Denmark. His research interests are social movements, media, and globalization. Publications include *International Zapatismo: The Construction of Solidarity in the Age of Globalization* (London: Zed Books, 2005); "Contentious Cartoons: Elite and Media Driven Mobilization", *Mobilization*, 12(1), 2007: 37-52; "The Funny Side of Globalization: Humour and Humanity in Zapatista Framing", *International Review of Social History* 52(4), Supplement S15, 2007: 21-34; "The Porous Public and the Transnational Dialectic: The Muhammed Cartoons Conflict", *Acta Sociologica* 50(3), 2007: 295-308.

tho@ps.au.dk