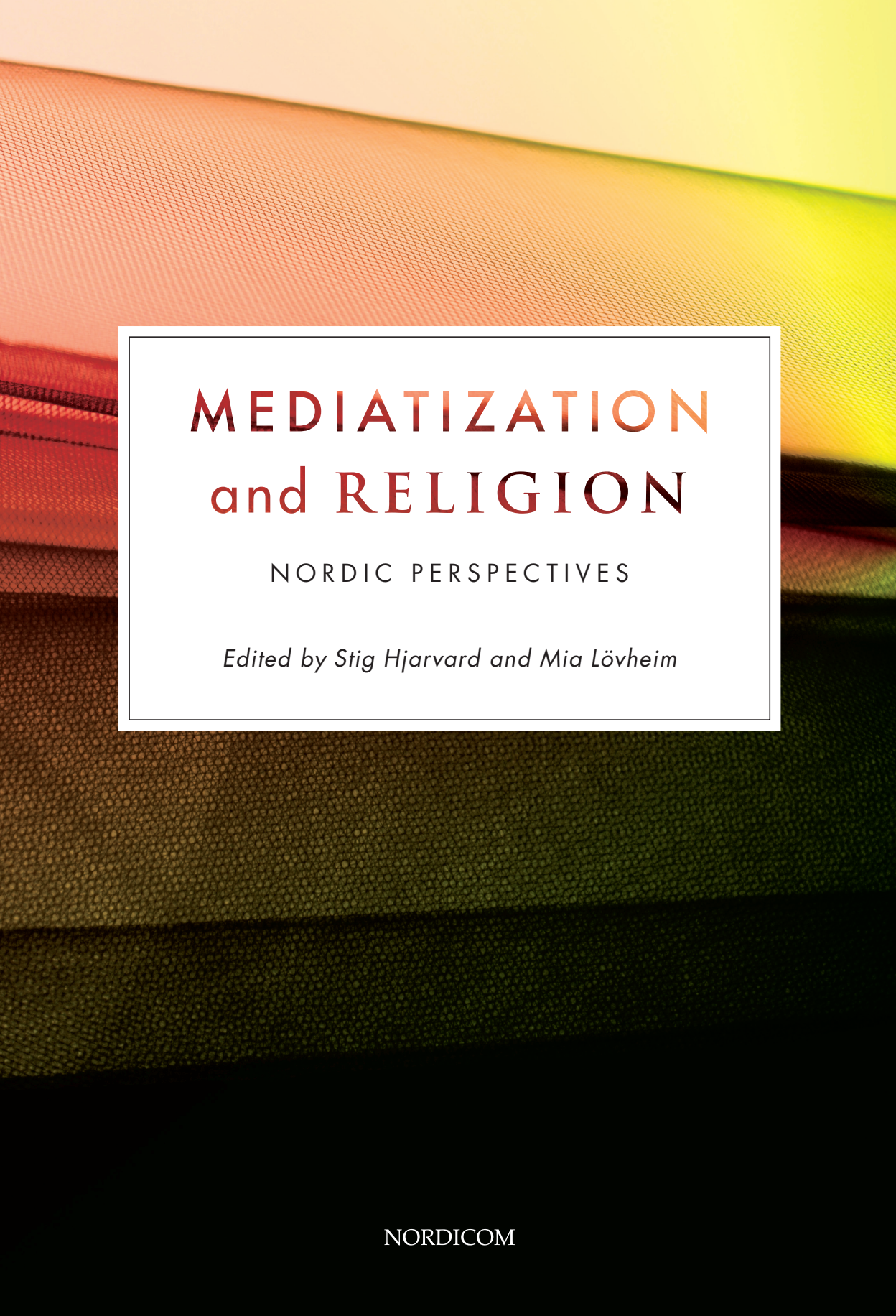




MEDIATIZATION and RELIGION

NORDIC PERSPECTIVES

Edited by Stig Hjarvard and Mia Lövheim

NORDICOM

NORDICOM's activities are based on broad and extensive network of contacts and collaboration with members of the research community, media companies, politicians, regulators, teachers, librarians, and so forth, around the world. The activities at Nordicom are characterized by three main working areas.

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In yearbooks, newsletters and survey articles the Clearinghouse has an ambition to broaden and contextualize knowledge about children, young people and media literacy. The Clearinghouse seeks to bring together and make available insights concerning children's and young people's relations with mass media from a variety of perspectives.

Mediatization and Religion

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Nordic Perspectives

Stig Hjarvard & Mia Lövheim (eds)

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Introduction

Stig Hjarvard & Mia Lövheim

The aim of this book is to present Nordic perspectives on the interplay between media, religion, and culture. The book has grown out of the Nordic Research Network on the Mediatization of Religion and Culture (funded by NordForsk 2006-2010) that has proven to be a highly fruitful cross-disciplinary collaboration between Nordic scholars from sociology of religion, film and media studies, and theology. While many of the theoretical and empirical studies emerging from this network have already appeared in a variety of international publications (e.g., Sumiala et al. 2006; *Northern Lights* 2008; Lundby 2009; *Culture and Religion* 2011), we have deliberately sought to emphasize a Nordic dimension in the present collection. This Nordic focus should not be seen as part of an exercise in introspection, but rather as an attempt to join the international dialogue on media, religion, and culture from a particular regional perspective.

In the last twenty years, research into the interplay between media and religion has become a significant area of academic interest (cf. Engelke 2010) in which Nordic researchers from an early stage have been influential. In 1993, an international conference on the theme “Religion, Media and Culture” was arranged in Uppsala, Sweden. This initiative, taken by a research project with the same name and based at the Faculty of Theology at Uppsala University, became the starting-point for a biennial International Conference on Media, Religion and Culture. These conferences have provided a stimulating forum for scholars conducting international and interdisciplinary research in the area, as indicated by publications such as *Rethinking Media, Religion and Culture* (Hoover and Lundby 1997), *Practicing Religion in the Age of the Media* (Hoover and Clark 2002), *Mediating Religion. Conversations in Media, Religion and Culture* (Mitchell and Marriage 2003), *Key Words in Media, Religion and Culture* (Morgan 2008) and *Religion, Media, and Culture: A Reader* (Lynch, Mitchell and Strhan 2011).

In the present volume, we turn our focus to theoretical developments and empirical applications of theories relating to the role of media in social change

and religious transformation in modern Nordic societies – for example, as examined using the concepts of mediatization and secularization. More particularly, the volume addresses:

- Theoretical and empirical developments in mediatization perspectives on religion
- The changing role of the national Lutheran Church in a mediatized culture
- Popular media culture as an important source of religious imagination and practice
- The media's role in negotiations of Islamic identities in increasingly multicultural Nordic societies
- New media and the performance of religious identity and ritual

“Nordic contribution” here refers not only to the geographical origin of the contributing researchers or the choice of empirical examples, but also to specific characteristics of the Nordic countries which can influence the interplay between media, religion, and culture. As regards media systems and religious communities, the Nordic countries share a number of similarities that shape the intersection between media and religion in ways that differ in several respects from elsewhere in the world. Despite their national differences, the media systems of Nordic countries are – like Nordic societies in general – characterized by a high degree of public interest and intervention. To use the terminology of Hallin and Mancini (2004), the Nordic countries are the example *par excellence* of a democratic-corporatist media system characterized by a strong public service component and a long historical tradition of widespread newspaper readership. In addition, it features a very high degree of market penetration by new media (Internet, mobile media, etc.) in which the ‘old’ public service media and newspapers also have a strong presence. In contrast to the so-called polarized pluralist media system of Southern Europe and the liberal media system of the United States, it means (among other things) that every major Nordic media outlet is non-confessional in nature and, moreover, that public media are the public's primary source of information about religious matters (Hjarvard 2008a; Lövheim 2008; Lundby 2010; Sjöborg 2012). American-style televangelism is only a marginal phenomenon in the Nordic countries, and Christian newspapers lack the prominence of their counterparts in Southern Europe.

Compared to other parts of the world, Nordic societies appear highly secular, with religion being widely regarded as a private matter primarily and the Church playing a less prominent social role (Inglehart 2007). Not only has membership of the national Lutheran Churches in the Nordic countries experienced a long decline, there is also ample evidence of individuals ‘believing without belonging’ (Davie 1994: 2000) (that is, sustaining individualized forms of belief

outside of a organized religious community) and ‘belonging without believing’ (that is, remaining a passive member of the national Protestant Church whose participation is limited to baptisms, weddings, and funerals). Through the national Lutheran churches, Protestantism has until recently enjoyed an almost *de facto* monopoly on organized religion in the Nordic countries. However, this situation now is changing in consequence of several factors. A growing immigrant population has increased the presence of other religious denominations in the Nordic countries, with Islam in particular having gained a stronger presence. Globalization in general and a globalized media culture in particular have brought the population into more intense contact with a variety of religious issues and discussions, making it possible for smaller communities and individuals to discuss and practice religious beliefs in contexts beyond that of the established religions. For the most part, the media has been overlooked as an area of research by mainstream scholars of the sociology of religion. Yet current developments are highlighting its crucial role in forming the conditions for what has variously been termed a “resurgence” of religion, and a turn towards a “post-secular condition” in contemporary society (Philpott et al. 2011; Habermas 2006). This new situation also puts the national Lutheran churches under further pressure to transform themselves in an increasingly multicultural and mediatized environment (Botvar and Schmidt 2010; Bäckström et al 2011; Thomsen and Borup 2012).

Finally, there is also a particular theoretical framework that has informed research on the interplay between media, religion and culture in the Nordic countries. Previous scholarship in this area has been strongly influenced by a “culturalist” perspective (Hoover 2006) on media and religion, allied with a turn toward popular religious practice and the circulation of religious symbols and narratives in popular culture (Lynch 2007). This perspective has been articulated as an attempt to rectify simplistic understandings of religion and media in media studies and religious studies, where they have been conceptualized as separate and competing categories rather than connected aspects of the transformation of meaning-making and social interaction in late modernity (Hoover and Lundby 1997: 10). Furthermore, studies which draw on this perspective have tended to focus on the ideological meanings of media texts, or on micro-analysis of the ways in which various audiences use media devices and representations in their everyday lives.

In the Nordic context, much theoretical discussion has focused on the concept of ‘mediatization’ as a novel way of theorizing the media-religion nexus. As Lundby (2012/forthcoming) suggests in his overview of theoretical frameworks in the field, several other research traditions have focused on ‘mediation’ as a key concept in order to understand how media can influence religion, and vice versa (Meyer and Moors 2006; Morgan 2008), and on the mediated nature of religion itself (cf. Stolorow 2005). The concept of mediatization emphasizes the

factor of religious change with respect to the media's long-term influence as a set of social and cultural institutions, aesthetic practices, and technologies. The Nordic contributors to this volume do not necessarily share a common view on mediatization theory, and the various presuppositions and implications of the theory, together with its implications for religion, have been the subject of lively debate both inside and outside the network (see for instance *Culture and Religion* (2011)). Nevertheless, by applying mediatization theory to the study of religion, Nordic researchers have given new theoretical impetus to international discussions of the complex interrelationships between media, religion, and culture. The contributions in this volume provide additional theoretical and empirical energy to an ongoing debate over the mediatization of religion.

The chapters of the volume are organized into four thematic sections. The first section, "Mediatization, Public Media, and the National Church", focuses on the public presence of religion and the changing role of the national Lutheran Church in a mediatized culture. Stig Hjarvard, University of Copenhagen, in a chapter titled "Three Forms of Mediatized Religion: Changing the Public Face of Religion" takes his point of departure in the apparent paradox between religion's continued presence in the public media and the diminishing commitment to organized religion in Nordic countries. To this end, he develops a typology of three types of mediatized religion: (1) 'religious media', (2) 'journalism on religion', and (3) 'banal religion'. While the first type corresponds in part to organized religion, and may serve to project religious narratives into the public realm, the other two forms are driven primarily by various media considerations. Because of the mediatization of religion, he argues, 'religious media' play only a marginal role in the construction of public religion. 'Journalism on religion' and 'banal religion' may stimulate criticism towards the church as well as add force to individualized and more *bricolage*-like forms of religion.

In his chapter "The Internet Mediatization of Religion and the Church", Peter Fischer-Nielsen, Aarhus University, analyzes the use of internet communication by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark. His focus is dual: first, how Danes' increased involvement with religion on the internet points to changes in the communicative conditions for the Church; and second, how pastors' use of the internet in their work is changing the Church's institutional practices. The chapter concludes that in some respects a mediatization of religion is taking place as the internet challenges the church as the natural place in which to engage with religion. At a local level, mediated and non-mediated activities tend to amalgamate, a process that may bring the church in closer contact with the population. By showing how *mediatization of religion* and *mediatization of church* must be treated as two separate yet related issues, Nielsen brings empirical nuance to the debate over mediatization.

In his chapter "Mediatization, Deprivatization, and Vicarious Religion: Coverage of Religion and Homosexuality in the Scandinavian Mainstream Press",

Henrik Reintoft Christensen, Aarhus University, offers a critical account of Grace Davie's concept of 'vicarious religion'. Using recent Scandinavian media debates on homosexuality and the National Church as an analytical test case, he finds little support for Davie's idea that these public debates offer a prime example of a vicarious debate (Davie 2006). Instead, by using theories of mediatization and deprivatization, he argues that these debates are better understood as questioning the legitimacy of certain dogmatic aspects of religious authority, and they evoke an internal theological defense against post-material values perceived to threaten genuine Christian faith.

In their chapter "The Evangelical Lutheran Church and the Media in Post-Secular Finland", Marcus Moberg and Sofia Sjö, Åbo Akademi University, focus on the relationship between media and institutional Christianity by analyzing examples of recent engagements with the contemporary media by the Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Church. They advocate the concept of the 'post-secular' as a useful basis both for situating the mediatization of religion debate within a broader sociological perspective on the place of religion in late-modern society, and for acknowledging the diverse and often complex ways in which religious communities actively respond to and reflexively negotiate their presence within the new 'extended' sphere of public media. The Church, they conclude, can be said to have initiated what might be called a process of 'self-mediatization'. However, such transformation of the Church's methods of communication and interaction may also be indicative of how religious institutions are finding new ways to enter the mediated public sphere.

The second section, "The Mediatization of Social Conflicts", starts with an article by Knut Lundby and Kjersti Thorbjørnsrud, University of Oslo, on "Mediatization of Controversy: When the Security Police Went on Facebook". Their empirical point of departure is the publication in Norway of a caricature of the prophet Muhammad as a pig, first on the Facebook page of the Norwegian Security Police Service, and then in the mainstream news. The study traces circumstances and events preceding the publication, and analyses the news coverage of subsequent protests and counter-protests as they relate to three transformative levels of mediatization: narrative transformations, institutional transformations, and cultural transformation. The performance of religious ritual is central to the chapter by Johanna Sumiala, University of Tampere, titled "Ritualising Death in the Media. Symbolic Immortality, The Immanent Frame, and School Shootings". Sumiala's analysis, which is based on media anthropology, focuses on the ritualization of death in the context of mainstream and social media during two school shootings in Finland: in Jokela in 2007 and in Kauhajoki in 2008. In times of great public distress, ritualization of death in and through the media enforces the media's power over religious institutions, transforming the media into a forum for social ritual. Furthermore, ritualization in the media highlights 'this-worldliness' by emphasising the social and

cultural consequences of death. In so doing, she argues, the media becomes the 'immanent frame' (Taylor 2007) in post-Protestant Finland.

The third section, "Religious Identity and a Changing Media Environment," engages with the media's role in the negotiation of Islamic identity in an increasingly multicultural society. In her chapter, "A Voice of their Own: Young Muslim Women, Blogs and Religion," Mia Lövheim, Uppsala University, examines how female bloggers are acquiring a new voice in debates over religion, specifically Islam, in three Scandinavian countries. The Norwegian 'KurdiskMuslima' blog, the Swedish blog of Ana Gina, and the Danish blog of Gülay Kocbay are used as empirical case studies to explore how new media can provide possibilities for young women to act as agents and speak from a position of authority. In this way, mediatization may contribute to conceptions of religion that challenge conventional representations of gender and Islam. Using the concept of 'ethical spaces' (Christensen and Jerslev 2009), Lövheim argues that these blogs become a new form of space in which values are negotiated collaboratively through the resources of new media. Thus, they offer performative spaces that enable a generation of young Muslims to define themselves, personally and collectively, in new ways.

Ehab Galal, University of Copenhagen, in his article "Belonging through Believing: Becoming Muslim through Islamic programming" explores the relationship between the religious identities of Muslims in Nordic countries and their viewing of satellite television from the region from where they emigrated. Key issues include: how the symbolic resources mediated by Islamic programming offer an inclusive space for Muslim identification by positioning audiences as specific kinds of believers, and how this may converge or conflict with ideas of belonging in the Nordic context. In particular, *fatwa* programs, based on questions from Muslim audiences all over the world, are shown to address their audience in ways that focus on *becoming* Muslim. Using the concept of 'vicarious religion' (Davie 2006), Galal argues that these programs effectively stage Muslim identity in new ways, characterised by 'belonging through believing'. The idea of belonging is justified in terms of individual achievements of belief, and the media plays a crucial role in staging the religious performance that supports this belonging.

The chapters in the final section, "Religion and Popular Media Culture," focus on popular media culture as a source of religious imagination and practice. In her article "Danish *Twilight* Fandom: Transformative Processes of Religion," Line Nybro Petersen, University of Copenhagen, analyzes responses to the *Twilight Saga* book and movie series by a group of Danish teenage girls. She identifies four factors that support and intensify the way in which mediatization transforms the role of religion in modern Western societies. First, the loss of authority by organized religions is clear from the emphasis placed by these fans upon the priority of media representations to those of institutionalized

religion. Second, cognitive processes reveal the ways in which popular fiction can reinforce a fascination with supernatural phenomena. Third, the circulation of religious symbols and narratives in popular culture transforms the meaning of these phenomena in the narrative as well as in the fans' imaginations. Fourth, the display and function of religious emotions change as they become part of the performance of fandom in emotionally charged social ceremonies. Media narratives can thereby promote engagement with religion to a culturally secular audience but in so doing they also transform both its substance and function.

Finally, in her article "Religious Change and Popular Culture – With a Nod to the Mediatization of Religion Debate", Liv Ingeborg Lied, Norwegian School of Theology, Oslo, addresses the application of mediatization theory to the study of religion. After a short presentation of major findings from her own research on popular culture and religion in Norway (Endsjø and Lied 2011), she uses these insights in a critical yet constructive discussion of mediatization theory. One of the most intriguing aspects of the mediatization of religion hypothesis is its insistence upon the influence of popular culture in the ongoing reshaping of religion. However, the process of the mediatization of religion may be more prominent in some cultural areas than others. For instance, while the mediatization thesis may offer an evaluable explanatory framework for studying present-day apocalyptic and eschatological discourses, the media's influence may be less obvious in other areas. The institutional level of analysis which Hjarvard proposes (2008a) may also have its own weaknesses by delimiting the scope of the theory to countries of North-Western Europe, where religion typically takes a highly institutionalized form, i.e. the Protestant Church. Finally, she suggests that a combination of insights from cultural and cognitive perspectives on religion may provide an opportunity to consider religion as a continuum of religious forms, ranging from the explicit and reflective to the implicit and intuitive, i.e. involving both institutionalized and other forms of religion, including 'banal religion'. The study of the mediatization of religion can only benefit from such a multi-faceted conception of its subject.

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Mediatization, Public Media and the National Church

Three Forms of Mediatized Religion

Changing the Public Face of Religion

Stig Hjarvard

At the height of the Mohammed cartoon conflict in 2006, Danish Prime Minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen stated that religion should be a private matter and not play a major role in the public sphere¹. He was immediately countered by a number of religious representatives who – not surprisingly – argued that religion had a natural place in the public realm. The Mohammed cartoon conflict was not only a prominent example of a growing presence of religion in the public sphere, but also an indicator of the changing nature of the public face of religion and the difficulty of controlling public representations of religion. The controversies regarding the Mohammed cartoons of course did involve a traditional Islamic concern about whether or not to depict Mohammed in pictures, but the representation of Islam and the conflict itself were not primarily controlled by religious actors; rather, they were instigated and structured by a series of media dynamics, including the initial journalistic initiative to publish the cartoons, the news media's framing of Islam, public diplomacy through transnational satellite television, and popular mobilization through various mobile and digital media (Eide et al. 2008; Hjarvard 2010a; Stage 2011). In other words, it was a *mediatized conflict* (Cottle 2006) because the media became partly constitutive of the ways in which this clash over public representations of religion was played out.

The magnitude and repercussions of the Mohammed cartoon conflict were of course exceptional and the incident as such is not representative of the ways in which religion is represented in the public realm under less conflict-ridden circumstances. It does, however, bear witness to the fact that media have acquired an important role not only in the transmission of religious imagery, but also in the very production and framing of religious issues. Religious organizations and advocates may still produce their own public representations of religion, but the extent to which these get circulated is heavily influenced by the media system and religious organizations are more often forced to react to the media's representations of religious issues than the other way around. For

instance, the Catholic Church felt obliged to react to the popular books and movies by Dan Brown (Partridge 2008), and the news media's uncovering of widespread sexual abuse of boys by Catholic priests seriously influenced the Church's public reputation despite various attempts to apologize. The majority of public representations of religion are not disseminated by religious organizations, but are produced and circulated by the media and serve social functions other than those pursued by religious organizations.

The continued presence of various religious issues on the media's agenda and the problems organized religions encounter controlling the public images of their religion point to a more fundamental paradox that I have touched upon previously (Hjarvard 2011a), but would like to elaborate on here: the growth in religions' public media presence has *not* – at least in the case of the Nordic countries – been accompanied by a revival of organized religion. For instance, in Danish media there has been growing and continuous coverage of both Christianity and Islam as well as other religious issues since the 1980s (Rosenfeldt 2007), but the usual indicators of support for the national Protestant Church ('Folkekirken'), such as the number of baptized children, confirmations, church weddings and overall membership, indicate a slow, but steady decline. This decline in organized religion is partially offset by an increase in the number of some Islamic religious organizations and other immigrant religious communities, although other communities have also experienced a decline (Center for Samtidsreligion, 2009; 2010; 2011). The continued public media presence of religious issues does not seem to be a reflection of a growing commitment to organized religion. Instead, we are witnessing a paradoxical combination of high media attention to religious issues in the public realm and a slow, but steady decline of interest in organized religion at the individual and private level. This decline may not necessarily be synonymous with a decline in religious belief as such, but may be accompanied by a renewal of more individualized forms of religious imaginations and practices that may also find resonance in the media. From a theoretical point of view, the paradox points to the interconnections between the two general social processes of mediatization and secularization. The mediatization of religion (Hjarvard 2008) is changing the public representation of religion in late modernity at the same time that secularization (Bruce 2002; Dobbelaere 2002; Taylor 2007) is evoking both a decline and a transformation of religious organizations, practices and beliefs. How processes of mediatization and secularization are mutually interdependent – in some cases synergetic, in others conflicting – is a complex question that also needs to take into account other social and cultural processes like globalization, commercialization and individualization.

During the last decades, some scholars from theology and the sociology of religion have criticized and even denounced secularization theory. Peter Berger, once an ardent proponent of secularization theory himself, has used

the growing public presence of religion as an argument to declare the world as “furiously religious as it ever was, and in some places more so than ever” and proclaim that “a whole body of literature by historians and social scientists loosely labeled ‘secularization theory’ is essentially mistaken” (Berger 1999: 2). In a similar way, Rodney Stark has stated that there is no evidence to support the proposition that modernity fosters secularization and declares: “it seems time to carry the secularization doctrine to the graveyard of failed theories” (Stark 1999: 270). These radical advocates of the death of secularization, however, do paint an oversimplified picture of secularization theory and tend to ignore the empirical evidence. Their rhetorical equation of secularization with the total disappearance of religion serves as a straw-man argument allowing them to announce the opposite, yet similarly one-dimensional development: the resurgence of religion all over the world. If we go several decades back, we may find some scholars of religion (including Peter Berger) talking about secularization as the end of religion. However, secularization theory in general is not predicting the total disappearance of religion, but is occupied with a series of structural transformations in modern societies: the diminishing role of institutionalized forms of religion in society, the accommodation of churches to secular contexts and the transformation of faith, including the rise of more individualized forms of beliefs (e.g., Bruce 2002; Dobbelaere 2002; Taylor 2007).

Social scientists like Norris and Inglehart (2004) and Inglehart and Welzel (2005) have conducted extensive cross-national and long-term empirical analyses pointing to the conclusion that secularization is still an important feature of modernization processes in contemporary societies in Western Europe, the USA and elsewhere. There are, quite obviously, also numerous variations and interesting exceptions, but the overall empirical data do not falsify basic tenets of the secularization paradigm. It may be interesting to note that Jürgen Habermas, who has lately been embraced by religious proponents and skeptics of secularization theory because of his arguments about the possibility of mutual learning processes between religious and secular actors in the public sphere, is very clear about this general empirical trend: “the data collected globally still provide surprisingly robust support for the defenders of the secularization thesis” (Habermas 2008: 19). Casanova (2007), who has been skeptical of certain tenets of secularization theory, nevertheless states that “[t]o drop the concept or the theory of secularization would leave us analytically impoverished and without adequate conceptual tools in trying to trace the ‘archeology’ and ‘genealogy’ of Western Modernity” (Casanova 2007: 103). In view of these qualifications, secularization is not about the end of religion, but about the transformation of religion in the modern world. Furthermore, it is not the only interesting theoretical framework of relevance for the study of media and religion, and, therefore, must also be accompanied by other strands of research (e.g., studies of religious rituals and worship). Secularization research is interesting, because

the mediatization of religion involves the decline of institutionalized religious authorities (and the rise of media as authorities) at the same time as the mediatization of religion also reflects the continued presence, transformation and significance of religious imaginations in secular societies.

From this perspective, the aim of the article is to address how processes of mediatization are changing the nature of public representations of religion in highly secularized societies like the Nordic countries. Furthermore, I will discuss how these transformations may be related to the ways that religious organizations, beliefs and practices are developing in the Nordic context of the dominant Christian Protestant Church. The argument will mainly be theoretical, but various statistics and examples are taken into consideration in order to illustrate and validate the general argument. More specifically, I will present a typology of *three different forms of mediatized religions* and each of these involves a particular way of communicating about religion in the public sphere: (1) *religious media*, (2) *journalism on religion* and (3) *banal religion*. Through this typology we may develop a higher sensitivity to the degrees and forms of mediatization that are taking place in the field of religion, as each of them reflect a specific mode of power and control over the representation of religion. Because the theme of this article is about the public face of religion, I deliberately focus on the representational aspects of media and only deal with mediated interaction in so far as it is relevant for the overall argument, for instance regarding the question of control over public representations.

Mediatization: A double-sided process

The process of mediatization is certainly not restricted to the realm of religion, but denotes a much more general process through which a variety of social fields become dependent on the media. Historically, the concept of mediatization emerged as either a way to describe the growing media influence in the field of politics (Asp 1990; Mazzoleni and Schulz 1999) or to label the growing importance of media in post-modern or late-modern society in general (Baudrillard 1981; Thompson 1995). During recent years, both theoretical and empirical studies of mediatization have intensified and provided both nuances and stronger conceptual clarity to our understanding of mediatization processes (Krotz 2007; Hjarvard 2008a; Lundby 2009; Hepp, Hjarvard and Lundby 2010). In particular, the theory of mediatization has proved useful for the analysis and discussion of how media spread to, become intertwined with, and influence other cultural fields (Bourdieu 1993) and social institutions (Giddens 1984), like consumption (Jansson 2002), education (Friesen and Hug 2009; Hjarvard 2010b), research (Rödder and Schäfer 2010) and religion (Hjarvard 2008b). The ways that media come to influence and make other social fields dependent on

the media may vary both in degree and quality, and as in most social relations, it is also a reciprocal process. As media become intertwined with other social fields, media practices may also be influenced by the dominant *modus operandi* of the field in question. Thus, some media may prove more useful than others for the specific field in question, and the media may be appropriated in very different ways as they come to serve particular purposes in, for instance, the school, the workplace or the family.

Mediatization not only affects other social fields or institutions in a variety of ways, but also signifies a new social and cultural condition in which the media in general come to serve a different role in culture and society. A hundred years ago, media were predominantly in the service of other social institutions. The political press was to a large extent under the control of political parties and movements, and some journals and magazines served scientific, cultural or religious interests. For most of the 20th century, radio and then later television were predominantly cultural institutions. Bestowed by law with public service obligations, broadcasting in the Nordic countries was not a media business, but a cultural institution that should enlighten the populace and provide an unbiased representation of the various institutions of society, like politics, industry, culture etc. Due to a variety of interrelated developments from the 1980s and onwards, including the deregulation of media industries, the arrival of new media technologies and a general climate of neoliberal policies, the media gradually became more commercial but also more independent of other social institutions. In a sociological sense, media became a media institution. They were to a much lesser extent in the service of other institutions (apart from the commercial market) and to a larger degree able to pursue their own interests as media organizations. Increasingly, media became governed by their own *modus operandi*, like technical possibilities, generic conventions and market considerations, and other institutions progressively had to accommodate to the demands of the media in order to gain access to one of the vital collective resources that media control: public representation.

The general process of mediatization is characterized by a double-sided development. On the one hand, the media acquired relative autonomy vis-à-vis other social institutions like politics and religion; on the other hand, the media became integrated into the very life-world of other institutions. Not least, digital and interactive media have become part and parcel of everyday life in almost all social institutions and have enabled both organizations and individuals to interact across time and space in much more flexible ways. The media are both present “out-there” in society as a relatively autonomous institution and available “in-here” as a resource for communicative interaction for organizations and individuals alike. The “in-here” dimension of mediatization from one point of view may empower individual social actors like politicians or ministers to bypass media organizations and communicate directly with their

respective followers in surprisingly new ways. As Lövheim (2011) has argued, the mediatization of religion also involves “the agency of religious actors and the possible vitality and significance of modern expressions of religion” (Lövheim 2011: 162). From another perspective, the usage of various forms of (interactive) media by organizations and individuals nevertheless requires a certain degree of adaptation to the various norms and characteristics of these media. For instance, if a church wants to use a blog or Facebook to communicate with possible followers, it must to some extent adhere to the already established conventions of these media as regards choice of appropriate topics, use of language, level of responsiveness etc. In this way, the “in-here” dimension of mediatization also induces a change in the ways that various institutions interact both internally and with the outside world.

Finally, the process of mediatization must be distinguished from the partly related concept of “mediation”. There may be no generally accepted definition of mediation, but for the sake of comparison we will consider mediation as the concrete act of communication through a medium. Thus, compared to non-mediated communication (i.e., face-to-face in co-presence), mediated communication extends human communication in time, space and ways of expressions. Due to the specific affordances and constraints of the media in question, the concrete instance of mediation may alter the form and content of the message and influence the relationship between the sender and receiver – compared to non-mediated forms of communication or other forms of mediated communication. But the particular instance of mediation does not alter the social institution itself or its relationship towards the outside world. Mediatization, by contrast, concerns the long-term process whereby social and cultural institutions and modes of interaction are changed as a consequence of the growth of the media’s influence. From this perspective, the mediatization of religion concerns the ways that religious organizations, practices and beliefs are altered through the increased presence of media both inside and outside the institution of religion.

Mediatization of religion

As I have argued elsewhere, the mediatization of religion does not transform religion in a uniform way or produce a single outcome, but involves a variety of changes that interact with already existing developments in the field of religion, like individualization and secularization. Since the general characteristics of mediatized religion are spelled out in more detail elsewhere (Hjarvard 2008b; 2011a), for the sake of an overview, I will summarize key developments in relation to Meyrowitz’s (1986) three metaphors of media, each of which points to a cluster of media functions: media as conduits, media as languages, and media as environments:

- *Media as conduits.* The media have become an important, if not primary, source of information and experiences concerning religious issues. The media disseminate institutionalized religious texts only to a limited extent. Most often, the media use fragments of institutionalized religion and/or elements of folk religion, civil religion etc. combined in new ways. In journalistic genres, religion is usually portrayed through the frames of secular society, often involving a critical discourse on religious organizations, and in other media genres the iconography and liturgical practices of institutionalized religions and folk religions become stockpiles for media narratives, consumer advice and entertainment. Through this process, the media provide a constant backdrop of “banal religion” in society.
- *Media as languages.* The media not only produce and circulate religion, but also format religion in different ways, in particular through the genres of popular culture, like adventure, consumer guidance, reality television, science fiction etc. Since media do not have the intention to preach, but rather to get attention, they have a higher sensibility to the immediate cultural demands of various segments of the population. This often has the side effect of promoting individualism and consumer behavior – also in the area of spiritual issues – due to the commercial nature of popular media. The spread of interactive media allows people to express religious ideas and feelings in a variety of genres that usually have not been available to institutionalized religion.
- *Media as environments.* Media contribute to the production and altering of social relationships and cultural communities (Carey 1992; Morley 2000) and they have become crucial for the public celebration of major national and cultural events (Dayan and Katz 1994). The media ritualize social transitions at micro- and macro levels; provide moral orientation, emotional therapy and consolation in times of crises. As such, the media have in some respect taken over many of the social functions formerly provided by the church, but they are now performed within a predominantly secular discourse. Similarly, the media promote various forms of worship through fan culture, celebrity culture etc.

Accordingly, the mediatization of religion implies a multidimensional transformation of religion that affects religious texts, practices and social relationships and eventually the character of belief in modern societies. The outcome is not a new kind of religion as such, but rather a new social condition in which the power to define and practice religion has changed. Since processes of mediatization are sensitive to the social and cultural contexts, the aforementioned characteristics do not apply to all societies to the same degree, but may be more valid for northern European countries and, in particular, the

Nordic countries. As Lynch (2011) has observed, the mediatization of religion may be spelled out in the above-mentioned way in social contexts in which four characteristics are dominating: (1) mainstream media institutions have a non-confessional orientation and there is limited usage of media with a strong confessional orientation; (2) when the population has little direct engagement with religious institutions, mainstream public media have become the access point for engagement with religious symbols and narratives; (3) the existence of a clearly identifiable religious institution (e.g., the Protestant Church); and (4) a high degree of secularization at societal, organizational and individual levels (Lynch 2011: 205).

The Nordic countries share these four characteristics and we may therefore expect mediatization of religion to follow at least somewhat similar lines of development within these national contexts. It is important to stress, however, that even within the Nordic context there may be differences affecting the particular relationship between media and religion, which for instance the particular national variations regarding the Mohammed cartoon crisis bear witness to (see also Lundby and Thorbjørnsrud in this volume.). However, if there is one general outcome of the mediatization of religion in the Nordic countries, it is the diminishing ability of religious organizations (the churches) to control the public representation of both religion in general and the churches' interests in particular. In order to address the variety of ways that media come to influence religious development in the Nordic countries, I will distinguish between three forms of mediatized religion, each of which represents a particular institutional framing of mediatized religion: *religious media* are trying to create religious community and identity based on mediated participation; *journalism on religion* subjects religion to the dominant discourses of the political public sphere; and *banal religion* constructs religion as a cultural commodity for entertainment and self-development.

Religious media

In regard to religious media, we are referring to media organizations and practices that are primarily controlled and performed by religious actors, either collectively (e.g., a church) or individually. They may encompass mass media, social network media and private personal media like the mobile phone. Because of our focus on public representation, we will limit ourselves to considering mass media and social network media with a public presence and usage. Historically, religious media have been numerous and even dominating within particular social and cultural contexts. Furthermore, particular media developments have spurred changes in religious communication and been implicated in transformations of religious institutions, practices and power

relationships. A significant example is the invention of the printing press in Europe around 1450, which allowed for the mass production and distribution of Christian texts and enabled a more personal relationship between the word of God and the Protestant followers to proliferate (Eisenstein 1979). In more recent history, television became a vehicle for televangelism in the United States, allowing various religious individuals to become charismatic religious leaders with a high public profile (Peck 1993). The televangelism phenomena is by no means restricted to the United States, but has proliferated to many other parts of the world, including India, where televangelism has developed into a “Masala McGospel” mixing various elements of Hinduism with American media culture (James 2010).

In a contemporary Nordic context, religious media play a more limited role. Today, only a few, smaller news media have religious affiliations or objectives, like the Danish newspaper *Kristeligt Dagblad* (2010 circulation: 26,267), the Norwegian newspapers *Dagen* (2010 circulation: 9,946) and *Vårt Land* (2010 circulation: 24,781), and the Swedish newspapers *Världen idag* (2010 circulation: 7,800) and *Dagen* (2010 circulation: 17,400)². In broadcasting, there are a handful of Christian niche channels like the Danish *Københavns Kristne TV* (KKR/TV), Swedish *Kanal 10*, and Norwegian *Radio 10*, *Kanal 10* and *Vision Norge*. For the immigrant population, there are several religious satellite television channels and programs available (see also Galal, this volume) that comparatively speaking play a more important role in some immigrant communities than the Christian niche channels play for the general population. The public service broadcasters in the Nordic countries have a limited amount of explicit religious programming that either discuss religious issues typically within a journalistic format or transmit religious services, predominantly Christian Protestant services. In Denmark, the public service broadcaster DR has two regular Christian television programs, *Før søndagen* (Before Sunday) and *Gudstjeneste fra DR Kirken* (Service from the DR Church). *Før søndagen* has an average rating of 0.6% or 32,000 viewers and *Gudstjeneste fra DR Kirken* is followed by 0.8% of the population or 42,000 viewers (1st half-year 2011)³. The watching of religious ceremony is often a supplement to actual church attendance. The average viewer of *Gudstjeneste fra DR Kirken* attends religious service in a church (or synagogue, mosque etc.) four times as frequently as television viewers in general. On rare occasions, broadcasting of Christian Protestant services receive much larger audiences and blend with the general radio and television programming. During times of national crisis (e.g. natural disasters and terrorist attacks) or celebration (e.g. royal weddings and coronations) a church service may become integrated into a larger media performance ritualizing the national mourning or festivity. Under these circumstances church and media interact more directly and mediatization may be understood as a mutual adaptation to changing social conditions.

Through the Internet and other digital media, religious organizations including the Protestant Church have acquired a new venue for communicating directly with their followers and the wider public. Religious organizations typically exercise a higher degree of editorial control over the content of these new media compared to their limited influence on mainstream media like radio, television and newspapers. The general public's use of for instance Internet web sites with religious content is, however, rather limited. Fischer-Nielsen (2010: 78) reports on the basis of data from 2009 that less than 7% of the Danish population are frequent users (at least one visit a month) of websites with predominantly religious content. The same study also emphasizes that a very large number of Protestant ministers make use of the Internet in their daily work and this may come to influence their professional network and information flows in various ways. Thus, the Internet may be more important for the internal communication in religious organizations than for the external and public communication. Fisher-Nielsen (2010) concludes that "the ways in which religion is communicated and experienced online help to confirm and strengthen the secularization that characterizes Danish society, in the sense that the national Protestant Church ("folkekirken") and religious institutions in general do not dominate the religious communication online" (Fischer Nielsen 2010: 102; my translation).

The pluralization of religious voices on the Internet not only challenges the authority of established churches, but more individualized and networked forms of religious communication practices develop inspired by the general Internet culture. Højsgaard observes that the "cyber-religious field, moreover, is characterized by such features as role-playing, identity construction, cultural adaptability, fascination with technology, and a sarcastic approach to conformist religiosity" (Højsgaard 2005: 62). Blogs and other online forums provide a venue for religious actors to discuss various issues that may challenge previous experiences of religious beliefs and values and contribute to the construction of "religious autobiographies" (Lövheim 2005). Although such discussions may be important at the individual and group level of society, online forums rarely come to set the public agenda by themselves. Examining a variety of Danish online discussions on religion, Højsgaard (2004) observes that only in one instance did a debate find its way to the broader public and he concludes that regarding discussions of religion, "the Internet cannot be said to constitute a unifying or significant centre in the 21st century Danish society" (Højsgaard 2004: 286). In combination with other (mass) media, online discussions may, nonetheless, serve a supplementary function for the public discussion of religion, as for instance Lövheim and Axner's (2011) study of the Swedish "Halal-TV" debate demonstrates.

Religious media may be considered a less mediatized form of religion compared to *journalism on religion* and *banal religion*, since religious organiza-

tions or actors are in greater control of the communication. *Religious media*, however, must also accommodate the logic of the media in a variety of ways, and this may change not only the form and content of communication, but also influence the kinds of actors and relationships that are considered legitimate and relevant. When entering the general media's public sphere, religious media come to be judged by the same standards as other media, including their ability to use technology and genres in an appropriate and interesting way. Religious actors with greater media capabilities may challenge existing religious authorities and both old and new actors are prompted to copy the media's general responsiveness to audiences and users.

Journalism on religion

The growing news coverage of both Christianity and Islam (Rosenfeldt 2007) not only reflects a quantitative development of more journalistic attention to organized religion, but also a qualitative change in which religion has moved from the margins of journalism and has become a recurrent theme within a variety of general news issues or "news beats" as they are labeled by journalists. For instance, the growing journalistic attention to Islam is not least due to the role of Islam in relation to social and political news on immigration, crime and terrorism. As a consequence, the focus of the news report involving Islam is usually not on religious issues per se, but on the allegedly problematic concomitants of Islam in relation to social and political issues (Andreassen 2007; Hervik 2002; 2011; Stage 2011).

From an institutional perspective, journalism's increased reporting on religion reflects a change in the power to define and frame religion. Both religion and journalism are communicative institutions that address a public audience in order to influence its world-views, but the norms and practices that govern the two institutions' communicative actions are very different. Journalism emerged as the craft of a particular group of media workers in the late 19th century, and during the 20th century, journalists gradually acquired professional legitimacy through their adherence to emerging cultural norms from two other institutional domains: norms of objectivity from the sciences and democratic ideals from the political world (Schudson 1978; Tuchman 1972). As a consequence, journalism is clearly positioned as a secular practice devoted to facticity and sees itself as a fourth estate of power controlling the possible misuse of power by other social institutions, including the church. Accordingly, *journalism on religion* brings religion into the political public sphere and subjects it to journalism's dominant paradigms of facticity and public accountability. We should, of course, be careful not to take the self-conception of journalism as an accurate or sufficient description of what journalists do and what journalism is all about.

The journalistic profession certainly adheres to the notions of objectivity and impartiality, but numerous studies have shown that the news can be framed in various ways and thereby comes “to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation” (Entman 1993: 52). Unintentionally or not, news media are part of the (political) agenda setting process and thereby implicated in the continuous production of both social facts and opinions (McComb 2004). As Hartley (2009) has argued, journalism is not only to be associated with democratic process and political deliberation, but is also deeply embedded in the broader popular culture. Journalism was initially – and still is – also a market-driven activity providing entertainment and voice to popular sentiments (McManus 1994; Franklin 1997). Journalistic coverage of religion will therefore also serve purposes other than rational deliberation, such as, sensationalism or the celebration of cultural events. Nevertheless, journalism has – not least in the Nordic countries – developed as a semi-independent institution that has increasingly kept an arm’s length distance to not only political parties, but also other interest groups, including religious organizations. The majority of news media consider themselves secular organizations with no intention to treat religious organizations or issues any differently than any other organization or issue.

Because journalism has acquired control of a particular and important practice of public representation, news reporting, religious organizations or individuals have to accommodate to the demands of journalism in order to gain access to this mediated public arena. In general, this means they have to comply with two important logics of journalism: the criteria of *newsworthiness* and the *role of a source*. Religious organizations get access to news media in so far as their information is considered newsworthy, i.e., meets journalistic news criteria concerning social significance, topicality, closeness etc. (Hjarvard 2011b). If they comply with these criteria, they may be given a voice in the news media, but in order to do so, they must also act in accordance with the social role of a reliable and relevant news source. As a news source, they are expected to provide information and express opinions, but they will only be quoted to the extent that they – in the eyes of journalists – provide credible information (i.e., factual and objective) and relevant opinions (i.e., in accordance with the story line). News sources, of course, are not completely at the mercy of the journalists, and news sources may in various ways come to influence the news agenda and frame the ways stories get reported. Because journalists need sources to report the news, they also have to be responsive to sources and negotiate the framing of the news (Blumler and Gurevitch 1981). Even so, religious organizations cannot speak through the news media using their own communication genres (e.g., sermon, prayers etc.) and norms of credibility (e.g., references to Holy Scriptures). In order to have a voice in the political public sphere, they have to make news and act as sources.

As a prominent form of mediatized religion, *journalism on religion* reduces the ability of organized religious organizations and individuals to define and frame religious issues in the public sphere and they are subsequently much more exposed to public criticism based on the general social and political norms of secular society. Christensen (2010) has documented how various forms of religious authority have presence – or no presence – in the public sphere of media and parliaments in the Scandinavian countries. As regards Christianity, more traditional or dogmatic forms of religious authority do not exert any particular influence in the public sphere, but in Norway and Sweden, newspaper articles may occasionally represent Christianity as a natural part of public life, for instance in concert announcements and obituaries (Christensen 2010: 105). Christianity may therefore still exert a kind of cultural authority due to its historical legacy in Nordic countries, but only in so far as the values in question are not considered out of sync with the surrounding society. For instance, journalistic news coverage of questions concerning gender equality and homosexuality typically represent Christianity and the Church as less committed to equality and tolerance than the rest of society (Christensen 2010; see also Christensen's article in this volume).

Because of journalism's commitment to secular values of the general society, news media often come to serve as an instrument to "modernize" religion, i.e., exposing and correcting non-acceptable norms and behavior. The recent news coverage of the Catholic Church in Danish news media may serve as an example of this. Because few Danes are members of the Catholic Church, Danish news media rarely report on Catholicism and mainly in relation to foreign affairs. However, the recent scandals concerning the sexual abuse of children and youth in the Catholic Church also had repercussions in Denmark, where several Catholic priests were accused of sexual abuse of minors, and this increased the general attention in the news towards the Catholic Church in Denmark. The Danish newspaper *Berlingske Tidende* had intensive coverage of these issues and made Catholicism a particular news theme ("Aktuelt emne") on its website⁴. This themed collection of 100 news reports from *Berlingske Tidende* in 2010 gives a condensed picture of the newspaper's selection and framing of news about a particular religion. Of the 100 news stories, 87 dealt with cases concerning sexual abuse of children and youth and apart from focusing on the abuse itself, they were also highly critical of the Catholic Church's handling of the accusations. Generally, the news stories portrayed the leadership of the Catholic Church as either incompetent or trying to cover up the criminal misconduct of its priests. Eight news stories concerned the death of a Catholic nun who was mistreated at a convent in Djursland and in these stories we find a similar critical framing of the Catholic leadership. Two stories dealt with the Catholic Church's slightly changing policy towards contraception, and one story reported on the dismissal of a German bishop accused of

physical violence against children and financial misconduct. Finally, *Berlingske Tidende* had two articles dealing with celibacy and only in this case do we find articles that are not in one way or another directing criticism towards the Catholic Church. Still, at least one of the articles was a kind of defense against criticism voiced elsewhere that celibacy may at least indirectly be the cause of Catholic priests' sexual abuse of minors.

The critical news coverage of the Catholic Church concerning pedophilia was certainly not restricted to the pages of *Berlingske Tidende*, but was an international phenomenon. In general, it was an almost textbook example of a media scandal (Thompson 2000) with the Catholic Church and its priests in the role of the culprits. The Catholic Church both nationally and internationally (through the Pope and the Vatican state) tried to counter the growing criticism in various ways, including criticizing the press. This, however, only demonstrated that the Catholic Church had clearly misjudged its ability to define and frame the public representation of itself. In view of the Vatican state's accusation of news media for being too critical against the church, the chief editor of *Berlingske Tidende*, Lisbeth Knudsen, only re-asserted the right of journalism to criticize the Catholic Church: "the news media's critical stories are not a smear campaign. If the media are to be accused of anything, it is for having paid too much respect for religious feelings and clerical authority" (April 17, 2010). The very critical framing of the Catholic Church may in part be explained by the fact that both Catholicism and its Church are considered culturally alien and thus command less authority in the minds of journalists and news media. But the absence of traditional or dogmatic authority of Protestantism in the public sphere points to the fact that the (occasional) cultural authority of Protestantism has been achieved through an accommodation to the secular values that are promoted by *journalism on religion* and other modern institutions of society like the school, science and politics.

Banal religion

Journalism is, however, not the only way in which media dominate the production and distribution of religious imaginary. If news media and journalism bring religion into the political public sphere, other media and genres make religion visible in the *cultural* public sphere. In mainstream cultural media, like magazines, novels and journals, radio, television, film and computer games, there is generally very little content explicitly dealing with religion. Representations of religious issues, symbols and actors are usually a marginal phenomenon and typically appear in relation to issues and stories that have no explicit, elaborate or intentional religious meanings. For instance, fantasy stories and games like *World of Warcraft* involve a huge inventory of avatars and objects with magic

qualities, but they are generally not to be considered as part of a manifest religious universe. Advertising often plays with religious references in order to evoke connotations of authenticity or just to make fun, but rarely in order to sell a religious message (Endsjø and Lied 2011). Similarly, personal advice columns in magazines may occasionally feature advice by Protestant ministers, but they appear on a par with doctors, psychologists and coaches in terms of personal development, and are usually not inclined to preach a particular gospel, but provide more general life-help mixed with spiritual references. Even though such representations of religion are de-contextualized from institutionalized religious settings and appear in media with no intention to preach a particular religious gospel, they nevertheless provide a continuous backdrop of imagery that reminds audiences of the presence of supernatural phenomena. Such representations of de-contextualized and non-intentional religious meanings constitute another form of mediatized religion: *banal religion*.

The term banal religion is derived from Michael Billig's (1995) study of nationalism and culture in which he coins the term *banal nationalism*. Usually the study of nationalism has focused on the explicit ideologies (e.g., fascism or populism) and cultural symbols (flags and royalty) of nationalism, but nationalism is not only a product of such obvious nationalistic phenomena. Nationalism is also created and reproduced through the circulation of a wide variety of representations and actions that are not explicitly nationalistic or do not necessarily reflect any deliberate attempt to propagate nationalism. Billig (ibid.) distinguishes metaphorically between waved and unwaved flags of nationalism, i.e., between the overt nationalistic symbols and actions and the implicit signs of national belonging embedded in everyday occurrences. Thus, symbols of Swedishness or Norwegianness may be explicit and intentional or implicit and unintentional. Banal nationalism, then, denotes the widespread, yet unnoticeable symbols and actions that may unwillingly reinforce the individual's sense of belonging to a specific nation state and national culture.

In a similar vein, *banal religion* denotes the media presence of a variety of symbols and actions that implicitly and perhaps unwillingly may reinforce the public presence of religion in culture and society. Banal religion makes use of a variety of rituals and symbols from institutionalized religions (e.g., crosses, monks and prayers) as well as folk religions (e.g., black cats, witches and vampires), but mixes and rearticulates them in new contexts relatively independent of their traditional meanings. For instance the Harry Potter stories by J. K. Rowling may be read as a secular narrative mixing popular genres like fantasy, adventure and the boarding-school story, but they nevertheless comprise a rich variety of supernatural elements. From one point of view, the presence of magic and supernatural beings may simply be considered a product of the genres in question and therefore not to be taken seriously. From another point of view, the value of the stories also arises from their ability to make this inventory of

supernatural elements vivid and salient in the minds of a modern audience. In this way, banal religious elements come to reproduce the presence of religion in a secular world, but without promoting a particular religious belief.

It is important to stress that *banal religion* is not a pejorative term suggesting a lack of religious importance or seriousness compared to for instance institutionalized forms of religion. If such comparisons make sense at all, it may be the other way around. From the perspective of evolutionary and cognitive anthropology (Boyer 2001), banal religion may be considered a primary or fundamental form of religion that tends to emerge in almost all human societies. It relies on basic cognitive functions that ascribe anthropomorphic agency to unexplainable occurrences and make use of counterintuitive categories to arrest attention, support memory and evoke emotions (Barrett 2004). Human cognition is predisposed to infer intentional agency behind any kind of happening, like the sudden strike of lightning or the recovery of a very sick person. Similarly, counterintuitive phenomena, like horses with wings or humans walking on water, appear much more salient to the human mind than their realist and indeed trivial counterparts, like horses with legs or humans swimming in water. Banal religious elements make up the brick and mortar of every religion, but banal religion in itself does not necessarily entail any elaborate propositions about religious doctrines or moral statements about the meaning of life.

The term “banal” also indicates that these religious elements may travel more easily below the radar of conscious thinking: their implicit, de-contextualized and non-propositional character, make them unnoticeable as representations of or statements about religious issues, but they nevertheless provide a backdrop of religiosity in society. As previously noted, both folk religion and institutionalized religions like Islam and Christianity make use of banal religious elements, but here they usually have become part of more explicit, elaborate and deliberate religious narratives, propositions or symbols. As such, folk religion and institutionalized religion make up a stockpile or inventory of banal religious elements from which the media may pick and choose in order to create new stories or symbols. Banal religion is a bricolage of decontextualized elements from a variety of sources, including institutionalized religious texts, iconography and liturgy, brought into new contexts and serving purposes other than those of religious institutions. Journalism on religion may also evoke various forms of banal religious elements when reporting on religious institutions and affairs. For instance, newspaper reports about Catholicism may be illustrated by pictures showing various disconnected symbols of Christianity or Catholicism that do not support the journalistic story but simply serve to signal religiosity. Here banal religion becomes a kind of vague backdrop to journalism’s manifest and specific inquiry into the particular doings and wrongdoings of the Catholic Church.

Two media genres seem to have played a particularly important role during the recent years for the proliferation of banal religious elements: factual entertainment on television and fictional drama across a variety of media platforms, like books, television drama series, feature films and computer games. Reality television during the last two decades has emerged as a major entertainment genre (Hjarvard 2002; Hill 2007), and within this framework subgenres concerned with various forms of spiritual, paranormal and supernatural phenomena have emerged. Danish television reality series like TV2's *The Power of the Spirits* ('Åndernes magt') and TV3's *The Return of the Spirits* ('Ånderne vender tilbage') "documented" paranormal phenomena, and TV2's *Travelling with the Soul* ('På rejse med sjælen') discussed the question of re-incarnation. The reality crime show has also opened up for the supernatural dimension; for instance, Danish Channel 4's *Sensing Murder* ('Fornemmelse for mord') makes use of clairvoyant investigators to solve old murder mysteries. Outside the reality genre, we find other entertainment programs playing with supernatural dimensions, like Danish TV2's quiz show *The Sixth Sense* ('Den 6. Sans') or TV2 Zulu's therapeutic program *The Oracles* ('Oraklerne'). Referring to many of the same television series in a Norwegian context, Endsjø and Lied (2011: 71) observe that "in Norway in the 2000s, popular culture has become one of the most visible exponents of belief in spirits and imaginations of the immortal soul" (my translation).

Many of these programs are based on international formats circulating in many countries. As Hill (2011) has demonstrated in her reception studies of the ghost hunter reality program *Most Haunted* in Britain, these programs not only suggest various forms of supernatural occurrences, but the embedding of these representations in specific media formats come to influence the ways audiences come to engage with supernatural aspects. Viewers are familiar with the narrative conventions of reality television and this provides them with a repertoire of possible responses: knowledge of entertainment conventions may provide audiences with both a playful and skeptical attitude towards the occurrences, while the documentary format still invites viewers to become at least "uncertain believers" (Hill 2011: 81). In general, mediatized religion in the form of reality television has not only made elements of folk religion and "superstition" much more publicly visible, but it has also come to frame these elements in specific ways. Because supernatural phenomena have to serve entertainment purposes in the media, these phenomena are only dealt with in so far as they can comply with this demand. As a result, the various programs oscillate between playing with, criticizing and believing in supernatural phenomena.

The proliferation of banal religion through fictional drama does not generally originate from the Nordic countries themselves, but rather from the import of popular Anglo-American drama. Not least due to a very strong tradition of realism in the Nordic countries, domestic mainstream drama has shown only

modest interest in religious themes, magic occurrences or spiritual issues in general. Television crime fiction like the Danish serial *Unit One* ('Rejseholdet') and popular crime novels by the Swedish author Åsa Larsson may occasionally involve elements of magic realism like psychic visions or voices of dead people, but these religious aspects are usually not at the center of the story line, but rather stylistic features serving to construct emotionally engaging characters. In Nordic crime fiction, conservative or fundamentalist religious people are often stereotyped as culprits on a par with perverse sex criminals and greedy Mafiosi, suggesting that (too) strong religious feelings may lead to antisocial behavior. This criticism of strong religion is also found outside the crime genre in mainstream feature films like the Swedish drama *As it is in Heaven* ('Så som i himmelen') and the Danish drama *In Your Hands* ('Forbrydelser'), which provide critical comments regarding the role of the Christian church and ministers and instead paint a positive vision of the inner spiritual force of ordinary people. If we go beyond the realm of popular culture and move into the terrain of purely artistic film, we find several Nordic directors with a preference for stories with allusions or explicit references to the Bible or other religious motives, for instance Ingmar Bergman, Carl Th. Dreyer and Lars von Trier. For a contemporary audience, the works of these artists, however, may be interpreted as existentialist discussions by use of religious allusions rather than works making religious claims. In general, drama produced within the Nordic countries tends to reflect the general secular development in which the authority of the Christian church is severely questioned and individualized forms of faith appear more attuned to the demands of modern life.

In the Nordic countries, Anglo-American products, as in many other parts of the world, occupy a prominent position in the consumption of fictional narratives on almost every media platform: books, films, television series, computer games etc. (Sepstrup 1990; Thussu 2006). The import of Anglo-American fiction has increased during the last decades due to the deregulation of media industries and the proliferation of many more media outlets, in particular television channels with an almost insatiable appetite for more television series to fill up airtime. This has not only increased the number but also the generic variation of Anglo-American fiction products available to Nordic audiences. As a result, a wide variety of fictional narratives involving banal religious elements has acquired a public presence in the cultural realm. Prominent examples of these are American television series like *X-files*, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *Ghost Whisperer*, *True Blood* and *Fringe*, which deal with various supernatural occurrences within generic formats like crime, sci-fi, fantasy, comedy, adventure etc. In a detailed analysis of the American television drama series *Supernatural*, Petersen (2010) observes that the series in a playful manner reworks religious concepts and renegotiates religious imaginations. This is done, for instance, by connecting banal religious elements to

existential themes and through playful intertextuality. Clark (2008) examines online discussion forums concerning the American television series *Lost* and concludes that this type of program frames religious symbols and narratives through the lenses of popular culture and “evoke religious symbolism and narratives within contexts that are outside the bounds of what is normally considered ‘religious’” (Clark 2008: 159). As Petersen (this volume) demonstrates in her analysis of young fan groups’ reception of the American movie series *Twilight Saga*, the secular context of the Danish society gives banal religious representations in popular narratives a prominent role as providers of religious imaginations: “the absence of a homogenous religious worldview allows these teenagers’ religious imaginations to be informed by the transformed and disconnected banal religious concepts they come across in media narratives” (Petersen, this volume: 179). As with journalism on religion, banal religion may occasionally provide criticism of organized religion, but generally it is open to a huge variety of religious, spiritual and magical orientations. In this way, it provides an often playful cultural backdrop of religious imagination and in a Nordic context with limited exposure to the communication of organized religious interests American popular culture becomes a significant factor for the public representation of religion.

Visible difference

Religion has acquired a growing presence in the public domain during the last couple of decades not least because of growing media attention to various religious phenomena. This may in some cases reflect an increased importance of religious organizations or beliefs in society like the rise of political Islam and a growing number of immigrants with an Islamic background in the Nordic countries. The public media presence is not, however, synonymous with a general religious renaissance. The general commitment to the Protestant churches in the Nordic countries continues to decline, not dramatically, but at a slow, steady rate. Similarly, indicators of support for other religious organizations or more individual forms of beliefs do not bear witness to alternative forms of religious revival. The simultaneous development of high public media presence and low private support for institutionalized religion may, however, not be paradoxical. We are witnessing a change in the public face of religion due to – among other factors – the growing mediatization of religion. In this article, I have identified three different forms of mediatized religion, each of which represents a particular way of giving voice to and visual representation of religious issues and actors. The main characteristics of the three forms of mediatized religion are summarized in table 1.

Table 1. Key characteristics of three different forms of mediatized religion

	Religious media	Journalism on religion	Banal religion
<i>Dominant genres</i>	Religious services, preaching, confessions, discussions	News, current affairs, moderated debate	Narrative fiction, entertainment, self-help services, consumer advice
<i>Institution in primary control</i>	Religion	Journalism	Media
<i>Religious content</i>	Interpretations of religious texts and moral advice	Utterances and actions of religious actors framed by secular news values	Bricolage of texts, iconography and liturgy of various institutional and folk religions
<i>Role of religious agents</i>	Owners, producers, performers	Sources	Fictional representations of ministers and believers; in factual genres social counselors, entertainers etc.
<i>Communicative functions</i>	Persuasion Social rituals Religious community	Information Critical scrutiny Political public sphere	Entertainment Cultural rituals Self-development
<i>Challenge to Protestant Church</i>	Multiple and individualized religious voices and visual representations	Critical of religious institution if out of sync with secular values	A bricolage of religious representations provides a backdrop of cultural knowledge about religion

As stated earlier, mediatization may involve varying and in some cases contradicting developments, e.g., in some cases promoting secular values, in other cases producing new forms of religious imagery. Despite these differences, it seems possible to discern two general trends of religious transformation in the Nordic countries that are partly an outcome of mediatization: the Protestant Church has lost some of its former authority to define and frame religion in both the political and cultural public sphere and popular media formats have come to play an important role for the public dissemination of religious symbols, beliefs and practices. As various types of *religious media* become available, a plurality of more or less organized religious voices can be heard and the use of social network media for religious communication may favor a more individualized orientation towards religious belief and practice. *Journalism on religion* has become an authority to scrutinize religious organizations and actors if their attitudes or behavior are out of sync with general secular values. And finally, through *banal religion*, a bricolage of religious symbols, beliefs and practices are produced and circulated outside the framework of organized religion and without any necessary intention to preach a particular gospel. As with other

long-term structural processes of modernity like globalization and individualization, mediatization is changing the structural conditions for the practice of religion in the modern world. It is not only such a silent force of modernity, but it makes a highly visible difference by changing the public face of religion.

Notes

1. In Denmark's Radio's (DR) television program "Profilen" (15.02.06).
2. Circulation figures according to Svensk Tidningsstatistik (TS), Dansk Oplagskontrol (figures concern 2nd half-year 2010) and Norsk Oplagskontroll/ Mediebedriftenes Landsforening.
3. Television ratings figures available from TNS Gallup.
4. www.b.dk/katolsk

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The Internet Mediatization of Religion and Church

Peter Fischer-Nielsen

The internet has become an increasingly important element in the communication of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark, which has 80 per cent of the Danish population as members. In November 2009, a new version of the central homepage www.folkekirken.dk was launched with the goal of providing “clear and correct information to the members” and of functioning as a “source of knowledge and inspiration for faith, service, prayer, feasts and personal occasions” (Petersen 2009). Together with informational content, interactive features such as Facebook sites and a Twitter profile have been developed, and in November 2011 a devotional website and a smartphone application have been created in cooperation with the Danish Broadcasting Corporation. Simultaneously, the internet has also become a well-integrated part of the local pastoral activities of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark. Thus, as many as 81 per cent of the pastors say they use the internet on a daily basis in their work (Fischer-Nielsen 2010a). As the online church activities are likely to continue to increase both at a central and local level, it becomes still more interesting to consider the consequences of this media use for the church.

In this article the internet communication of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark will be analysed through the lenses of mediatization theory (Schulz 2004; Hjarvard 2008a, 2011; Lundby 2009b; Finnemann 2011; Lövheim 2011). The empirical analysis will focus on two aspects of this process. Firstly, through a study of Danes’ involvement in religion on the internet mediatization will be approached as *changed communicative conditions* for the church. Secondly, a study of pastors’ use of the internet in their work life will provide a basis for discussing mediatization as *changed institutional practices*. The distinction can also be formulated as, on the one hand, *mediatization of religion* and *mediatization of church* on the other. The analyses rely on two major surveys carried out by the author in 2009 including 1,015 Danes and 1,040 pastors employed in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark. Moreover, eight qualitative interviews with pastors from the diocese of Aarhus were conducted

in 2009. While these data cannot provide a definitive answer to the questions raised in this article, they can hopefully add empirical insight and nuances to the theoretical discussion on mediatization.

Mediatization as framework for empirical studies

The concept of mediatization has been applied in several ways by media scholars (Lundby 2009a). In this article it is used as a framework for an empirical study of the role of the internet in contemporary religious changes in the Danish society and institutional changes taking place within the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark. Some comments should be attached to this use of the concept of mediatization:

First, the overall assumption that mediatization theory is a relevant perspective on new media may be questioned. Particularly an institutional approach to mediatization that focuses on the power relations between media institutions and other societal institutions (Hjarvard 2008a) can be seen as incompatible with the internet, which offers more direct user involvement and interaction and engages lots of other voices than those of the traditional mass media. In fact, a broader approach to mediatization, in which it is not as much “the logic” of the media institutions as it is “the grammar” of a given media matrix that causes social change, seems to better match the reality of the internet (Finnemann 2011). The understanding in this article is, however, that both the power of media institutions and the more complex grammar of a new media matrix must be taken into account in an analysis of mediatization in relation to the internet. While the internet definitely is more open and less institutionally controlled than the old mass media, there is still a massive presence of old and new professional media companies on the internet. TV stations and newspapers still hold an important role online, and new players such as Google, Facebook and Twitter daily constrain the ways we should communicate, if we want to be heard. Therefore, the analysis looks for changes that relate to the internet both as a platform for media institutions on which to exercise power and as medium for broader and more complex kinds of interaction between producers and users.

Second, with a focus on *change* the article applies what must be the most used keyword in mediatization studies. For empirical studies of these changes both Stig Hjarvard and Winfried Schulz provide useful frameworks. Hjarvard uses Joshua Meyrowitz’s distinction between media as conduits, languages and environments as a point of departure when looking for changes in the religious landscape of contemporary society (Meyrowitz 1993). He reaches this conclusion:

As conduits of communication, the media have become the primary source of imagery and texts about magic, spiritualism and religion, and as languages the media mould religious imagination in accordance with the genres of popular culture. The media as cultural environments have taken over many of the social functions of the institutionalised religions, providing both moral and spiritual guidance and a sense of community. (Hjarvard 2008c: 24)

The first part of the analysis asks whether this media influence is also evident in relation to the internet; in what way does the internet – as conduit, language and cultural environment – provide an alternative to the church and institutionalised religious life as such?

Winfried Schulz describes the transforming role of the media in terms of extension, substitution, amalgamation and accommodation. According to him, mediatization can be seen in the ways media technologies extend the human communication, substitute non-mediated social activities, interact with non-mediated activities and demand an accommodation to the way the media operates (Schulz 2004: 88-89). It has been argued that Schultz' four-point scheme cannot catch the complexities of mediatization within varying media matrixes, and that it is insensitive to the unique properties of the new digital media (Finnemann 2011: 76). Much of this critique is only of interest in a wider theoretical debate on the concept of mediatization, which is not the main focus of this article. Here it is found that Schultz' model, when used in a flexible and open way, can function as a relevant analytical tool in the study of institutional changes within the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark. Thus, in the second part of the analysis it will be asked how pastors' activities on the internet extend and substitute offline activities, how online and offline activities are intermingled and in what ways the pastors accommodate to the medium.

Third, it is proposed that both general religious change and narrow institutional change must be observed when judging the degree of mediatization marking a given religious institution, in this case the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark. An analysis of the ways Danes interact with religion on the internet gives an impression of the influence this medium (as conduit, language and environment) has on the transmission and reception of religious content in society, and how the internet thereby contributes to the general mediatization of religion. Still, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark as well as other religious organisations can choose not to accommodate to the logic of the internet and thus limit the mediatization of the institution. Therefore, while Hjarvard (2008c) gives a general account of the mediatization of religion in Denmark, this article supplements his findings in two ways. Firstly, it offers a more thorough focus on the influence of the internet as a new medium, and secondly, by showing how *mediatization of religion* and *mediatization of church* must be treated as two different though related issues, it offers empirical nuances to the discussion of mediatization.

Finally, the article deals with the internet as a medium that can be studied in its own right, though it is just as much a platform for a range of old and new media (Finnemann 2001: 25-26). While more narrow studies of the influence of these specific media (such as online newspapers, search engines, social networking sites etc.) can provide more detailed information, there is still a need for broader studies that take into account the connectedness of these media and acknowledge the basic qualities that are provided by the internet and give the different internet-based media some common features such as “decentralised, networked, dynamic and global” (Fuchs 2008: 278). We might want to think of these features as a certain internet logic, different from the logic of other media types, but we should not be blind to variation and counter-logical behaviour among the internet-based media we study. Apart from the theoretical reasons, we also have a very limited empirical knowledge of the general Danish population’s interaction with religion online and an even poorer knowledge about the online communication of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark. Therefore, an explorative and open study is appropriate, which can lead to more narrow and specific research questions.

The internet mediatization of religion in Denmark

While some research has been done on internet mediated religion in a Danish context (Højsgaard 2004; Schmidt 2006), Stig Hjarvard was the first to address the theme in relation to the general population (2008b; 2008c). In his study of mediatized religion, he finds that only a minority of the Danish population visits religious websites and that those who do are often already engaged in a religious practice (Hjarvard 2008b: 201-205). Thus, his findings confirm studies from other countries where the revolutionising effect of the internet has been downplayed, and the continuity between online and offline has been stressed (Clark, Hoover and Rainie 2004; Lövheim 2008). Even though the emergence of the internet has not led to a general religious awakening in Denmark or in other countries, we should still in a mediatization perspective expect the internet to have some influence on the religious sphere. This influence is sought for in the following analysis of 1,015 Danes’ reports about their online interaction with religion.¹

Religion is distributed on non-religious websites

In a study of internet mediatization there must be a focus on both the users’ interaction with religious content produced and distributed by churches or religious groups and on the users’ interaction with religious content produced and distributed by other agents, such as old or new media institutions and the

users themselves. The former can be described as a weak kind of mediatization, due to a certain degree of religious institutional control of the content, although the communication might be affected by rules and codes defined by others. The latter, however, permits a much stronger type of mediatization, since the distributive power is in the hands of other agents than the religious institutions.

Table 1. "Where on the internet have you come across religion or spiritual issues within the last year?"

	Total% (N=1,015)	18-29	30-39	Age% 40-49	50-59	60-74
Websites for newspapers and TV stations ¹	16	25	16	17	11	11
Religious websites ¹	10	18	9	6	10	10
Encyklopaedias ¹	9	16	7	9	10	5
Social networking sites ¹	8	19	11	3	7	3
Discussion groups ¹	8	23	5	4	4	4
E-mails	7	5	9	5	8	5
Blogs ¹	5	15	5	3	3	1
Have not come across religion ¹	45	28	43	47	50	54
Do not know	19	13	22	23	17	18

¹ Statistically significant differences, $p \leq 0.05$.

Note: The respondents could choose as many responses as they found relevant, thus, the sum exceeds 100 per cent. Answers appear shortened in the table. Answers chosen by less than 5 per cent of the respondents have been omitted. These are newsgroups/mailling lists, video and picture sharing sites, games/virtual worlds, web TV, internet shops, chat/instant messaging and web radio. The question was part of a more extensive internet-based survey conducted in 2009.

Table 1 shows that only few persons have met religion on specific religious websites, which is in harmony with Hjarvard's findings. Far more have met religion in other online contexts that are not directly governed by religious agents. Thus, 16 per cent have experienced religion on websites for TV stations and newspapers, 9 per cent on encyklopaedias (such as Wikipedia) and 8 per cent on social networking sites (such as Facebook). Only 45 per cent say they have not been in contact with religious themes online within the last year. This strong type of mediatization is even more visible among the youngest respondents. For them, religious websites only constitute the fourth most important source of religious content, while newspaper and TV sites, discussion groups and social networking sites all are more common means to engage in religious issues. At the same time, only 28 per cent respond they have not encountered religion in a year. If the answers of the youngest respondents can be seen as an indication of future general developments (Lövheim 2008: 215), the internet and especially non-religious websites can be expected to gain an increasing importance as distributor of content on religious issues.

Table 2. "When you have visited websites that exclusively or mainly deal with religion or spiritual issues, how did you find the sites?"

	Total% (N=343)	18-29	30-39	Age% 40-49	50-59	60-74
Through Google/search engine ¹	56	65	74	57	46	41
Through links from other sites	21	23	27	20	20	14
By coincidence	19	19	23	17	12	22
Knew the address in advance	11	8	15	6	15	10
Through friends or family	7	10	6	5	9	4
Through newspaper/magazine	6	4	8	4	11	7
Through TV or radio	6	5	8	4	9	5
Through church/religious group	5	7	0	3	6	9
Through link in e-mail ¹	5	4	0	5	13	2
Through a teacher	2	5	0	4	2	0
Through pastor/religious leader	2	1	2	0	0	5
Other	2	1	3	6	0	1
Do not know ¹	19	11	10	17	32	24

¹ Statistically significant differences, $p \leq 0.05$.

Note: Only respondents who had visited a religious website within a year were asked to answer the question. The respondents could choose as many responses as they found relevant, thus, the sum exceeds 100 per cent. Answers appear shortened in the table. The question was part of a more extensive internet-based survey conducted in 2009.

Google, links and coincidence lead people to the religious websites

Although the mediatizing effects might be weaker on the religious websites than, for instance, on media sites, table 2 shows that even religiously controlled sites seem to be somewhat dependent on various media agents. More than half of the persons who have actually visited a religious website have been led there by a search engine such as Google (and for the two youngest age groups the number is significantly higher), 21 per cent have followed a link, and 19 per cent have entered the site by coincidence. Only 11 per cent knew the address in advance, 5 per cent were led there by a church or a religious group and 2 per cent entered a religious website because it was recommended by a pastor or another religious leader. In other words, even on websites that are produced by the religious groups, the traffic is to a high degree controlled or framed by external agents. The church or religious groups can choose to ignore their power and communicate entirely on their own terms, but the cost is likely to be less visibility and traffic.

The internet is the place to seek answers on religion

In a non-mediatized religious context, the church, family and friends would probably be the most obvious places to look for answers to questions on Christianity. Table 3 (below) shows that the first choice today has become the

internet. 56 per cent would go online to find answers – and again significantly more in the younger age groups – while 37 per cent would consult a pastor, 28 per cent would look to the Bible and 21 per cent would seek answers in a book. These figures do not reflect where people actually *have* looked for religious answers. Instead, they demonstrate that the internet is where a high number of secularised Danes, who are not particularly occupied with religion, imagine they would look for answers, if for some reason the issue should become relevant to them. It is noteworthy that the pastor and the Bible are the second and third most popular choice on the list, because in reality these sources play a minor role in the Danish population as ways to engage in religion (Hjarvard 2011: 125). Thus, while the impact of the internet is probably leading to increased mediatization of religion in Denmark, the continued presence of the pastor and the Bible in the Danes' awareness (though not in their daily religious practice) indicates that these traditional religious elements will continue to play a role, though probably in new and non-conventional ways. Moreover, their presence on the internet could result in a symbolic power struggle between media and church authority. While the media (new as well as old) may want to distribute religion in fragmented and unstructured ways in order to entertain an audience, the church may insist on religion as a coherent narrative to be respected in its own right. With Hjarvard's terms, we can speak of a possible clash between *banal religion* and *institutionalised religion* (Hjarvard 2011: 128-120). However, it is also possible to imagine religion and media as "intersecting, rather than opposite, domains in which values and practices of religion can be combined with the logic of the media," as Mia Lövheim points out (2011: 161).

Table 3. "Where would you look for answer if you had a question concerning Christianity?"

	Total% (N=1,015)	18-29	30-39	Age% 40-49	50-59	60-74
The internet ¹	56	65	66	56	55	37
A pastor	37	36	37	35	36	40
The Bible	28	32	26	24	26	29
Books ¹	21	26	26	17	19	17
A church ¹	17	20	23	15	12	16
Family ¹	14	18	23	11	13	5
Friends ¹	13	20	17	12	10	5
Christian group/organisation ¹	7	6	13	8	4	3
Nowhere	6	4	6	5	4	9
Other	1	0	1	2	1	1
Do not know	6	3	5	7	7	7

¹ Statistically significant differences, $p \leq 0.05$.

Note: The respondents could choose as many responses as they found relevant, thus, the sum exceeds 100 per cent. Answers appear shortened in the table. Answers chosen by less than 5 per cent of the respondents have been left out. These are a teacher, TV programs, newspapers/magazines and radio programs. The question was part of a more extensive internet-based survey conducted in 2009.

*The internet affects people's understanding of religion
in moderate ways*

Early speculations on the internet carried both utopian and dystopian imaginations about the impact of this new medium on religion (Højsgaard and Warburg 2005: 5). Later empirical studies disclosed the exaggeration of these extreme expectations. For instance, Mia Lövhelm concludes, in a Swedish study, that instead of interpreting the interest of young people in religion online as a sign of a “resurgence of religion”, it is probably more appropriate to interpret it as an indication that “traditional contexts for religious socialisation, such as the Church or the family, are gradually being replaced by other contexts” (Lövhelm 2008: 215). Likewise, the results in table 4 show only moderate changes within the respondents’ religious orientations and experiences due to the internet. From the perspective of churches or religious groups it might be discouraging that considerably more people say they have become more critical of religion than more religious. This illustrates that the internet does not function as a channel for religious messages only, but also for content critical of religion. While a homepage can provide the unedited answers of a religious group, it will by the individual user be judged in the light of competing viewpoints equally available online.

Table 4. Consequences of internet use – “How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?”

	Total% (N=1,015)	18-29	30-39	Age% 40-49	50-59	60-74
I have become more critical of religion ¹	16	26	14	16	11	15
I have gained knowledge of religions I didn't know ¹	10	22	7	3	9	7
I have become more aware of what I believe/don't believe in ¹	8	18	6	7	6	5
I have gained contact with more people of another religion ¹	8	17	9	5	7	3
I have realised positive points in other religions ¹	8	14	5	5	7	7
I have gained contact with more people of my own religion ¹	7	12	6	8	6	3
I engage more often with religion online than offline ¹	7	13	7	6	4	4
I have become more religious than before	2	4	1	3	2	1

¹ Statistically significant differences, $p \leq 0.05$.

Note: The table summarises the answers of those who have answered: “I completely agree” and “I predominantly agree” to the statements. Answers appear shortened in the table. The question was part of a more extensive internet-based survey conducted in 2009.

Table 4 shows that the youngest respondents are more affected by the internet use than the older respondents. 22 per cent of the youngest say they have gained knowledge on the internet of religions they previously did not know, 18 per cent have become more aware of their own religious identity and 17 per cent have gained contact with people of another religion. Still, only 4 per cent say they have become more religious because of the internet, whereas 26 per cent think they have become more critical of religion. The internet seems to have a greater influence on young people's attitudes towards religion for at least two reasons. Firstly, young people spend more time online than the older internet users, and it is therefore likely that they also will be more influenced by this medium. Secondly, young people are more confronted with the reality of a multi-religious society through education, friends and travel experiences and will therefore be more motivated to engage in such issues online. Thus, there is a chance the general influence of the internet on Danes' perception of religion will increase as the experiences and internet behaviour of the young users become mainstream.

New conditions for religious communication

Though the internet provides religious groups as well as individuals with the opportunity to become producers, the analysis of Danes' interaction with religion online suggests that a certain kind of mediatization of religion is still taking place. As *conduit*, the religious content being distributed on the internet stems from a variety of contexts, and the specifically religious websites are not the dominant source. Websites of traditional mass media and new media corporations take a leading role in the process of distributing religious content, especially among the youngest users. Therefore, few Danes come across religion online in the form of coherent introductions to the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark or other religious groups, but as fragmented, criticised and reinterpreted elements in stories told by other agents on the internet. As *language*, the internet frames religion within discourses of journalism, entertainment and debate rather than within the language of the church. Even on religious websites, which could be shaped according to the wishes of the religious sender, we see a pressure for accommodating to the ruling discourses of the internet, since few users know the addresses in advance but are led to these sites by search engines, links and coincidence. Finally, the internet seems to function as a new *environment* for engaging in religious themes. Though people still encounter religion more often in offline than online contexts, the internet has become the main place to seek answers to questions about Christianity. Furthermore, especially young people deal with religion on social networking sites and in online discussion groups, where the interactive features create an alternative to offline communities and even – in some cases – religious gatherings.

We can conclude that mediatization is still a relevant perspective, even in the study of the new digital media. However, it can be difficult to separate the role of the internet from the role of other factors and trends in the changes taking place online. While new comparative studies will expand our knowledge of the mediatizing role of the internet, it will probably remain a theoretical task to discuss the importance of media influence versus other influences when it comes to religion online. Thus, it must be asked whether the tendencies shown in this article most convincingly can be explained within the framework of mediatization, or whether theories of individualisation or secularisation provide a better understanding (Fischer-Nielsen 2011). Instead of drawing a clear-cut boundary between the different explanations and choose one over the other, it is probably more suitable to perceive them as different perspectives that supplement each other and enrich the overall analysis. While different societal structures and developments might have led to the emergence of the internet and other technologies, these will – once they have been established – confirm and radicalise the tendencies that initiated them (Qvortrup 1998: 199).

The internet mediatization of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark

The degree to which the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark as an institution is being changed by the internet is the topic of this section. A survey among 1,040 pastors serve as the empirical point of departure, since pastors are the daily representatives of the church and lead most of the services and activities in the local parishes.² As a supplement to this survey and to obtain more nuanced answers, qualitative interviews with eight pastors (of different sex, age and parish type) from the diocese of Aarhus were conducted. In the introduction it was mentioned that the internet has become an integrated element of the majority of the pastors' working life. It should be added that the pastors generally regard this, a good development. Thus, 88 percent of the pastors think that the internet has had a positive influence on their work, while only 1 per cent says it has had a negative impact. Even though the intrusion of the internet in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark hardly can be denied, it is an open question whether it leads to fundamental changes in the structures, values and theologies of the church. In the following empirical analysis it is suggested that some degree of mediatization of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark is taking place when its institutional boundaries are challenged or transcended by the internet. These transboundary effects will subsequently be summed up within the four-point scheme of Winfried Schulz.

Extended pastoral communication

Many pastors experience their online communication (including mail correspondence) extends their contact with people. As depicted in table 5, as many as 60 per cent of the pastors say the internet has brought them in contact with more parishioners than they would otherwise have been. At the same time, 38 per cent find that they are more often in contact with people living in other parishes because of the internet. While extended reach from a church perspective basically must be considered a positive development, it also challenges the job definition of the pastor and the institutionalised structures of the church. Lack of time may be one important issue,³ and the very parish structure of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark is most certainly another. The conflict between a local parish church and the boundary breaking character of the internet is formulated by one of the interviewed pastors, a 32-year old woman:

We are bound to an old parish structure, and it has been the idea, that the church should be where people are. I don't know how we solve it, but it is a problem, that so many are on the internet. Maybe we should have a Facebook-pastor or a Twitter-pastor. We should be where people are, and the internet is really a place where people are today, and where the church isn't well represented.

Of course, not only the internet challenges the idea of a parish. Increased mobility and individualisation in the population have also led to the creation of new concepts such as *youth church* and *night church* as well as new pastoral identities to serve these congregations. The internet development has not yet led to the creation of cyber church or new pastoral identities, neither has the job profile of the local parish pastor been modified in order to match the new media landscape. Thus, this dimension of the internet mediatization of the church is primarily visible as a tension in the pastors' working life between new communicative opportunities, on the one hand, and structural restrictions on the other. Fundamental institutional changes as a consequence of the internet are still to be seen.

Table 5. Pastors' experience of extended communicative reach – "How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?"

	Total% (N=1,040)	26-39	Age% 40-59	60+
Because of the internet I am in contact with more people from the parish than I would otherwise be ¹	60	75	58	41
Because of the internet I am more often in contact with persons outside the parish who seek my help ¹	38	41	40	29

¹ Statistically significant differences, $p \leq 0.05$.

Note: The table summarises the answers of those who have answered: "I completely agree" and "I predominantly agree" to the statements. The question was part of a more extensive internet-based survey conducted in 2009.

Religious authority through relational presence

The Danish anthropologist Cecilie Rubow distinguishes between a strong and a weak type of pastoral authority, and both types play a role in the pastor's daily work: the strong type of authority is performed from the altar or the pulpit and through a professional handling of the service, the sacraments, the prayers and the texts, where the pastor is expected to take on the role of the leader in a hierarchical sense. The weak type of authority, however, emerges through relational presence in the congregation and a gradual building up of trust and respect, where the keywords are not difference and distance but equality and exchange (Rubow 2006: 228-229). The pastors' online interaction with parishioners seems to challenge the former type of authority, while it may actually strengthen the latter. This seems to be the case on social networking sites especially. Though church "sites" or "groups" on Facebook mostly function as noticeboards or as a quick way for parishioners to signal an identity by pressing the "like" button (Johns 2012), especially the pastor's personal interaction with Facebook "friends" may in some ways lead to a strengthening of the congregational relationship (Lomborg and Ess 2012).

Table 6 shows that 17 per cent of the pastors (and 29 per cent of the pastors under 40 years) say they use Facebook in their work. The pastors do, however, approach and evaluate the site differently. Some fear it will undermine their privacy if they are friends with colleagues and parishioners, and others are worried that the existence of Facebook will create a situation where they are always at work. These concerns have led some to reject Facebook altogether, while others have become very restrictive in their choice of Facebook friends. Still, many pastors see Facebook as a good opportunity to get in contact with especially young people. A 34-year old female pastor says the following about Facebook in relation to the confirmands: "They learn that I am also a person who burns her fingers on the hotplate. I am not just the pastor they meet in the classroom or in the church." Thus, the barrier between pastor and confirmand is broken down, and while the pastor loses loftiness in this process, she might win relationally built respect instead.

It may be questioned, whether this increased online interaction functions as a substitute for face-to-face interaction. Judging from the interviewed pastors, this is primarily the case in relation to professional contact with colleagues and communication about practical issues with parishioners. The internet communication might also supplement a deeper conversation about faith, but it is not seen as a sound substitute. For the pastors, the embodied and personal contact is still seen as the most proper way to communicate. Internet communication is in other words not uncritically embraced. Pastors use their own values and the more or less collective church values in an active reflection and negotiation of the medium. Heidi Campbell (2010) has most thoroughly described the negotiation of new media in religious groups. While theology and tradition

play a greater role in her American examples, primarily values and pragmatic conditions seem to be emphasised by the Danish pastors.

Table 6. Pastors' use of Facebook – "For what purposes have you used the internet within the last three months?"

	Total% (N=1,040)	26-39	Age% 40-59	60+
Been on Facebook				
– [Only] in my spare time	24	33	25	9
– [Only] in my work as pastor	1	2	1	3
– Both in my spare time and in my work as pastor	16	27	13	11
– Neither in my spare time nor in my work as pastor	55	35	58	70
– Do not know	4	2	3	7
– Total	100	100	100	100

Statistically significant differences, $p \leq 0.05$.

Note: The question was part of a more extensive internet-based survey conducted in 2009.

Theological changes

In a Danish context, the theological boundaries have become less marked these years. Previously, it was relatively easy for a Danish pastor to identify with one of three traditional theological identities. Yet, today the types are intertwined and new individual and collective pastoral identities are established and combine different theological perspectives (Mortensen 2005:109; Fischer-Nielsen 2010b). Though the internet has not initiated this development, it seems to accentuate it in many regards. Table 7 shows that almost half of the pastors – and significantly more of the young pastors – have shared a sermon on the internet within a period of three months. Statements in the qualitative interviews reveal that this activity is far from restricted to a narrow circle of likeminded colleagues, but that the sermons are often distributed in groups and on sites where a plurality of viewpoints are present. Many pastors are for instance members of the so-called *pastor list*, a mailing list and a resource site with about 720 Danish pastors from various theological backgrounds. Susanne (32 years) explains how this list helps her: "I clearly get inspired by being able to go online and read five different sermon instructions and engage in the discussions on the *pastor list*, where there might be four pastors who publish a sermon, which we can discuss." The internet *can* support networks of likeminded minority pastors, but the results of this study suggest that in a Danish pastoral context the medium is more often used to transcend boundaries between narrow theological identities. Pastors have always been networking, but the internet seems to provide an extension of their networks both in a numerical, theological and geographical sense.

Table 7. Pastors' use of the internet – "Have you used the internet for the following purposes within the last three months?"

	Total% (N=1,040)	26-39	Age% 40-59	60+
Picked up inspiration for a sermon ¹	86	94	86	72
Searched for pictures/video clips as part of work ¹	68	76	68	56
Shared a sermon ¹	46	60	48	19
Given pastoral care ¹	32	30	35	22

¹ Statistically significant differences, $p \leq 0.05$.

Note: The question was part of a more extensive internet-based survey conducted in 2009.

The amalgamation of media and church

Finally, the findings of the study indicate that the internet also blurs the boundaries between church and media. Table 7 shows that the internet serves as a source of inspiration for 86 per cent of the pastors (and for 94 of the youngest pastors), when the sermon is to be prepared. While some of this inspiration comes from theological websites, the qualitative interviews demonstrate that much of the inspiration stems from media sites. The internet seems to expand the pastors' media consumption of both old and new media types, partly because the internet is easy and free to access. This is exemplified by Jens, a 46-year old male pastor: "I would never buy tabloid newspapers like Ekstra Bladet and BT myself, but I look in them on the internet, and they affect my perspective, when I want to know what is going on in society." Likewise, Morten (40 years) says that YouTube, MTV's website and the websites of various youth magazines help him to stay informed about the youth culture. Table 7 also shows that 68 per cent of the pastors use the internet to search for photos and video clips. These are probably used both in services and for church magazines, and they thereby serve to mediatize the way the church is presented.

While internet-based media influence is finding its way into the church, traditional church activities now take place online. Within a period of three months, one third of the pastors have given pastoral care on the internet, as Table 7 shows. Thus, an amalgamation of church space and media space seems to be one of the results of the pastors' increased use of the internet. While this may help the church remain relevant and in touch with the population, it also puts a pressure on the pastors to accommodate to the styles and discourses of the internet.

Conclusion

The aim of this article has been to analyse mediatization of religion in Denmark on two levels specifically in relation to the internet. In continuation of Stig

Hjarvard's work, the first section looked for signs of mediatization of religion in the general Danish religious sphere. The study showed no dramatic changes in the Danes' religious life but indicated that the internet is playing an important role in forming people's religious orientation. Since the younger respondents proved more engaged online, this could be a growing phenomenon. The religious websites only constitute a minor resource for religion on the internet, while various non-religious sites play a greater role. Even the traffic on the religious websites is to a certain degree controlled by media corporations such as for instance Google. Although the internet provides churches and religious groups with the opportunity to become publishers and distributors this study concludes that mediatization of religion is still taking place. As conduit, language and environment the internet challenges the church as the natural place to engage in religion.

The second part of the article focused on another aspect of this mediatization. While the religious sphere might be mediatized through the internet, this is not necessarily the case for the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark. As an institution it can choose to ignore the demands and restrictions of the new media and communicate on its own terms online as well as offline. Yet, the study suggests that especially on the local pastoral level mediatization does take place, while it has not yet affected the institutional structures of the church in visible ways. In Schulz's terminology, the internet extends the pastors' reach to both local parishioners and persons from other parishes, and it extends the theological horizon. Online conversation substitutes some of the professional and practical communication, but with regard to counselling and personal issues the pastors only see communication as a supplement to the face-to-face interaction. The amalgamation of mediated and non-mediated activities happen in various ways, for instance when the pastors pick up inspiration from media sites and introduce it in their sermons. Though the pastors try to accommodate to the internet in their daily work life, this accommodation is not yet visible in the institutionalised structures that have so far remained unchanged. Thus, it can be concluded that mediatization is only partly taking place within the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark.

The article has distinguished between *mediatization of religion* and *mediatization of church*. It has been suggested that both perspectives are important in order to understand the role of the internet in the changing communication of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark. It has not, however, been the aim of the article to judge whether mediatization is a desirable development or not. Even from a church perspective this is not a clear-cut case, since mediatization, on the one hand, challenges the church in several ways, but, on the other hand, seems to bring the church in closer contact with the population. Positive as well as negative consequences of the increasing internet communication will therefore continue to constitute a relevant theme of reflection and discussion.

Notes

1. The survey was conducted through the opinion-research institute Zapera based on a representative sample of the Danish population. 1,015 respondents answered the questionnaire, which is 41.3 percent of the contacted persons. The survey was conducted in December 2008 and January 2009.
2. A questionnaire was sent by the author to the e-mail addresses of all of the 2,068 pastors in the Danish National Church. 1,040 completed the questionnaire, which gave a response rate of 51.8 per cent.
3. 47 per cent of the pastors respond that lack of time hinders increased internet use.

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Mediatization, Deprivatization, and Vicarious Religion

Coverage of Religion and Homosexuality in the Scandinavian Mainstream Press

Henrik Reintoft Christensen

In recent years, official Christianity's attitudes towards homosexuality have sparked public debates on several occasions, but almost always within a few select themes: rejection of same sex marriages, opposition towards homosexual pastors, or mobilisation of conservative electorates. In the sociology of religion, this is often read as the deprivatization of religion, the mediatization of religion, or as an indication of the vicarious role of religion depending on who you ask. This article discusses Grace Davie's notion of vicarious debates through an examination of her primary example of such a debate: homosexuality. The discussion takes its point of departure the mediatization and deprivatization of religion.

The concepts of mediatization of religion as it has been proposed by Stig Hjarvard (2008a; 2008b) and vicarious religion engage with one another on several points although it has rarely been addressed in the literature. Both Hjarvard and Davie focus on the transformation of religion and society – primarily in Europe – but from different perspectives. These different perspectives are illustrated in their description of the death of Princess Diana. They try to make sense of Diana's funeral using the concepts of vicarious religion and mediatization respectively. Davie writes that the British population was aware that their individual expressions of grief were inadequate.

Hence the need for public ritual or public liturgy, and where else but in the established church. The fact that Princess Diana had not led an unequivocally Christian life was immaterial – she, like the rest of us, had a right to the services of the church at the end of her life. It follows that churches must exist in order to meet such demands, ambiguous though they are (2006a: 28).

Davie can draw this conclusion based on her idea of the collective memory and cultural heritage of the church. As European churches have been obligatory state churches rather than voluntary associations as in America, they are an integral part of European life, and can therefore be used by both the nation

and even the least regular churchgoers. Hjarvard, on the other hand, approaches the funeral from the perspective of the media.

[The] treatment of collective feelings is not reserved for the big catastrophes; it is a recurrent feature of the media, and they may not only be responsible for emotional guidance, they may also facilitate the construction of collective emotions in the first place. A celebrity event like the death of Princess Diana was made into an international event by the media, and the media both built up emotional responses and provided examples of how to express sorrow in a number of ways, for example, by laying flowers at embassies, lighting candles and so on (2008: 18).

Both scholars approach the case of Princess Diana from the perspectives of their discipline. Davie argues that the churches are of prime importance, and Hjarvard argues that the media are very important. Additionally, Hjarvard also argues that other institutions might be important, and that the media recognizes this. "When the media try to be at their most solemn, they perform as nakedly as possible: they stage themselves as pure channels of transmission" (ibid.: 19). Clearly parts of these theories converge with regard to religion in the public sphere, but they differ on some accounts as well. And it is exactly these convergences and divergences that make it possible to evaluate the notion of vicarious debates from a mediatization perspective. In this chapter I first present Davie's idea of vicarious religion and the four elements it consists of before detailing the element of vicarious debate which is the only one in which Davie explicitly gives the media a role. Then I will briefly introduce the Scandinavian material that the evaluation is based on before analysing a number of examples of the debate on homosexuality. Finally, I discuss and question Davie's argument that the debate on the relationship between Christianity and homosexuality can be perceived as a vicarious debate on profound shifts in the moral climate of society. Davie has convincingly argued for the notion of vicarious religion, but the media attention paid to Christian attitudes towards homosexuality can, in my view, only poorly be described as a vicarious debate in the Scandinavian case.

Vicarious Religion

Grave Davie uses the term vicarious religion to convey "*the notion of religion performed by an active minority but on behalf of a much larger number, who (implicitly at least) not only understand, but, quite clearly approve of what the minority is doing*" (Davie 2006a: 22, emphasis in original). The first half of the definition, she writes, is straightforward, while the second half needs to be elaborated by way of examples. Before presenting examples she in-

roduces the four ways in which religion can operate vicariously: Rituals are performed vicariously, church leaders and churchgoers believe vicariously, and furthermore, they embody moral codes on behalf of others. Finally, the church “can offer space for the vicarious debate of unresolved issues in modern societies” (Davie 2006a: 23). I discuss homosexuality as a vicarious debate because it is her only example of such a debate. Additionally, same sex marriages are also one of her examples when she discusses the vicarious performance of rituals.

[Same sex marriages] put a strain on the institution [the church] in that they challenge long-held assumptions about the Christian understanding of marriage and the theologies that underpin this. [They] highlight the degree to which portions of the population expect the church to be the repository of ritual, even when that means adapting to the new life cycle realities that are part of modern societies (Davie 2006a: 24).

This quote seems to indicate that Davie realizes that the question of homosexuality might not be debates on moral shifts in society after all, but debates on the degree to which the church is aligned with the moral shifts that have already taken place in society, but this is a point I return to in the discussion.

Recently, Steve Bruce and David Voas have published a harsh critique of all four elements of vicarious religion (2010). Regarding same sex marriages and the vicarious performance of rituals they argue that requests for same sex marriages are not evidence of vicarious religion because “such rituals are sought by practicing Christians. To the extent that ‘portions of the population expect the church to be the repository of ritual’, it seems to be mainly a case of the product outstripping the originating institution in social significance” (Bruce and Voas 2010: 247). In other words, the church is either used for religious reasons, in which case it is not a question of vicariousness or it is used because an old ritual in an old building confers more dignity and solemnity than a civil ceremony, but without any trace of religiosity. The church’s grandeur is co-opted for secular reasons and consequently it is not a case of vicariousness (ibid.: 247). The focus of this chapter is not vicarious religion as such, but vicarious debates, which is the element least discussed by Bruce and Voas, and also the least developed and convincing part of Davie’s notion of vicarious religion.

Davie argues that European churches offer a space for discussing changes in the moral climate, which the media attention to those debates attests to.

Could it be that the churches offer space for debate regarding particular, and often controversial, topics that are difficult to address elsewhere in society? The current debate about homosexuality in the Anglican Communion offers a possible example, *an interpretation encouraged by the intense media attention directed at this issue* [...]. Is this one way in which society as a whole come

to terms with profound shifts in moral climate? If [this] is *not* true, it is hard to understand why so much attention is being paid to the churches in this respect. If it *is* true, sociological thinking must take this factor into account (Davie 2006a: 24, first emphasis is the author's, the last two are original).

She emphasizes the importance of this issue arguing for its prominence as an example of vicarious debate by restating it in another article (Davie 2006b: 26; 2006c: 250). Clearly she perceives of the public debate on homosexuality in the church as a prime example of a vicarious debate. The difference between the articles lies in their scope. In "Vicarious Religion" (2006a) she only focus on the British media: "Large sections of the British media are, it seems, wanting to both have the cake and to eat it: to point the spotlight at controversies within the church while maintaining that religious institutions must, by their very nature, be marginal to society (Davie 2006a: 25). In the second article, "Is Europe an Exceptional Case" (2006b; reprinted in 2006c) she expands her focus. "Large sections of the *European* media are, it seems, wanting to both have the cake and eat it too: pointing the spotlight at controversies within the church whilst maintaining that religious institutions must, by their very nature, be marginal to modern society (Davie 2006b: 26, my emphasis). As Davie expands the scope to include all of Europe, she probably assumes that it is also the case of the Scandinavian debates. Using the theories of mediatization and deprivatization of religion, I argue that pointing the spotlight at controversies *within* the church is not necessarily the same as making the church important for society. In this way, I argue that the debate on homosexuality is not a vicarious debate in Scandinavia, and furthermore that it is possible to make sense of it and understand why so much attention is being paid to the churches on this issue without recourse to vicariousness. The theory of mediatization deals among other things with the institutional changes brought about by the way the logic of the media is imposed on other institutions, which is particularly relevant when discussing the intrusion or emergence of new values in religious institutions like the national churches in Scandinavia. These new values are often associated with what Ronald Inglehart (1977) calls post-material values or Ole Borre (1995) calls new politics. Homosexuality is a significant issue in this regard because religious institutions have historically rejected the rights of homosexuals, but as a consequence of changes in the surrounding society with regard to gay rights and perceptions of homosexuality there is a potential for change to be studied due to the attitudinal gap between parts of the churches on the one hand and the news media and general public on the other. The next section introduces the instances in which José Casanova argues that religion should be allowed a legitimate public role, which is then used in the discussion of the public role of Christianity in relation to homosexuality.

Deprivatisation of religion

Casanova has become thoroughly associated with the, in his own words, “inelegant neologism ‘deprivatization’” (Casanova 1994: 6). He shows that religion has entered the public sphere throughout the world, and he argues that religion should be accepted in the public sphere if it supports the rights to privacy and freedom of conscience. This condition is met in three instances according to Casanova.

- a. When religion enters the public sphere to protect not only its own freedom of religion but all modern freedoms and rights [...]
- b. When religion enters the public sphere to question and contest the absolute lawful autonomy of the secular spheres and their claims to be organized in accordance with principles of functional differentiation without regard to extraneous ethical or moral considerations [...]
- c. When religion enters the public sphere to protect the traditional life-world from administrative or juridical state penetration (ibid.: 57-58).

In the later discussion these instances are important en bloc, but here it suffices to say that Casanova is remarkably uninterested in the role of the media in the process of deprivatising religion. This is a shared trait of most sociologists of religion who either ignore the media or only look at the ways religious actors use media (Cf. various introductions and handbooks of sociology of religion: Aldridge 2000; McGuire 2002; Dillon 2003, 10; Fenn 2003; Davie 2007; Furseth and Repstad 2007; Beckford and Richardson 2007).

Since I want to pay attention to the representations of religion made by both religious and non-religious actors, and the possible effect on religion, I need a theory that allows me to do so. In other words, in order to examine the arguments of religious actors on an issue, *in casu* homosexuality, as well as the effect of the surrounding society's attitude towards this issue on the religious system I find it relevant to use Stig Hjarvard's theory of mediatization as it focuses on this dual perspective.

Mediatization of religion and society

Hjarvard distinguishes between direct and indirect (strong and weak) mediatization (2008a: 110-111). Strong mediatization refers to the shift from face-to-face or non-mediated interaction to interaction through a media, for instance televangelism, and weak mediatization refers to the exposure to mediated material in non-mediated situation. The same phenomena can be interpreted as strong or weak mediatization at the same time, especially with regard to news and mass media. Those actors who have substituted the traditional discussion (perhaps

on homosexuality) in the community hall with a media broadcasted discussion exemplifies a strong case of mediatization, but it is a weak case of mediatization for the audience who notice that there is a debate in the television in the background while they work or eat at home, the cafeteria or somewhere else.

Furthermore, Hjarvard (2008b) distinguishes between three metaphors of the media: media as conduits, languages, and environments. The first metaphor refers to the fact that media is used to deliver content and messages from senders to receivers. The second refers to “the various ways the media format the messages and frame the relationship between sender, content and receiver” (*ibid.*: 12). The final metaphor refers to the systems and institutional level focusing on the capability of media to facilitate and structure interaction and communication (Hjarvard 2008b: 13).

As this study uses the representations of homosexuality and religion in parts of the Scandinavian mainstream press to discuss the deprivatisation of religion and vicarious debates it is a study of both the mediation of religion in the news, but also the way media contribute to changes in the religious system, or, in other words, the mediatization of religion. The primary interest here follows along the lines of media as environment. In this way the media as conduit and language is kept relatively constant focusing only on news paper material (language) and on the content and messages of Christianity and homosexuality (conduit).

Methodology and analysis

Hjarvard writes that the metaphor of environment signals an interest in historical changes, and although the material collected for this study is not historical, it will be related to the historical development in the attitudes towards homosexuality in the final section. The material consists of newspaper material from three national newspapers in Denmark, Norway and Sweden, and has originally been collected as part of a larger research project on religion and politics in newspapers and parliaments (Christensen 2010). It was collected in the period between the opening of the parliaments in the beginning of October 2006 and New Years Eve in all three countries. When planning the collection of data, one of the first choices is between a period and a case. This is similar to the choice between an ordinary and an extraordinary period as the case and the extraordinary are often coterminous. I have deliberately chosen an ordinary period in order to collect every-day representations of religion. It is difficult finding a period which is ordinary, as every period is unique, and in that sense extra-ordinary, but if nothing pivotal has happened with regard to the subject that is analysed it can be identified as ordinary. A new minister with an activist and radically new agenda on this issue, or an ecclesiological

happening on same-sex marriages could be extra-ordinary events if they were followed up by much media coverage. This is not the case, although some of the Norwegian articles are part of the debate on the future relationship between the state and church.

All articles including a religion keyword were collected, and from this body of texts all articles including a Christianity keyword (pastor, dean, bishop, monk, nun, Catholic, Protestant, church, Christianity, Christians) and a homosexuality keyword (homosexuality, gay, lesbian, same sex, LGB) were identified. To minimize the risk of ignoring relevant articles, all articles including the terms *religion* and *sexuality* have also been included and then later removed from the final body of texts if necessary.

Table 1. Number and share of articles on homosexuality and Christianity in each newspaper

Denmark	Articles	Pct	Norway	Articles	Pct	Sweden	Articles	Pct
Politiken	25	4,5	Aftenposten	46	8,2	Svenska Dagbladet	29	8,7
Jyllands-Posten	16	2,7	Dagbladet	28	9,6	Dagens Nyheter	28	9,0
Ekstrabladet	13	5,6	VG	17	9,9	Aftonbladet	13	8,4
Total	54	3,9	Total	91	8,9	Total	70	8,7

A total of 215 articles on homosexuality and Christianity have been selected for the analysis. It is primarily news and background articles that deal with these issues, but there are some opinion articles in the material as well, although they are almost exclusively linked to the case from the Faroe Islands, discussed below. The table shows that Denmark is different from the other countries as the Danish newspapers do not cover the issue as much as is the case in both Norway and Sweden. Only 4 percent of all articles on Christianity deal with homosexuality in the Danish newspapers while it is almost 9 percent in Norway and Sweden. It is worth noting that the share of Christianity coverage is very similar in the three countries (around 45 pct.) although the exact number of articles differs¹ (Christensen 2010: 52).

Another difference is the tabloid newspapers. They do not normally pay much attention to religion, but in relation with homosexuality they cover the issue to the same or even greater extent than the other newspapers.

In the following section, the material from the three countries is not analyzed in order to identify differences between them. Instead they are all treated as a Scandinavian part of a larger European public debate on Christianity and homosexuality and form the basis for discussing the notion of vicarious debate in relation to homosexuality. During the first reading the texts were categorised according to the event they describe. Based on this they are divided into two sections, i.e. events that are primarily external or internal to the churches as this might potentially be important for evaluating the notion of vicarious debate. Davie identified the controversies within the church as important, but they are

not the only issues relating homosexuality and Christianity to each other. Consequently I examine both controversies within and outside of the church. The sections below represent this categorisation when they describe and identify the Christian arguments or attitudes towards homosexuality, and relate them to the legitimate instances of public religion as identified by Casanova.

Mediatization and deprivatization of religion: the case of homosexuality

A second reading of the material reveals four issues: The midterm election in America, the right to non-discrimination in the Faroe Islands, same-sex marriages in the national churches, and the attitudes towards homosexual pastors in the national churches as well. The first two issues are external to the church as they focus on the political mobilization of conservative electorates or politicians. The latter issues are internal to the church as they touch upon matters of theology and the performance and belief of the pastors themselves.

Homosexuality and mobilization of Christian opposition in American and Faroese Politics

The cases of congress man Mark Foley and evangelical pastor Ted Haggard are covered in all three countries. Both cases are linked to the coming midterm election because the Christian right is an important part of president Bush's constituency, and mobilizing them proves increasingly difficult due to reasons that also has to do with homosexuality. Foley has, on several accounts, skipped voting in Congress to engage in sex chats with delivery boys and interns in Congress. This is explicitly stated as a problem for Christian voters and not voters in general.

A few days before the election, the leader of the national association of evangelicals, Ted Haggard, resigns because of a homosexual relationship with a prostitute. He has been very outspoken in his criticism of homosexuality and supposedly speaks often with the president, but the relationship forces him to not only resign but also repent in public. In both cases, the attitude of Christians towards homosexuality point more or less in the same direction. Foley's actions are explained by him being abused by a pastor when he was young thus including the notion of paedophilia in the debate. This type of Christianity is also characterised by the absence of forgiveness. It is not part of the Evangelical version of the Bible. The tone is set by an Evangelical lobbyist: "The liberal baby killers in Washington should be careful, and the Ford company boycotted because it accepts homosexual employees" (Politiken 28 October, "Democrats with a winning hand").

After the midterm election it becomes clear that Bush has lost the election, and that the new Speaker in Congress is a Democrat. The Christian conservatives warn against her, describing her as a woman who wants to introduce 'Californian values' in Congress, which is "tantamount to a cesspool of sin where women rush to abortion clinics and homosexuals marry each other" (Dagbladet 9 November, "Bush lost the centre"). In the coverage of these American cases, Christians and Christianity are represented negatively through their negative representations of homosexuality. Either other actors or journalists describe them as hypocrites and zealously judgmental or the media only refer to those parts of their rhetoric which is very negative. No Christian protagonists are used in the coverage to show that Christians can accept homosexuality. The Christianity that emerges from the Scandinavian coverage of the midterm election is a dogmatic type of Christianity which focuses on obedience, subordination, and an inflexible authority structure that is mirrored in all relationship: God is above man, man above woman, pastor above lay people etc. This type of Christianity cannot accept homosexuality, and consequently, these public representations of Christianity are not legitimate according to Casanova.

The case from the Faroese Islands includes a more varied list of actors in the debate. In 2005 a group of MPs in the Faroese parliament proposed a ban on the discrimination of homosexuals, but the proposal was rejected by two thirds of the parliament. After the violent attack on a young man who had been on the radio telling how difficult it is to be gay in Faroese society, the proposal is put forward once again in late 2006. The story is only covered in one Danish newspaper, but much more nuanced than the American cases. The journalists talk with gays, parents, politicians, and religious people in order to give everybody a voice. Parents have begun to come forward demanding that their children be treated with respect and dignity. Nevertheless, a mother relates how they are met with serious opposition by Christian politicians, and a father argues that the biggest mistake is the confusion of religion and politics. "The parliament has become a platform for religious fundamentalism. Much of what is said can be seen as encouraging hatred and persecution. It has nothing to do with Christianity. It is religion" (Politiken 24 October. "They read the Bible like the Devil").

The Christian politicians argue that politics must be based on the Christian faith, and the law cannot oppose the Bible. They do so by way of three arguments. The first arguments can be called the Old Testament or dogmatic argument: You can find verses in the Bible that specifically condemns homosexuality and no Christian society should therefore allow it. The other argument is the New Testament argument. As Faroese society is Christian and based on compassion it takes care of all members of society. There is no reason to make laws to solve non-existing problems. The third argument is the human rights arguments that the proposal discriminates Christians who can no longer express

the values in the Bible that are against homosexuals. The supporters of the proposal use two arguments. The politicians use the human rights argument that homosexuals have the right not to be discriminated. The parents and gays use the same arguments, but a few use Christianity as well arguing that Christianity is about love, compassion, tolerance, and freedom. At the day of the vote, 17 of the 32 members vote in favour of the amendment banning discrimination.

As was the case in the coverage of the midterm elections, we learn primarily that Christianity has a problem with homosexuality. Only the parents and a few Christian gays refer to an ethical message of Christianity when defending gay rights whereas all other Christians represent a more dogmatic type of Christianity similar to the one we found in the American cases. Furthermore, the arguments used, even the New Testament arguments are not legitimate according to Casanova.

Christian attitudes towards same-sex marriages and homosexual pastors

The public debate on homosexuality and Christianity is, in the selected period at least, inseparable from the debate on the future relationship between the state and the church in Norway. The existing relationship is supported by those who fear that only the state can guarantee an inclusive church, i.e. that the church will inevitably turn conservative and intolerant. It is primarily politicians and opinion makers that envision such a scenario in which modern demands for gender equality and the right to non-discrimination will simply be ignored in favour of a dogmatic Christian Truth. The current situation is that the Church of Norway has two official attitudes towards homosexuality: on the one hand it allows pastors to bless homosexual couples in the church and on the other it allows pastors to reject them. The former group argues that the church “should be the progressive force which brandishes the banner of humanity and human autonomy” (Aftenposten 20 October, “Q&A: Mother Good-heart”), while the latter group feel more committed to the Bible. When looking at the coverage in the media, it is clear that the pastors in favour of rejecting homosexuality know that their attitude is not *come il faut* in the public debate. There are several arguments in favour of the blessing of same-sex marriages in the media, but none against. We only have second hand access to arguments against homosexuality. The most direct argument against same-sex marriages comes from a pastor who warns that if pastors and bishops share the attitudes of politicians, trade unions, and common members of the church, it will end up “de-Christianizing the church” (VG 10 December, “LO’s [The Norwegian Confederation of Trade Unions] prayer for the state-church”). The result is that the representations are highly biased in favour of accepting homosexuals and it is non-religious actors from the political system or labour movement who are most outspoken on this issue.

In much coverage of homosexuality and same-sex marriages in other countries the newspapers find it relevant to mention if the church or Christian groups are opposed. For instance in South Africa, we learn that *all* ethnic groups oppose same-sex marriages but, it is only representatives from the Catholic Church and the Christian Democratic party that are used as voices for this opposition. Furthermore, we hear how the Orthodox Church condemns equal rights claims in Russia, and how the Catholic Church opposes civil same-sex marriages in Mexico. Of all these churches, only (part of) the churches in Scandinavia accepts and approves of same-sex marriages according to the news. For instance several Swedish newspapers print the press release from the archbishop, who expresses his satisfaction that homosexuals can be married in church with a “blessing as similar to that of a normal marriage without being an actual wedding ceremony” (Dagens Nyheter 7 December, “Gay couples can get the blessing of the church”). Similarly, we hear how pastors tell that Swedes leave the church because it has not kept up with the developments in society, which is pivotal if it wants to remain relevant. On the other hand, a growing number of Laestadians leave the church due to its increasingly liberal attitude towards homosexuals. Instead Laestadians form their own conservative communities with an attitude towards homosexual pastors and same-sex marriages in better accordance with their theology.

In these internal debates we also note a struggle between a conservative and a more liberal Christianity, but it is by far, the liberal that is most positively represented in the press. It subscribes to the set of criteria that Casanova has identified in order for religion to be public on the premises of the modern democratic and rights based society. The conservative voices are hardly heard at all, and this alone problematizes the notion of a debate on moral shifts in society. In the next section, I discuss this in relation to the notion of vicariousness.

Mediatization and deprivatisation in relation to religious authority and vicariousness

In order to understand the relationship between Christianity, or the church, and homosexuality in Scandinavia, it might be relevant to look at the recent developments in the attitude towards homosexuality in society, or to look at the political, legal and media environment of the church. Erik Albæk (2003) writes that homosexuality was decriminalized in Denmark in 1930. However, this did not foster tolerance immediately which is clear from a 1947 poll. The Nordic Gallup Institutes asked what crimes were most serious, and of the seven options 61 percent of the Danes listed homosexuality as the worst or second-worst crime, whereas 26 and 19 percent did the same in Norway and Sweden respectively. Interestingly, it was only in Norway that it was a felony in 1947.

During the next four decades, the attitude towards homosexuality changed dramatically and 57 percent of the Danes favoured registered partnership in 1988, the year before the law on registered partnership actually passed (Albæk 2003: 250f). This is summarized in the table below.

Table 2. Dates and figures on the attitudes and rights towards homosexuality*

	Denmark	Norway	Sweden
1947 poll: Homosexuality as worst or second worst crime	61%	26%	19%
Homosexuality among adults is decriminalized	1930	1972	1944
Homosexuality is included in anti-discrimination laws	1987	1981	1987
Implementation of registered partnership	1989	1993	1995

* Figures from the poll are based on Havelin 1968. Unfortunately, he presents the Gallup polls without giving the number of respondents. He writes: "In 1947, the Gallup Institution in the four Nordic countries made a survey where they asked a sample of the population to rank seven felonies according to their severity. These were murder, rape of adult women, breaking and entering, forgery, drunk driving, hunting outside of the hunting season, and homosexuality" (Havelin 1968, 73, note 9, my translation). It has not been possible to find the poll elsewhere. The dates are based on Albæk 2003 for Denmark, Moxnes 2001 for Norway, and www.rfsl.se for Sweden (seen on 29 January 2010, and again 21 May 2011).

The table shows that legal and political equality of homosexuals has changed quite recently from being a crime to being accepted to such a degree that gay couples can enter registered partnerships. This means that the churches have had to adapt themselves to this value transformation in a short span of time. Supplementing the table, the Euro Barometer has examined the discrimination at the individual level in the member states of the European Union, and although Norway is not among them, the results from Sweden and Denmark are quite clear. These populations are the most and second most tolerant of the member states with regard to homosexuality (Euro Barometer 2008: 57-58).

Returning to Davie and her idea that media debates on homosexuality in the churches are prime examples of the vicarious role of religion, I argue that this idea is wrong, and that the theories of mediatization and deprivatization of religion help explain that. I am not arguing that vicarious religion as such is wrong, but, on this issue, I find it to be a poor description of what does exist for several reasons. First, the data above suggest that the shift in moral climate has already happened in society, but not necessarily in every corner of the church. What we see in the debates are the coverage and representation of a dogmatic *reaction* from parts of the churches to the intrusion of external values based on human rights. The carriers of these values are the political, legal and media systems, the latter facilitating the interaction between the other systems and society in general. This means that the autonomy of the religious system and its traditional value structure is challenged. Naturally, this creates tensions *in* the religious group which might perceive it as a non-religious or secular, but nevertheless existential threat to their faith if we use the terms of a securitization of religion approach (Laustsen and Wæver 2001: 720). Keeping the pace

of the attitudinal change in mind, it is difficult to imagine the churches being able to adapt fast enough on an issue which has been important, theologically, for generations. In this way, the case from the Faroe Islands is the closest we get to a vicarious debate, and it might have that function in the Faroe Islands, but the way the case is used in the newspapers is more as an example of the dogmatic intolerance of religion, than that of the church offering a space for discussion of controversial issues.

Second, as we have seen, the debate on homosexuality only becomes a debate when the church or religious actors act in contradiction with the general public attitudes towards homosexuality, personal autonomy and in some cases human rights in general (Krarup 2000). Only rarely do the antagonists themselves, the dogmatic religious authorities, appear in the mainstream public debates. When one position on a given issue is more or less systematically excluded or chooses not to let itself be heard in the public sphere we are not witnessing a real debate or exchange of arguments but the debunking of a certain type of Christianity. On the other hand, the dogmatic Christian is actually the most frequent Christian actor in relation to homosexuality, which means that the media primarily pays attention to those actors who fail to live up to the three instances of legitimate deprivatized religion identified by Casanova. It is precisely because they are perceived to be illegitimate from a liberal, democratic or secular point of view that makes them interesting in the eyes of the media. Furthermore, the notion of strong mediatization can be applied here. The coverage of Christianity and homosexuality shows that the mainstream media is not a channel open to everybody, it does not give voice to the most conservative, traditional or homophobic actors, either through suppression of conservative voices through an editorial gate keeping function or, perhaps more probable, a self imposed exclusion because these voices feel or know that their dogmatic message is less acceptable in a mediated form than the ethical message of other Christians. Their message is no longer a part of the realm of shared experiences in Hjarvard's terms (Hjarvard 2008a: 122). The conservative message can still be mediated through less public or niche media, be given in non-mediated form in parish meetings, hiring policies of the church, or other types of interaction outside the national or political public sphere. They are not a natural part of the idea of an inclusive, tolerant, and democratic society. In this way, Scandinavia could be the exceptional case that does not fit Davie's notion of vicarious debates since the countries are already among the most tolerant.

Finally, you can find a number of topics much more important for and debated in society than, gays and the rights they have already acquired that are ignored or only sporadically addressed by the churches, for instance bio-engineering, genetic manipulation, or global warming. Although these issues have not been part of the material for this article, the overall material from

which this has been taken included all articles involving religion. Only one out of more than 7,000 articles mentions stem-cell research. None of the selected media choose to cover how the Catholic Church encourages Catholics to use public transportation to protect Creation from global warming, and the short debate on some Danish pastors' announcement of chiming of church bells at the COP15 summit in Copenhagen in 2010 did not focus on global warming or sustainability but on the pastors taking the church hostage in a demonstration of a political leftist agenda. These issues do not touch upon the same basic issues in the church and its theology the way gender and sexuality historically have done and sometimes still do, and in that way, I find it more natural for the church to discuss homosexuality than these other issues. That does not make the debate vicarious, however. Summing up, it seems that it is not so much a case of helping society come to terms with shifts in a new moral climate. Rather, it is the media who covers what they perceive to be an institution with a problematic stance on some post-material values like equality in relation to gender and sexual orientation. In this way, it is more a question of revealing hypocrisy or discrimination than offering a space for reflection on changes in society.

Conclusion

In this chapter, the public debate on the relationship between homosexuality and Christianity has been presented in order to evaluate to what extent that debate can be understood as a case of vicarious religion. Using a number of issues in the overall debate on homosexuality and Christianity in the Scandinavian mainstream press, I question, not vicarious religion as such, but the debate on homosexuality as evidence of the churches offering space for vicarious debates. On the contrary, I find vicariousness to be a poor description of the debate in the news media, and it runs the risk of turning every public debate into a vicarious debate. It might very well be the case that vicariousness is a general trait of late modern society and not only related to religion and the traditional state churches, but that is both beyond the scope of this article to explore, and the original idea of the term. Using the theories of mediatization and dep-privatization of religion the public debate can instead be seen as questioning the legitimacy of certain dogmatic aspects of religious authority which leads to an internal theological defense against some post-material values perceived to *de-Christianize* or threaten the true faith. The Faroese case shows that the concept of a vicarious debate might work in societies where the tolerance of homosexuality is low, although in that case it was not so much the church as it was Christianity that demanded more than offered this space. In order to remain relevant for society, churches must negotiate the terms of going public, but the

price for being socially, culturally, or publicly legitimate can be extraordinarily high demanding, for instance, abandoning past doctrine.

Note

1. The lowest share is found in Danish Jyllands-Posten with 41 pct of the articles on religion dealing with Christianity and the highest share is found in Norwegian Aftenposten where 49 pct of the articles deal with Christianity.

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The Evangelical Lutheran Church and the Media in Post-Secular Finland

Marcus Moberg & Sofia Sjö

The progressively accelerating mediatization of contemporary Western societies is often taken to have greatly come to affect and shape the ways in which religious communities, both old and new, communicate and interact within broader society and culture. Developments in media have also afforded religion and religious actors increased visibility in the public sphere, thus further underlining the importance that broader theoretical frameworks on the current and future place and significance of religion in contemporary Western societies are developed in direct and mutually beneficial dialogue with current religion, media and culture research.

This chapter focuses on the relationship between media and institutional Christianity in a Finnish context in light of a set of recently developed engagements with the present-day media environment on the part of the institutional Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Church. In addition to this, we discuss one recent national media-related event that is particularly illustrative of the influence that the media today may exert on public discourse on religion-related issues as well as of the mounting pressures on religious communities to adapt to the demands of the present-day media environment.

In light of the particular national context of Finland, and with particular reference to the theoretical framework of mediatization, we propose that the concept of the post-secular might provide a fruitful basis on which to develop a broader sociological perspective on religious change that directly acknowledges the impact of the present-day media environment on contemporary institutional religious communication, agency, life, and practice.

Mediatization and religious change

Religion and media have always been inextricably interlinked in varied and complex ways. The rapid development of new media technologies and the

explosive increase in different media outlets during recent decades have, however, made the relationship between religion and media ever more multifaceted, resulting, among other things, in a growing visibility and presence of religion in the public sphere (e.g. Stolow 2010: 544; Herbert 2011). Following these developments, scholars have more recently started to approach the present-day relationship between religion and media in relation to the theoretical framework of mediatization (e.g. Lövheim and Lynch 2011a).

Although the framework of mediatization has been developed in slightly different versions, it is generally intended to capture a central element of modernity and social and cultural change whereby the influence of the media as a whole – as technology, organization, commercial enterprise etc. – has extended into and grown within virtually all spheres of social and cultural everyday life, including religion and religious life (e.g. Hjarvard 2011: 119-120). Processes of mediatization vary across different social and cultural contexts and are most appropriately examined in modern democratic societies where extensive media-infrastructures are in place and where media have acquired the status of independent institutions (Hjarvard 2011: 124). Finland, the focus of attention in this chapter, certainly fulfils these requirements.

It is, however, important to note in this context that scholarly opinion remains splintered when it comes to the possible or presumed actual effects of processes of mediatization on contemporary religious life and practice. As the mediatization of religion debate has been given more extensive treatment elsewhere (Lövheim and Lynch 2011a), it is enough to point out here that we base our argument in this chapter on an open-ended understanding of mediatization as a phenomenon that certainly affects religious life in a range of complex and varied ways, but not necessarily in ways that are directly determinative or easily predictable (cf. Lövheim and Lynch 2011b). We therefore do not regard mediatization as a phenomenon or process that simply encroaches or impinges on religious life and practice in simple and straightforward ways, but rather as a varied and dynamic phenomenon that different religious communities actively respond to and reflexively negotiate in diverse and often complex ways depending on their particular social and cultural situation and context. This raises the question of agency, a question we will have reason to return to.

It has become increasingly clear, though, that the mediatization of religion debate needs to develop and proceed in close dialogue with broader sociological perspectives on the place of religion in late-modern societies. More recently, broader debates in the sociology of religion have become ever more occupied with the continued significance and growing visibility and presence of religion in the public sphere across many Western societies (as well as beyond them). Considering the media-centeredness of contemporary Western public spheres on the whole, it can certainly be argued that any theoretical perspective designed for approaching and conceptualizing the contemporary

public visibility of religion also needs to pay close attention to developments in the present-day media environment (cf. Herbert 2011: 627).

Among various more recently emerged perspectives, we propose that the concept of post-secularity could prove particularly fruitful in this regard for the following three principal reasons. First, it explicitly focuses on the present-day visibility and presence of religion and religious actors in the public sphere. Second, it has so far remained malleable and open to further development and refinement in combination with perspectives from other fields, and perhaps particularly religion and media studies. And, third, it provides a useful way of conceptualizing how currently ongoing general transformations of the Finnish religious landscape necessarily need to be understood in close relation to the present-day media environment. However, considering that both the concept of mediatization and post-secularity continue to be the subject of much debate, our argument in this chapter is suggestive rather than assertive.

The concept of post-secularity

The relatively recently emerged debates on the “post-secular” character of contemporary Western societies have so far mainly revolved around philosophically rethinking and reframing received understandings of “the secular” and secularist principles of governance (e.g. Dillon 2010: 142). Debates on post-secularity thus also connect to broader debates on ongoing macro-level transformations of the general socio-economic makeup of Western societies following the increasing global interconnectedness of national societies with regard to economy, politics, populations, and media.

Although it has appeared in many different forms, the concept of post-secularity has become particularly associated with the current social-philosophical thinking of Jürgen Habermas. Habermas’ (2008: 17) version of the concept is based on the premise that there has occurred a recent and increasingly widespread growth in “public consciousness” with regard to religion and religion-related issues in general throughout “the affluent societies of Europe or countries such as Canada, Australia and New Zealand, where people’s religious ties have steadily or rather quite dramatically lapsed in the post-World War II period.” It is fair to assume that the Nordic countries also should be included among these.

According to Habermas, three factors have played a particularly significant role in bringing about this general rise in “public consciousness”: (1) the increasing coupling of religion with global conflicts; (2) the increasingly prominent role played by religious actors in relation to value-laden civil debates on different national levels; (3) and following increasing immigration, especially by people “from countries with traditional cultural backgrounds” (Habermas 2008: 20). Although not explicitly noted by Habermas, it is difficult to imagine

the impact of any of these three factors without taking the present-day media environment into account.

Habermas' writing on post-secularity also contains a purely normative social-philosophical element, but it is quite possible to differentiate this from what he regards as the principal characteristics of a post-secular society as outlined above. However, from a sociological point of view, important questions remain as to exactly *where*, as well as in relation to *which* or *what types* of social and cultural phenomena elements deemed characteristic of post-secularity could be empirically identified and observed (cf. Turner 2010). The position of religion within the present-day media environment certainly constitutes a particularly relevant field in relation to which the concept could be further developed and refined.

As a starting point for further development it would surely, following Knott (2010: 34), be useful to regard the concept of post-secularity as also signifying the emergence of “a new kind of religion that is informed and changed by its historical experience of exclusion and changing relationship with the modern nation state and the condition of the secular.” We fully concur with Knott (2010: 34) when she writes that, even though there are plenty of “signs that religion has re-entered the public domain,” it is evident that it has “had to adapt in order to do so.” It is worth reiterating here that the public sphere of most contemporary Western societies cannot be adequately understood separately from the media as the principal facilitator of public civil discourse on religion-related issues. However, it is crucial to note that describing a society as post-secular by no means automatically implies that that society also should be regarded as “post-secularized” in some sense or other. Nor should a rise in the public visibility of religion automatically (or even hypothetically) be taken to reflect rising levels of individual religiosity or involvement in religion (cf. Hjarvard 2011: 131).

Post-secularity in a Finnish context

If the concept of the post-secular is understood in the way outlined above, Finnish society can be argued to have started displaying what could be called “post-secular characteristics” since the early 1990s. The past couple of decades have witnessed significant changes in the general societal and cultural position of the dominant Evangelical Lutheran Church (henceforth referred to as the “Church”). Although Church membership has remained exceptionally high in wider European comparison (slightly under 80 percent of the population in 2010), interest in Church teachings and activities have seen steady long term decline as the religiosity of Finns has become increasingly privatized (Kääriäinen et al. 2005: 166-174). However, in response to these challenges, the Church

has actively sought to transform itself into a service- and civil society-oriented institution and independent societal actor (Kääriäinen et al. 2005: 172).

One could also at least tentatively argue that a general increase in “public consciousness” regarding religion and religion-related issues gradually has been brought about among Finns during past decades by similar factors such as those outlined by Habermas as having played a central role for the emergence of post-secular societies. Should this indeed be the case, it is abundantly clear that media, and mass media in particular, need to be regarded as having played a hugely influential role in bringing about such a situation. For example, religion today is repeatedly coupled with global conflicts in both international and national news media on almost a daily basis. On the national level, one can also discern a notable increase in the visibility of religious actors, including the Church, in public debates on value-laden civil and political issues such as the civil rights of sexual minorities or assisted reproduction (e.g. Kanckos 2008). The Church as a social institution has also played a notable role in public debates on growing social inequality, particularly through a series of widely publicized and publicly debated joint statements by the Church’s Bishops on issues such as the negative social effects of neo-liberal policies (*Kohti yhteistä hyvää*, “Towards the Common Good”, 1999) or food security (*Anna meille jokapäiväinen leipämme*, “Give us our Daily Bread”, 2010).

Increasing immigration has also clearly played its part. Following the slow but steady growth of the immigrant population in Finland past decades have witnessed a notable increase in national mass media coverage on issues relating to Muslim immigrants in particular (cf. Taira 2008). In 2010, the Finnish public service broadcast company Yleisradio (YLE) also produced and aired a Finnish version of the TV-series format *Make Me a Muslim* (with the title *Muslimielämää*, “Muslim Life”), that followed six non-Muslim Finns learning about Islam and trying to live as Muslims during a period of six weeks.

As the examples above illustrate, there is indeed some ground for suggesting that religion and religious actors have gained increased visibility in the Finnish public sphere during past decades – provided that one accepts the view of the “public sphere” as being underpinned by media to a substantial degree. Media have certainly come to constitute the principal “environment that makes it possible for religion to sustain a presence in both public and private life” (Stolow 2010: 544) in Finland. But they have also come to provide the principal environments within and through which many religious communities today actively strive to *increase* their presence and visibility in this regard. The continued, and perhaps growing, public visibility of the Church in Finland today is partly attributable to such efforts.

Lastly, as already noted, the concept of the post-secular also hypothesizes that an increase in the public visibility of religion – which we argue is principally attributable to the rise of a modern communications media-centered public

sphere – has altered people’s perceptions about the boundaries between “religious” and “secular” spheres and the general role and significance of religion in society. This issue, however, largely remains to be empirically substantiated in a Finnish context. Therefore, in the absence of sufficient empirical data on this issue, the above observations should only be taken as indicative. However, recent Church initiatives towards the media are suggestive of a process of change.

Recent developments in the relationship between Church and media in Finland

Although the scholarship on religion and media in Finland has a fairly long history, the field has remained small. Recent developments in the relationship between media and the Church specifically have been most consistently monitored by the Church Research Institute in their regular four-year reports on general Church developments (e.g. Kääriäinen et al. 2009) as well as in other related publications (e.g. Rahkonen 2007). Other research on Church and media has mainly focused on the Church’s own both earlier and current use of mass media, mainly print and radio (e.g. Nieminen 2001).

In the following we shall discuss some notable developments with regard to the Church’s current strategic engagements with the wider present-day media environment. In the final part of this section, we shall also briefly explore the current relationship between the Church and the mass media in relation to a long-lasting (and at the time of writing still ongoing) national public debate on the civil rights of homosexuals and same-sex couples. There is not space here for a detailed presentation of the many ways in which the Church engages with the media. However, we believe that the cases chosen clearly point in a certain direction, a direction that theories of mediatization and the post-secular both can help us better comprehend.

The general media-theology of the Church has expressly been based on the notion of a “communicative church” since at least the early 1990s (Church Council 2004). However, recent years have witnessed an unprecedented active and purposeful engagement with the present-day media environment on the part of the Church. During the past decade alone, the Church has developed and started implementing a set of extensive strategic initiatives all aimed at improving its ability to actively engage with the media environment of today and, above all, the Internet.

The Church was an early adopter of the Internet. Its official main website www.evl.fi was originally launched already in 1995. Today, the website also contains a newsfeed section where news on Church-related issues is continuously being posted. Notably, the reports posted in the newsfeed section frequently focus on and emphasize Church media use in general. For example, among a

total of 234 separate newsfeed reports posted during the period 1 September to 31 December 2010, 92 directly dealt with media-related issues in some way or other, and many of these also expressly emphasized the importance of the Internet as a particularly central communicative tool for the Church. Church Internet-use has gradually grown on all levels. For example, the Church has more recently developed a range of online services such as online pastoral care, virtual Sunday schools, and Internet-based educational tools for Children's work (cf. Moberg 2010: 95-96).

Among all current Church initiatives aimed at improving its ability to engage with and within the virtual world, the so-called *Hengellinen elämä verkossa* (Spiritual Life on the Web)-project (implemented during 2009-2012) is by far the most notable. This extensive nation-wide project was explicitly developed for the purposes of instructing Church personnel in Internet use as well as to encourage them to assume an active presence on contemporary online social media platforms (Moberg 2010: 94-95). The development of the Church's general Internet competence and presence online also constituted one of three "prioritized" main areas of development in the Church's official communication strategy during 2004-2010 (Church Council 2004). The need for increased active engagement and interaction on all media platforms is also expressly emphasized in the (at the time of writing) most recently published strategic communication program formulated by the Church Communication Centre, which will be in effect until 2015¹.

Overall, the Church's current general approach towards the media as outlined in official Church documents is frequently expressly based on the proposition that the Church not only should but *ought to* and indeed *has to* engage with the present-day media environment on all fronts. For example, in the online description of the underlying main rationale for the "Spiritual Life on the Web"-project it is candidly stated that the Internet has "changed the working environment of the Church," that the Church consequentially "has to" react to this development, and that changes and re-structurings of its activities therefore necessarily "have to" take place².

The *Church Media Fund* (founded in 2005) constitutes another related current initiative that is further illustrative of an ever more purpose-driven multidimensional engagement with the present-day media environment on the part of the Church. Through the activities of the Fund the Church has moved beyond its traditionally assigned slots on public broadcast network outlets and started to take on the role of a direct financial supporter of the creation of non-Church produced forms of media content (e.g. television documentaries) that deal with religion and existential issues in ways considered concomitant with or in support of Church values, such as the advancement and perpetuation of social solidarity and responsibility – a long-standing key value of the Church (Kääriäinen et al. 2005: 60).

Overall, these recently developed forms of engagement with the present-day media environment are all illustrative of the Church's aspirations to be able to function as an active agent within the new "extended" public sphere that has emerged as a result of the general liberalization of the media economy and ongoing developments in digital technologies and virtual arenas in particular (cf. Herbert 2011: 632). In its expressed efforts to ensure that its "citizen service" (Church Council 2004: 59) is realized in the best possible way in an increasingly media driven- and dependent society, the Church has clearly come to recognize the pivotal importance of the media as the principal facilitator of the public sphere on the whole – a recognition that clearly also to some degree has affected its self-understanding and brought about some notable organizational changes and shifts in priorities (including the allocation of resources).

*The Church and the impact of the mass media:
the homosexuality debate*

The civil rights of homosexuals and same-sex couples (e.g. regarding child adoption) has long constituted a topic of public debate in Finland. Recently, however, the debate has taken a new turn in which both the media and the Church have emerged as central players. On 12 October 2010, the long-standing current affairs program *Ajankohtainen kakkonen* on the Finnish public service network YLE's channel 2 held a live-broadcast debate on the topic titled "Homoilta" (Gay Evening) – the second of its kind (the first debate was held in 1996).

The Gay Evening-program featured 18 discussants, among them journalists, LGBT activists and representatives, Church representatives (including a bishop), Christian activists, and members of parliament. The largely critical views on homosexuality expressed during the debate by the leader of the Finnish Christian Democrats Päivi Räsänen – although her role in the program was not that of a representative of the Church – provoked an immediate, strong, and unprecedented negative wider public reaction against the Church as a whole. Notwithstanding the fact that the Church publicly distanced itself from Räsänen's views, within just one week after the program had aired, around 30 000 people had formally resigned their Church membership, and by December the number had risen to around 40 000³.

Notably, the Gay Evening-program was both conceived, staged, and framed by the national public service network alone, probably largely because of the topic's general currency, controversiality, and thus perceived newsworthiness. In addition to this, it is no exaggeration to say that the Church utterly failed to both properly prepare itself for participating in this particular program and to anticipate subsequent wider public reaction to it. As a consequence, the Church was clearly also taken aback by the magnitude of the ensuing media

debate, which quickly became instrumental in bringing about the subsequent unprecedented avalanche in Church membership resignations.

The wider media-debate sparked by the Gay Evening-program also had a great effect on two major Church events held just a little over a month after the program had originally aired: the General Synod and the parish elections. The fact that synod proceedings were to include a vote on the institution of a possible prayer for same-sex registered couples (which, of course, had been decided on long before the Gay Evening-program) contributed to an unusually strong mass media interest in synod proceedings, thus affecting synod debates as well. The synod did indeed eventually decide on the institution of a prayer.

In addition to this, the media-debate following the Gay Evening-program also sparked a seldom seen wider public interest in the parish elections (held on 12 November 2010, just a few days after the General Synod). The parish elections were preceded by a range of extensive media campaigns encouraging young Church members to vote since these were the first elections in which sixteen year-olds were allowed to vote. The Church even created an online so-called "election-machine"-site designed to aid voters in finding a suitable candidate and to provide candidates with a channel through which to provide information about themselves and their stances on Church issues. However, as a consequence of the Gay Evening-debate, the elections primarily became framed in terms of a choice between liberal and conservative forces.

Although the civil rights of homosexuals and same-sex couples has long been the subject of continued public debate in Finland, following the Gay Evening-program, *religion*, in the form of conservative Christian resistance to homosexuality as such, has now emerged as perhaps the single most visible component of wider public debates on what is essentially a civil rights issue that ultimately will have to be decided on through legislation. This momentum has also clearly emboldened conservative Christian actors and developed into a formidable challenge for the Church. For example, the difficult situation engendered by the Gay Evening-program was exacerbated further on 20 March 2011 when the Christian revivalist youth media *Nuotta*⁴ launched a media campaign against homosexuality titled "Älä alistu!" (Don't yield!). This campaign triggered a new wave of Church membership resignations, resulting in the Arch Bishop publicly pleading for the campaign to be stopped.

Church and media: a question of agency

The homosexuality debate constitutes an exceptionally good example of religious concerns re-entering and becoming a highly visible part of wider mediated national civil and political debates, which can be considered a typical characteristic of a post-secular society. As already noted, the media have come to exercise a

huge influence when it comes to framing and facilitating how different views, values, positions and identities (e.g. in relation to sexual orientation) become expressed, disseminated, and subsequently discussed in the present-day mediated public sphere. For example, media representations of minority sexualities typically tend to at least “reinforce as much as challenge the prevailing heterosexual hegemony” (Hodkinson 2011: 238). Although space does not allow for a more detailed discussion of the issue here, the Gay Evening-program and the subsequent debates and reactions in other media could therefore also be situated in relation to the (often sensationalist) ways in which the relationship between religion and sexuality tends to be represented in the media. For example, it could be argued that the general, and in many respects sensationalist, picture of the Church’s presumed stance on homosexuality that came across most clearly in the media largely reflected *certain* media (pre)conceptions about the relationship between Christianity and sexuality rather than the actual official stance of the Church (or even the lack of a clear official stance).

The homosexuality debate can thus perhaps also be taken to illustrate how the interplay between religion and media in post-secular societies gradually leads to a situation that, so to speak, starts to perpetuate itself. As religion and religious actors become more visible in and through an increasingly liberalized and complex media environment (Herbert 2011: 632), this may also lead to an increase in the general newsworthiness of religion, which in turn may lead to an increase in the frequency of public media-debates on the role of religion and religious actors in society – debates which also spread and diversify through new social media in particular. It is possible to view the Gay Evening-program and its aftermath as an example of a case in which certain Church values and stances (although ambiguously articulated by the Church itself) became singled out and made the topic of critical public mediated discussion and scrutiny in a way that the Church as an institution and societal actor neither expected nor was able to control. However, although it would seem reasonable to identify the media as the principal driving force here, both media and Church agency are difficult to pin down in this case.

In her constructive critique of the mediatization thesis Lövheim has pointed to the need to “acknowledge the agency of religious actors to take part in the shaping of media as well as modern society” (Lövheim 2011: 153). Although the consequences of the homosexuality debate can be argued to underline the power of the mass media in particular to affect the image of religion today, the many media related strategies instigated by the Church to both counter the consequences of the intensification of the homosexuality debate (membership resignation) and use it to inspire interest in the parish elections, for example, complicates any simplistic reading that would principally locate agency in any one court. This in turn ties into the discussion of the possible emergence of a post-secular society in Finland and the role of the media in this process. As

we have aimed to illustrate through our discussion above, the Church can well be viewed as a good example of a religious institution that actively aims to engage with the present-day media environment in order to perpetuate and increase its presence in today's mediated public sphere.

Concluding remarks: Church and mediatization

As explored in this chapter, current Church engagements with the present-day Finnish media environment clearly point to how the Church increasingly has come to internalize the demands of a mediatized society. The Church could therefore perhaps at least to some degree also be said to have consciously initiated what could be termed a process of '*self*-mediatization'.

With regard to the impact of the homosexuality debate on the Church and the role of the mass media as the principal catalyst and facilitator of this debate, another facet of mediatization can perhaps also be discerned, namely, that of "organizational mediatization" (Raupp 2005). As argued by Raupp (2005: 203), "seen from the perspective of mediatization the relationship between organizations and the mass media is an interdependent one." In order for organizations (or religious institutions) to be able to communicate their interests and concerns as effectively as possible in an increasingly media-centered public sphere, they need to gain an as clear as possible understanding of how communication "works" in this context and learn to anticipate mass media and wider public responses to their actions (or lack thereof). Therefore,

when an organization plans and implements decisions with regard to the expectations of mass media we see a weak mediatization effect. A strong mediatization effect occurs when decisions would not have been taken without the anticipation of the logic of the mass media (Raupp 2005: 207).

The Church today clearly displays a strong desire to be able to "manage the communication process effectively" (Raupp 2005: 204), although it no doubt is experiencing great difficulties with regard to the homosexuality issue. Thus far, it would be premature to talk about a strong mediatization effect when it comes to the Church's own perception of its relationship vis-à-vis the mass media. However, following the intensification of the homosexuality debate in the fall of 2010 and the serious challenge that it has come to pose for the Church, some signs of an accelerating weak mediatization effect being underway have now started to appear (such as when Church representatives interviewed in mass media candidly admit that the Church has failed to interact with the mass media effectively with regard to the homosexuality debate in particular).

However, this transformation of Church communication and interaction can also reasonably be conceptualized in terms of a religious institution re-entering,

or finding new ways of entering, the mediated public sphere, but also having to adapt in order to be able to do so. The conflict-ridden nature of the homosexuality debate underscores the potential usefulness of employing the concept of the post-secular in this particular case. Conversely, so does also the way the Church has come to use different types of media, such as the Internet, to facilitate its position as a service- and civil society-oriented institution and increase its public visibility and presence.

In striving to understand the media strategies recently initiated by the Church and the way in which these are aimed at supporting the present-day self-understanding of the Church as a service- and civil society-oriented institution, and in comprehending events such as the Gay Evening-debate and its consequences for the Church, the usefulness of combining the theoretical framework of mediatization with the notion of the post-secular becomes clear. Each concept brings an important perspective to the different examples discussed in this chapter and they are both needed for a comprehensive analysis. When attempting to gain a deeper understanding of how the present-day relationship between institutional Christianity and media in Finland relate to broader processes of social, cultural and religious change, combining the concepts of mediatization and post-secularity clearly opens up many interesting avenues for further reflection and analysis as well possibilities for comparisons with similar national social and cultural contexts such as those of the other Nordic countries.

Notes

1. <http://sakasti.evl.fi/sakasti.nsf/sp?Open&cid=Content49C011>
2. (<http://sakasti.evl.fi/sakasti.nsf/sp2?open&cid=Content3CC84E>).
3. <http://eroakirkosta.fi/static/ek-tilastot/>
4. <http://www.nuotta.com/>

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The Mediatization of Social Conflicts

Mediatization of Controversy

When the Security Police Went on Facebook

Knut Lundby & Kjersti Thorbjørnsrud

Connection

The terror attacks in Norway on 22 July 2011 were undertaken by a white Norwegian claiming to defend a European Christian tradition. This puts the focus on right-wing extremism. Half a year after the bombing in Oslo and the shooting at the youth camp at Utøya, the Norwegian security police (PST)¹ published their annual report. Despite the recent terror, PST maintained that the most serious threats could come from young Islamists who have grown up in Norway (PST 2012). And, in fact, the night before PST's press briefing on 17 January 2012 a video was launched on YouTube in Allah's name, wishing the crown prince, the prime minister and the foreign minister a painful death. The video was linked to an upcoming Islamist demonstration a few days later, in front of the parliament, to protest against Norwegian engagement in the war in Afghanistan. The Islamic Council advised Muslims not to take part, and no more than 35 protesters did, with as many journalists present – making this a well-mediated event.

The speaker at this demonstration in January 2012, Arfan Bhatti, said that unless Norwegian forces were withdrawn from Afghanistan the Norwegian people must be aware that their security is threatened: "This is not a threat but a warning", he added.

This expression echoed a much larger demonstration in the Norwegian capital two years earlier, in February 2010, where Arfan Bhatti was also involved. This is the case to be analysed here; a case encompassing layers of mediatization. Then it was a Norwegian convert who issued the statement "This is not a threat but a warning." He had taken the name Mohyeldeen Mohammad. He was actually one of two Norwegians arrested in connection with the video two years later.

The Norwegian Police Security Service is active in social media and in 2008 became the first secret service in the world to create a profile on Facebook. On their page they unwittingly published a caricature of the prophet Muhammad as a pig, posted anonymously. Arfan Bhatti, by then already a leading Muslim

activist, showed this to the tabloid paper *Dagbladet*, which put the story on their front page, with a facsimile of the caricature on the PST Facebook page. Uproar followed among Norwegian Muslims – not against the security service but against the newspaper. Groups of Muslims demonstrated in central Oslo. The young convert took the microphone, claiming that Norwegian authorities would not understand the situation of Muslims in the country until there was a 9/11, like in New York, or a 7/7, as in London. This warning created a stir within the public debate, fuelling a perception of the spread of Islam as threatening to Norwegian society. However, established Muslim voices in Norway spoke out against the young activist, indicating that Muslims ought no longer to be portrayed as one homogenous and unified group.

These events were covered extensively by the news media. This chapter analyses the chain of incidents in relation to mediatization theory (Hjarvard 2008b; Lundby 2009c). Following the mediatization of religion (Hjarvard 2008a, 2011), an intensification of controversies around religious themes in the media has to be expected.

Concepts

Mediatization implies changes in social and cultural formations moulded by the media. Such changes, to be processes of mediatization, are *transformations*, as they change “the direction, the form, or character of the actual social or cultural activities” (Lundby 2009a: 11). Transformations are long term, deep and lasting. However, as likely turning points, they may be identified already in specific, smaller steps of change – as in the aspects of a transforming process to be analysed here.

The modus operandi of mediatization has been related to “media logic” (Asp 1990; Hjarvard 2008b). This may be a useful concept as long as it is not taken in a linear and unified way as *one* operational principle (Couldry 2008; Lundby 2009b). As first outlined by Altheide and Snow (1979), media logics typically favour the evocative message, rich with emotional cues. Stories regarded as newsworthy are constructed with tools picked from the entertainment industry, creating information as narratives with a beginning, middle and end, based on dramatization, polarization, personification and simplification, at the expense of complex or contextualized specifics about particular questions. Media dramaturgy, in order to evoke feelings and induce reactions among the audience, is loaded with moral judgements, packaging events into easily-comprehensible stories about good and bad, victims and villains, enemies and patriots. This points to *narrative transformation* as an aspect of mediatization (Lundby 2008: 8-10) and relates to the transformation of representation offered by the multimodal means of story construction in the media, especially digitized me-

dia production, with its easy switch and combination between text, graphics, images and sound.

It is central to a theory of mediatization that media logics shape how the media work and also transform how other actors and institutions function as they adapt to and master the logics of the media. Part of the mediatization at this level is the strong position acquired by the media themselves as key institutions in society's communication. However, other institutions, like politics and religion, are also changed, or mediatized, when they implement media practices (Hjarvard 2008b). At this level we have the *institutional transformation*.

The narrative and institutional processes of mediatization take part within a wider cultural setting. The changes involved may imply a *cultural transformation*. This happens when narrative and institutional transformations resonate into broader cultural or collective sentiments, ideologies or conceptions. Nancy Thumim (2008) looked into this in a study of digital storytelling in public institutions. She distinguished between processes of textual, institutional and cultural mediatization (or in her term "mediation").

The transformations on the three levels will intertwine in different ways. However, in this case study they are analysed as processes on separate levels before a more coherent conclusion is drawn.

Challenges

Our aim is to explore whether the publication of the cartoon of the prophet Muhammad in Norway in February 2010, and the protests that followed, can be understood in terms of the three levels of mediatization. The methodology is to undertake a systematic analysis of the various phases of the case in relation to the three suggested levels of mediatization. On the narrative level, we will see how stories about religion, extremism and terror are constructed in line with the basic tenets of a media dramaturgy. Further, how knowledge of media dramaturgy and news conventions is exploited by single actors that have every interest in adding fuel to polarization and conflict rather than in dialogue and nuances. On the institutional level, we will study how institutions adapt to, exploit or lose control of the logic of the media as it unfolds. On the cultural level, we will trace whether a conception of Islam as interwoven with extremism, threat and terror was given dominance in Norwegian public discourse during the period.

The empirical material for this study consists of the postings and discussions on the Facebook page of the Norwegian Police Security Service (PST) in 2010, official reports and threat assessments from PST in the same period and data from interviews with the directors of the communication department of PST. The data further consists of the news stories and of eds/commentaries related to

the publication of the caricature and the subsequent coverage of protests, reactions and demonstrations in the main Norwegian newspapers in February 2010.

The selected case discloses a social and cultural tension within Norwegian society and its Muslim community that had not been visible in the general public sphere before the incident. As tensions escalated and became visible, this was defined as a controversy by the agents themselves and by the media. The conflict unfolded in new social media and in traditional mainstream media. We traced and read the stories told and found that the messages indeed revealed processes of mediatization transformation on the three levels: the narrative, the institutional and the cultural.

The methodological challenge is to identify changes or transformations from a case study at a certain point in time. Solid conclusions on change require before-and-after data not available here. However, the actual situation under study could be compared to a more unspecified earlier state. The strategies and reactions related to the constructions of terror, extremism, intolerance and Islam as intimately intertwined that was put forward in the media during the demonstration in 2010 is contrasted to a former, less conflictual situation and, thus, an outline of this context prior to the publication of the caricature in February 2010 is required.

Context

Norway is in transition from a fairly homogenous society to a more diverse one. Tensions following these changes are, to some extent, related to a growing presence of Islam in Norway. Norway has a small but expanding Muslim population. Somewhat more than 100,000 of a total population of nearly 5 million are registered with Muslim communities. Muslims now make up the largest faith community outside the dominating Lutheran Church of Norway that encompasses 78 percent of the population (Statistics Norway 2011). Nearly half of the Muslims live in the capital, Oslo, and, in some parts of the city, make up a considerable and visible part of the local population. This minority has, however, lived in peaceful co-existence with the Christian majority. The erupting conflict in 2010 followed a long period of dialogue. Norway was involved in the caricature crisis in 2006, although not as heavily as Denmark. An international team of media scholars has analysed the controversy as a transnational media event (Eide, Kunelius & Phillips 2008). Following the publication of the caricatures of the Prophet Muhammad in the small, Norwegian, New Christian Right paper *Magazinet* and subsequent distribution of this event via the Internet and other media to the Middle East, Norwegian embassies were attacked and set on fire.

The conflict in Norway was calmed down through dialogue, largely due to the channels for religious dialogue that were established, before the caricature

crisis, between the Islamic Council of Norway and the Church of Norway Council on Ecumenical and International Relations. The Norwegian government, besides its own links, could lean on these channels of dialogue between the religious institutions when the political crisis over the cartoons was at its peak (Leirvik 2011). The Contact Group was established as early as 1993, well before 9/11, to discuss issues concerning religion and society.

However, the initial caricature controversy was important in establishing the frames (Entmann 1993) within which Islam and the Muslim presence in Norwegian society have been debated in recent years. Weldeghebriel (2008) identified one frame emphasizing “dialogue and co-existence”, which tries to counter intolerance in a multicultural society. The other frame stresses “values under pressure” – basically the freedom of expression but also other Western values – within which Islam and Muslims may become an external threat.

The proportion of articles on “Islam” among all entries on “religion” in seven main Norwegian dailies nearly doubled, from 11 per cent to 20 per cent, from 2000 to 2001. However, it rose further during the cartoon crisis in 2006 (Lundby 2011). A recurrent trend in the Western world since 9/11 has been the linkage of Islam to extremism, radicalization and terror (Ahmad 2006; Altheide 2007; Ehrkamp 2010; Saeed 2007). This linking of Islam and terror, Islam and fundamentalism, corresponds with a predominant media dramaturgy favouring certain representations of social reality and certain modes of storytelling over others (Johnson-Cartee 2005)

Oddbjørn Leirvik, professor of interreligious relations, and himself a key figure in the dialogues, is afraid that Islam is caught between closure and change in the Norwegian press and TV. Islam is seen as immutable, in contrast to the capacity of the West, and even Christianity, for liberal development. The Norwegian mainstream media calls for change in the Muslim communities but does not report when it actually happens, Leirvik (2009) claims.

A Norwegian study suggests that young Muslims tell stories counter to the negative portrayal of Muslims in the media. It seems that they come out of the negotiations with the media images of Islam with a stronger sense of belonging to Islam as well as to being Norwegian, and, at the same time, with a deeper understanding of who they are as Muslims. However, they would like a larger space to act and manoeuvre within Norwegian society, as they feel restricted by the expectations of how they, as Muslims, are or should be (Kjelling 2009).

Since 11 September 2001 and the US-declared “war on terror”, the security priorities of not only the US but most Western states have been altered dramatically (Jackson 2007; Tilly 2004). Terrorism, extreme Islam and the need to fight “radicalization” of Muslims have been defined as a number-one task for security agencies around the world. This, indeed, also holds true for the Norwegian Police Security Service (PST).

The PST prevents and investigates offences against the security and independence of the State. While acknowledging that the terrorist threat in Norway, compared to other security threats, is low, the PST, through their communication with the public, both *define* the combat of terror related to extreme Islam as their most urgent task and *argue* that such terror acts are a potent and ubiquitous danger that might strike Norwegian society suddenly and unexpectedly.

The way the PST communicates their messages to the public is certainly changed both through their activities on new social media and through the publishing and framing of formerly-secret reports. In 2010, the PST's annual report was made public for the first time and published on the Internet. The name of the report was *PST0910*, with possible connotations to 09/11. Important parts of the report consisted of six videos which present the main tasks of the PST, all deliberately playing with effects from entertainment and fiction genres.

The video on counter terrorism tells a story of the terror threat in Norway as highly unpredictable, possibly ubiquitous, and closely linked to what is designated "extreme Islam". The background music creates a scary ambiance; the voiceover does the same: a deep voice declares that the highest priority of the PST is to prevent politically-motivated violence inspired by extreme Islamism. The hand-held camerawork makes the audience see a potential terror target from below, viewed from the perspective of the villain – an effect often seen in action and horror films. It is important to note that very little specific information is provided concerning the actual terror threat in Norway; all we learn is that there are small groups in Norway that sympathize with or actively support extreme Islamism, through propaganda and money transfers to possible terror networks abroad.

It can be argued that the PST, with this type of annual report, adapts to and plays with media logics with roots in the entertainment industry to promote an imprecise perception of terrorism and the types of strategies, activities and leadership typically associated with the phenomenon. The PST presents a message that lacks precision and nuance but promotes fear of a vague and hidden enemy loosely defined as 'extreme Islamism' or 'radical Islam'. Presenting their message on terror and Islam in this way, they downplay or ignore expert knowledge on this issue.

Case

The controversy in February 2010 could be followed through three stages. First, came the *publication* of the caricature on PST's Facebook site and in *Dagbladet*. Then appeared the *demonstrations* among Muslims. Finally, the *aftermath* when (a) 'responsible' Muslims isolated the radical voices and (b) a new official warning against an increased radicalization of certain Muslim

groups and charismatic leaders was voiced by the security police.

PST is a pertinent example of an institution both adapting to and exploiting media logics. This practice, however, is risky; the organization is prone to getting caught in media dynamics that they lose control of, experiencing unforeseen consequences of mediatized activities.

The same applies to the second main institutional actor in the controversy: *Dagbladet*. Being experts in news criteria, adhering to classic journalistic values, the editors of *Dagbladet* experienced how their reporting can generate unforeseen consequences. Suddenly the paper itself is at the centre of the news, caught in a dynamic they neither like nor can control.

The last category of actors that initiated the controversy is the individual Muslim activists with an interest in creating a discourse environment in line with the prototypical premises of media logics: heated, heavy with emotions, polarized and dividing the world in simple categories of good and bad, evoking fear and indignation.

The publication

It was the PST itself that happened to trigger the developments by their Facebook publication. Through their communication- and media strategies (Thorbjørnsrud, Figenschou & Ihlen forthcoming) the PST became a key actor in the mediated public discourse encompassing the triangle of Islam-terror-extremism unfolding in Norway during the winter of 2010.

Until 2002 the PST had no information strategy, nor any communication staff. Since then, the PST communication department has developed an active media strategy, with an ambition to be innovative, take risks, and to use the media strategically to obtain the goals of the organization. As for new social media, their strategy is to “be where people are” on new social media platforms and to “talk the talk” of the new media formats². New social media are, in other words, recognized within the PST as social phenomena too important to ignore, and as channels where the organization can promote itself as open and transparent. The PST’s activities on the web involve videos on YouTube and messages on Twitter. In combination with information on their official homepage, they use these arenas and channels actively to both inform the public in general and to communicate with and attract attention from traditional mainstream news media (Thorbjørnsrud, Figenschou & Ihlen forthcoming).

On Facebook, the PST hosts discussions on religion; discussions that have typically been marked by polarized viewpoints, insults and attacks on other discussants. Until January 2010, these discussions were sporadically moderated, and then, suddenly, the activity intensified dramatically with 50–60 actors participating. The debate was heated, and insults and offences towards Christians, Muslims and Jews were rampant.

New posts came in with a frequency of 20 posts a minute during the most intense period, and the communication staff worked hard to delete offensive posts as they came in. But in that phase, when hundreds of offensive messages were posted, a link to a caricature of the prophet was posted without any accompanying text.

The link to the caricature, posted anonymously on the PST Facebook page, made the media dynamics turn in a direction beyond the control of the PST. The communication staff deleted the link as soon as they found it, but the news about the caricature link had already reached the second biggest tabloid in Norway, *Dagbladet*. The day after the posting (Wednesday 3 February), the newspaper had a front page with the following main headline: “Security police harassing Islam. Muhammad caricatures found on police web pages.” [our translation] The sub-headline continued: “Through the links on the Norwegian Police Security Service the prophet is portrayed as a pig.”

On the front page was a big picture of a person seen from the back sitting in front of his PC, with the cartoon of the prophet accompanied by the logo of the PST flashed onto the screen. The picture filled the front page and, alas, *Dagbladet* had actually published the highly controversial caricature up front.

The report continued inside the paper, with complaints from Arfan Bhatti, claiming to be censored within the PST Facebook discussion groups. He was not allowed to participate in the discussions on religion and, when he saw the link to the cartoon, he tipped off a reporter from *Dagbladet*. The news story in *Dagbladet* was highly critical of the PST and sided clearly with Bhatti. He was definitely not a ‘nobody’ within the Norwegian public sphere before figuring on the front page of *Dagbladet*: he has a long criminal record behind him and has been prosecuted, but found not guilty, for being involved in the planning and execution of terrorist acts. He argued that the PST, directly under the command of the Norwegian Ministry of Justice, with no legitimacy, was allowing a type of hateful discussion harassing Muslims and paying disrespect to Islam. He first attacked the PST – with *Dagbladet* as his platform – and then attacked *Dagbladet* through other media outlets, arguing that it was not his intention that the newspaper should show the picture of him in front of the screen scrutinizing the cartoon.

The news story viewed in isolation from the context of the caricature was a classic example of a journalistic position criticizing governmental power and elites and siding with the individual (Petersson 1994). The effects of the report were certainly not envisioned by *Dagbladet*. The editors explained the decision of publishing the cartoon on the front page as the result of a “modus vivendi” in news journalism: pictures are supposed to illustrate the messages in news texts, and this was a news story about *PST* publishing the caricature on their Facebook pages.

The demonstrations

The front-page of *Dagbladet* ended up spurring large demonstrations in Oslo. Muslims voiced their protests against *Dagbladet* – not the PST – for publishing the facsimile of the caricature. First, Muslim taxi drivers went on strike for several hours to voice their protest. Then came a demonstration in the University Square of some 3,000 protesters. This was in spite of the fact that central Muslim organizations, even if highly critical of the publishing of the caricature, did not actively support the demonstrations, as the organizers were regarded as radical and not representative of the main Muslim organizations.

In public, Arfan Bhatti downplayed his own role in the demonstrations but admitted that he was a “contributor” in making the demonstrations happen: among other things, by being the administrator of a Facebook group supporting the demonstrations (Bhatti 2010).

The protests voiced by Muslims dominated Norwegian mainstream news media for several days. The focus was on the demand from different Muslim organizations that the chief editor of *Dagbladet* should apologize for the publication of the cartoon in public. Meetings were arranged between him and central religious leaders, but the chief editor held on to his right to decide independently, based on news judgments, what type of illustration to publish in his newspaper. This right, he argued, pertains to the freedom of expression.

In the days leading up to the intended demonstrations, a central question in the media was whether the demonstrations would be peaceful, or whether demonstrators would show their anger through vandalism or attacks on *Dagbladet's* office. The police in Oslo urged people to consider carefully whether they should actually participate in the demonstrations. The demonstrations ended up being peaceful. However, during the demonstrations, Mohyeldeen Muhammad, a young Norwegian convert studying in Medina, took the microphone and said: “When will Norwegian authorities wake up. Maybe not until we get a 9/11 or a 7/7. This is not a threat, it is a warning.” This playing with words, was, however, picked up by the media and elaborated on as a direct or indirect threat. In the following days, the young man was given a platform within Norwegian news media to propagate strictly conservative views on the codes and norms of Islam, even if he did not explicitly support violence or terrorism.

The aftermath

The grassroots demonstrations by Muslims brought to the surface moderate as well as Islamist voices that had not been heard in the Norwegian public sphere. Counter-actions were taken by more established Muslim spokespersons and organizations in Norway. They stood up against Mohyeldeen Muhammad, distancing themselves and saying he represented only himself. A split between

established and alternative, mostly young, voices within the Muslim community became apparent within the media.

The PST, on their side, a few weeks after the demonstrations took place, published their Annual threat assessment (PST 2010). At the press conference presenting the assessment, the PST reported that they were worried that “at least four charismatic leading persons attract more people to radical Islamic groups.” The summary presents the same, somewhat double, message that the PST had put forward before: firstly, that the terrorism threat-level can quickly change, and terrorist attacks can be carried out without prior information or warning, but, secondly, that it is actually highly improbable that Norwegian networks supporting extreme Islamists would pose a direct threat to Norway. The summary stated:

Radicalization continues to occur in some of the extreme Islamist environments in Norway. A few charismatic leaders legitimate and glorify the use of violence as a political tool, and encourage others to support extreme Islamist organizations abroad. By virtue of their status as guides they can play a key role in the radicalization of others. Young people who are seeking an identity and who have difficulty finding religious guidance elsewhere are often susceptible to these leaders.

Unexpected as it seems, and *not* acknowledged in their threat assessments, the PST, through their web pages, provided an arena for persons with extreme viewpoints, gave them publicity and indirectly provided the opportunity for the skilled use of media logics from, in particular, one person, described as dangerous by the very same police.

Changes

Mediatization, as noted, involves processes of social changes that may have the character of *transformations*. How could such transformations be identified in the present case?

The publication

On the narrative level, we observe a controversial Muslim in *Dagbladet* pointing to how the PST Facebook page linked to the caricature. New voices with apparent knowledge about how to play with the logics of the media are heard on the public scene, making this a shift – a transformation – in the public debate compared to the atmosphere of dialogue.

Their use of new social media with the establishment of a Facebook page marks an institutional transformation of the PST as a security service. These

means of open communication by the secret service invited the anonymous posting of the pig caricature, with consequences for PST as an institution. Similarly, *Dagbladet* as a news institution had to face demonstrations following their front-page presentation of the case with a remediation of the image of the caricature.

On the cultural level, this gave resonance to the first caricature crisis in 2006: would this new controversy bring outbreaks and possible violent actions and transformations of cultural order similar to the first one? This was a widespread sentiment in February 2010. The new drawing was also another transformation in relation to the proclaimed ban on picturing the Prophet.

The demonstrations

The images of crowds of Muslim protesters in public squares in Oslo had not been seen before in Norway and told stories to onlookers and media publics about something changing. The appearance of dialogue-critical Muslim groups bore witness of possible institutional changes in the Norwegian Muslim community, involving splits between moderates and fundamentalists.

The voices of the dialogue-critical Muslim groups had not been coming through in the media, where The Islamic Council and their dialogue profile had dominated. The cultural transformation looming was the perceived threat of possible terror against Norway; although the young Norwegian convert said “this is not a threat but ...”, this was something new, challenging Norwegian values.

The aftermath

Leading Norwegian Muslims tried to isolate the threatening, deviating voice. In that sense, they tried to challenge the dominant narrative that had come through in the media coverage of the demonstrations depicting Islam as a threat. The “responsible”, leading Muslim spokespersons transformed the warning message from Mohyeldeen Muhammad, thus trying to avoid the kind of narrative transformation that his perceived threat could create within Norwegian society. The security police followed suit with their annual terror assessment a few weeks after the demonstrations.

Internal tensions among Muslims in Norway had been brought into the general public sphere. This was the institutional transformation. The cultural transformation at stake was the following doubt that had come out into the open: are Muslims a part of or in opposition to Norwegian society? Doubt had arisen through the media coverage of the demonstrations, confirmed by PST in their threat assessment. However, the long-term outcome was not settled.

Conclusion

Narrative, institutional and cultural transformations may be identified separately but will usually be intertwined in an ongoing process of mediatization – as stories, structures and sentiments support each other in society.

The analysis of the present case has indicated that transformations took place or were close at hand on all three levels during, respectively, the publication, the demonstrations and the aftermath stages. The study has not been able to evaluate the lasting effects of the events in February 2010 as no follow-up research has been undertaken. However, we have shown some of the transforming “mechanisms” in a mediatized event. Through the different phases, this controversy developed in a stereotypical way: on the one side we find terror, Islam and conflict, on the other, security, ‘Christian Norwegian-hood’ and liberal values. As such, the discourse was mediatized in a classic way, involving simplification, polarization and the construction of a bad “other”, threatening “us”, the majority. Actors playing with and exploiting the logics of the media pushed the discourse in this direction, even if they did it with highly different motives

The Norwegian Police Security Service came to contribute to this situation through the mediatization they initiated. First, through the way they portrayed the terror threat in Norway and, second, through their activities on Facebook, hosting discussions on religion that were both polarized and full of insults and attacks. It seems reasonable, from the way this case developed, that this type of discourse serves the interests of those wishing to undermine the legitimacy of established societal institutions as well as dialogue- and contact-based initiatives. Less evident is that the Security Service, both through spooky, mediatized portrayals of terrorism and terrorists *and* through their activities on Facebook, provides an arena for extreme viewpoints and offences, actually fuelling such forces and interests.

At the same time we observe that counter-voices succeeded in making themselves heard in the media. This fact indicates that media logic and the transformations of mediatization do not work in a predefined direction. Even if we can discern a dominant media dramaturgy at play there is still room for different perspectives and calls for dialogue, responsibility and moderation.

Notes

1. PST is part of the Norwegian police service. Administratively, and in its preventive activity, PST reports directly to the Ministry of Justice.
2. Interview with the Communication Director and Public Relation Manager 08.12.2010

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Ritualising Death in the Media

Symbolic Immortality, The Immanent Frame, and School Shootings

Johanna Sumiala

We in the Nordic countries live in “a secular age.” For Charles Taylor (2007), this is an era characterised by the absence or a decline of God in the public space (secularisation 1), falling off of religious practice and belief (secularisation 2), and transformations in conditions of belief (secularisation 3). It is particularly secularisation 3 that most interests Taylor. According to his analysis, there has been a shift in our conditions of belief from the transcendent into the immanent frame or from “other-worldliness” to “this-worldliness”, to use another formulation to characterise the sense of belief in the present era, which is sometimes called the post-Protestant age (cf. Seligman et al. 2008: 4).

In this frame of thinking, our ultimate concerns, our fundamental fears of destruction or underlying hope of salvation and/or resurrection are lived in a context that is not so transcendental and/or supernatural. Instead, we experience this through political, economic, and scientific beliefs, ideas, ideologies, and ‘-isms’ that promise to offer us an essential sense of security in times of great distress, as well as over the course of our everyday lives (cf. Casanova 1994; Joas and Wiekandt 2009; Valaskivi 2012; Woodhead, Kawanami, and Partidge 2009).

However, by saying that we live in the condition of the immanent frame, I do not mean to claim that we live without *practices* that are typically connected and related with belief, with ritual as a case in point here. According to Durkheim (1912/1995), ritual performs “the serious life” [*la vie serieuse*] and, thus, makes visible society’s innermost sacred values (cf. Davies 2002; Grimes 2006; Rappaport 2005; Rothenbuhler 1998, 2010).

In this chapter, I hope to lay out an argument that death – as an ultimate biological end of life – offers a particularly interesting case for the analysis of the interplay between ritual work, the media, and the immanent frame. It is through ritualisation, I maintain, that we may grasp how our conditions of belief have changed during the past decades of secularisation and how the media has affected this process.

Catherine Bell (1992: 218-223) argued that ritualisation includes three key elements: i) the production of hierarchic distinctions (e.g., which aspects of public death are covered in the media and which are non-visible for a public eye), ii) the ritualisation of the position of certain actors (who emerges as a visible actor in the media, killers or victims as news subjects, which journalists follow the event, experts, police, ordinary media users), and iii) the construction and maintenance of the ritual control of actors (what kinds of roles and functions these actors have and how are these maintained in the media). Ritualisation is about dynamic process. By applying the idea of ritual control, Bell refers to the ability of ritualised agents to pick out models from shared culture and to work and shape them, the ability and opportunity to give these experiences new ritual shape, which, in turn, can be applied to new social encounters that transcend the original frames of the ritual (e.g. Sumiala-Seppänen 2007: 280-291).

In this article, I focus on the ritualisation of public death in and through the media in the case of the Jokela and Kauhajoki school shootings. In 2007 and 2008, these two violent massacres received massive publicity all over the Finnish and international media. There were many elements that called for the need for public ritualisation (see also, Sumiala and Hakala 2010; Sumiala and Tikka 2010). First, the violence, in terms of the numbers of the victims and the way in which the mass murders were conducted, was grim on a Finnish scale. Finland had never experienced youth violence of that type before. The bombing in the *Myrmanni* mall in 2002 was a major death event in Finland; in this crime, the killer was also a young man, but to attack a school is yet another matter (Seppänen 2003).

School shootings as a form of contemporary theatre of terror, to use Jürgensmeyer's (2003) terminology, carry deep symbolic value (e.g. Kellner 2008; Sumiala and Tikka 2010). This phenomenon is well known internationally as a "typically" American phenomenon. Most "famous" shooting events are known to have taken place in the USA, such as in Columbine in 1999 and at Virginia Tech in 2007. However, such shootings in Germany, as in Erfurt in 2002, have attracted remarkable international interest (e.g. Muschert 2006).

When looking at the Finnish context, one of the key sources of public anxiety has to do with the crime scene. It is no exaggeration to say that the fact that the shootings took place in a school deeply violated the national sense of security and trust in the Finnish welfare society. Unlike in the United States, the school as a system and a collective symbol carries deep positive meaning in Finnish society (cf. Kellner 2008). The success of the international PISA Study, a comparative study that evaluates learning results in different countries, has received a great deal of international attention and brought the Finnish education system to be rated amongst the best in the world¹.

In the two school massacres, the school as an institution revealed its vulnerability. The violent killings of the head master and the nurse in Jokela and a

teacher in Kauhajoki can be interpreted on a symbolic level as a momentary victory for chaos and as the collapse of the order, security, and trust attached to the idea of a welfare society (cf., Sumiala 2011a; 2011b).

Another reason for the public distress has to do with the age and gender of the killers. Both killers were young men; the fact that they felt enough rage to use guns to kill their classmates and authorities was a source of great concern. The statistics of male violence are rather high in Finland. For example, a total of 119 persons, of which 79 were men, died as a result of violence in 2008. In a comparison of EU statistics, men's mortality from violence is the seventh highest in Finland, after the Baltic states, Macedonia, Bulgaria, and Romania. Nonetheless, it was difficult to believe that young men would start murdering at school².

As a subject of primitive survival, every society needs young people to guarantee its future; this understanding has special value in countries that have undergone serious demolition in the past. The memory of the two wars against Russia in the 1930s and 1940s is still alive in the Finnish collective memory. The spirit of "brave men willing to protect their country against the great Bear of Russia" is celebrated every year in the national ritual of Independence Day, December 6. Against this collective memory, the reality in which young men start killing "their own people" is a sensitive matter that raises a high level of symbolic and historical ambiguity. The school shootings showed the society in a cruel way that in the shadows of the welfare society, there was something evil growing (cf. Siltala 1994; Tepora 2011).

Finally, the killers shot down the myth of new media technology, which was held up as the path toward a utopia that was bringing prosperity and success to Finnish society in the era often described as the information economy. This is the myth of the information society (cf. Castells and Himanen 2001). As competent users of social media, the young shooters were able to use their media skills not to serve society, but to try to destroy it. They both used social media to create an effective public strategy to promote their ideologies and manifest hatred against other people (Sumiala 2011b). The Jokela and Kauhajoki shootings made it explicit that the potential dangers in Finnish society might not be those coming from "outside" society, but from inside society – as if society had been incubating a monster. Against this type of historical and mythical contexts, it is evident that ritualisation of death surrounding the shootings was not created *ex nihilo*. In the collective memory, combined with mythical narratives of the nation, there were many elements that called for collective ritual performance (Tepora 2011).

Death in anthropological terms

Throughout history, the inevitability of biological death has forced communities and individuals to think about the limits of life, hence inviting ritualisation. Draw-

ing on the large body of anthropological work on death, we may identify four key functions of death rituals in society (see Durkheim 1994; Lifton and Olson 1974; Metcalf and Huntington 1997; Robben 2006; Robert Hertz 1960; Turner 1967):

- death rituals help individuals and society to cope with loss,
- death rituals serve as the trajectory from dying to afterlife,
- death rituals help individuals and society to cope with the fear of death,
- death rituals help individuals and society to cope with the social and cultural consequences of death.

Robert Hertz (1960 [1907]), an author of the single most influential text on the anthropology of death, entitled *A contribution to the study of the collective representation of death*, believed that death deeply disturbs the social order by destroying the faith society has in itself. He argued that bereavement rituals serve to repair the damaged social fabric (Hertz 1960 [1907]: 78). Similarly, for Arnold van Gennep (1960: 147), mourning, as part of a rite of passage, is a transitional healing period for survivors; passing through the ritual process reunites the surviving members of the group (cf., Durkheim 1994[1912]; Metcalf and Huntington 1997[1979]). Victor Turner (1967) elaborated on Gennep's argumentation and distinguished three phases in funeral rituals: (1) the phase of separation, which isolates the corpse and the mourners from society, (2) a transition takes place and invites the liminal phase, and (3) a postliminal rite of incorporation marks the return of the mourners to society.

Moreover, Robben (2006: 2-3; 11) argued that the trajectory from dying to afterlife can be achieved in death rituals that dramatise belief in an eternal spirit, a surviving soul, a cycle of life and death, notions of reincarnation and regeneration or a belief in a symbolic immortality, or an extension of life through the family name, human achievements like art, etc. (e.g. Lifton and Olson 1974).

According to anthropologists and social theorists like Becker (1973), Lifton and Olson (1974), and Bauman (1992), ritualisation of death is deeply motivated by the fear of death. In her important work, *Death in due time: Construction of self and culture in ritual drama*, Barbara Myerhoff (1984) argued in a similar vein as she described the complex interplay between belief, practice, ritual, and death (as a response to our fundamental uncertainty when faced with death). Myerhoff underlined ritual's importance in "all areas of uncertainty, anxiety, impotence, and disorder." In her view it is the repetitive character in ritual that provides "a message of pattern and predictability." Ritual demands our engagement with symbols and symbolic communication, thus bidding us to "participate in its messages, even enacting meanings we cannot conceive or believe." Consequently, our "actions lull our critical faculties, persuading us with evidence from our own physiological experience until we are convinced" (Myerhoff 1984: 151). To summarise Myerhoff's thinking, in ritualisation, doing is believing.

Media death

In contemporary society, which is characterised by high media saturation, death becomes a public issue primarily through and via the different forms of mediated communications (e.g., Pantti and Sumiala 2009; Seaton 2005; Sumiala and Tikka 2011b). Violent, tragic, or unexpected deaths make news in the mainstream media and social networking sites, at the local, national, and global levels. It is not unusual to read news about the death of a small child in the local paper. The deaths of Osama bin Laden and Muammar Gaddafi stand out as examples of global death news. Death of a celebrity, e.g., Michael Jackson, has proved to attract massive public attention in the mediaspace (Sumiala 2012). Moreover, public death is performed in a variety of different media genres, ranging from news to popular media, e.g., fiction. We watch people die all the time, participate in their funerals, and empathise with the loss of human life, be it “real” or “fictional” death (cf. Seaton 2005).

As a collective response to public death, ritual has had to be adapted to this new condition of mediatization (e.g. Hjarvard 2008; Cottle 2006). This is not to say that media is the only site for public ritualisation in the event of violent, unexpected death. Public ritualisation still takes place at local and communal levels as well. The village of Jokela and the town of Kauhajoki stand out as examples (e.g. Oksanen et al. 2010). However, for many in Finland and elsewhere in the world, the Jokela and Kauhajoki school shootings became an object of public awareness and interest first and foremost as media events, sometimes called media disasters (e.g. Sumiala and Tikka 2010). Mediatized performance of public loss played a significant role in the constitution of these events.

This process was anything but neutral, let alone inconsequential. First, the traditional understanding of ritual time, as separate from mundane time, had to be modified. Ritualising death in any limited, singular, authentic time becomes more and more difficult to maintain, as continuous broadcasting, dissemination, sharing, circulation, and remediation enables ritualisation to be played out and lived in different time zones and at different personal times. To give an example, we could participate in the funeral of Princess Diana by watching the live broadcast on TV, whether we lived in London (where the funeral physically took place) or Helsinki (which is two hours ahead of Greenwich Mean Time). We can reschedule our participation by recording the event and joining the funeral when it is most suitable for us personally. Thus, in the media, the sense of ritual time has to be modified into the logic of ongoing broadcasting, updating, and recording in the contemporary mediascape. What follows is that the media transforms ritualisation, which becomes ubiquitous in a particular way.

Second, in traditional ritualisation, the distinction between ritual centre and periphery is of crucial importance (e.g., Coman and Rothenbuhler 2005: 5-6). In the media, the spatiality of ritual performance is put under renegotiation.

Ritualisation is performed simultaneously in multiple locations, typically via different media. Today, people can participate in public mourning via their mobile phones, computer screens, TVs, or radio sets; thus, locations occupied by public mourners are multiplied and extended beyond the limits of physical setting of the ritual. The media, in its rich variety, creates new symbolic locations for, e.g., public mourning and grief.

Third, traditional ritualisation offers specific roles to different actors who are participating in the ritual performance. In the media, the question of having the power to orchestrate death ritual is a complex issue. Mihai Coman (2008; 2011) claims the role of journalists is crucial in providing symbolic meaning to public events and, thus, of mastering ritual performance. However, in addition to these high priests of the media, ordinary people have gained new significance. Alongside the developments of social media and the Internet, ordinary people are offered new access to contributing to the mediated performance of ritualisation. To give an example, the death of Apple CEO Steve Jobs fostered massive public mourning in the mediaspace. New virtual sites of pilgrimage were created on different websites. People started to send their condolences via mobile phones with pictures of candles, flowers, and apples (Sumiala 2012).

Fourth, ritualisation demands participation. Without participants, ritual withers away (Bell 1992; 1997). In the media, participation may take different forms, independent of physical participation. The media invites novel ways of entering the liminal stage of mourning, such as paying tribute to the corpse, and develops new ways of participating in public mourning and grief as a media-related practice. The public performance after the death of “the king of pop” Michael Jackson in 2009 is an illustrative example here. His fans paid tribute to their idol, i.e., they created new media events around amateur dance performances carried out in public spaces, such as squares and market places in different parts of the world, including Stockholm and Helsinki. The call to do this was spread via social media. Video clips that were circulating on YouTube played a key role in inviting people to take part in this ritual dance related to mourning, grief, and remembering as it spread globally (cf. Sumiala 2012). Interestingly participation in ritualisation performed in and via the media may not always demand full attention. People may participate in ritualisation as spectators as well, or bystanders, e.g., by viewing the public funeral on TV while doing other things at the same time.

Ritualisation in the media always involves power. However, the ritual power of media is not total. The media cannot force us to do anything, to read or watch death news, but they can make us want to act in a certain way or to follow certain events. The ritual power of the media is, thus, seen in individual moments, in daily choices. The power of the media is dependent on the situation and, at least in principle, always includes the possibility of resistance – the

possibility of declining to view, read, or listen. A necessary condition for media power is that the members of the community who are following and using the media show the necessary interest in the phenomenon that is ritualised by the media and a desire to expose themselves to ritual repetition to a sufficient extent (see Bell 1992: 8).

Media ethnographic approach

The Jokela school shooting took place on November 7 at a Jokela high school in Tuusula, about 50 km from Helsinki. An 18-year-old gunman, Pekka-Eric Auvinen, killed 9 people: the head master and the official nurse of the school, 1 adult student, 5 schoolmates who were 16–18 years old, and himself. The Kauhajoki school shooting followed only a year later, on September 23. The school massacre took place at the University of Applied Sciences in Seinäjoki, located in the region of Ostrobothnia. Matti Saari, the 22-year-old gunman, killed 11 people: 9 students, 1 teacher, and himself. Both cases received massive media coverage, not only in Finland, but also elsewhere in the world over the first days after the attacks and invited a high level of ritualisation (e.g. Raittila, Koljonen and Väliaverronen 2010; Sumiala and Tikka 2010).

My aim here is to discuss the ritualisation of public death in the Jokela and Kauhajoki cases by offering a close look at ritualisation in the Finnish news media and social media, largely IRC-gallery and YouTube (of which IRC-gallery is a Finnish innovation of social media, whereas YouTube is truly global). My main material consists of online news images from several Finnish media houses (*Helsingin Sanomat*, *Ilta-Sanomat*, *Iltaalehti*, *Yle*, and *MTV3*), as well as visual print and electronic news material from the largest Finnish newspapers and broadcasting companies (*Helsingin Sanomat*, *Ilta-Sanomat*, *Iltaalehti*, *Yle*, *MTV3*, and *Nelonen*) from the first two days after the massacres. This material is complemented by other ethnographic material on the shootings, such as interviews conducted by the members of the research group, official documents, and other media materials³.

The methodological approach applied here is best described as media anthropological, or, more specifically, media ethnographic. To apply the words of Coman and Rothenbuhler (2005),

to study of media, ethnography brings an attention to cultural difference, a commitment to close observation and recording, the provision of “thick” descriptive detail designed to reveal the contexts that give actions meanings to a community, reflexive engagement with the voices of one’s hosts, and attention to the contiguity of what is being described to broader aspects of social process (2005: 2).

In my media ethnographic interpretation or application of thick description, to use Geertz's (1983) classic terminology, I tracked the logics of ritualisation, in particular, those repetitive and performative elements of the symbolic communication of public death. I looked especially at visual communication in ritualisation – that is, the media images that carried elements of ritualisation of public death. By drawing on Myerhoff's (1984) insight into the role of enactment with symbolic communication in ritualisation, I claim that, during times of disorder and heightened sense of insecurity, media images, particularly, play a key role in ritualising public death in the current era. This is carried out through the repetitive circulation of certain visual elements in the death narrative, eventually transforming death to fall into an element of the category of the symbolic (see Mitchell 2008).

Ritualising the killers

The key actors setting the stage for ritualisation were the killers themselves (cf. Sumiala 2011b). Both the Jokela and Kauhajoki shooters had been active users of social media and they produced a large amount of violent visual material before they committed their crimes. The killers used mainly IRC-gallery and YouTube to disseminate their self-portraits, in which they were shooting, playing with guns, and manifesting hatred and their superiority as human beings.

The Jokela shooter, who was even more active in his media performance, produced hundreds of videos, in many of which he proclaimed his misanthropic ideology. He used slogans such as "Humanity is overrated" and usernames such as *NaturalSelector*. In his writings, the Jokela shooter idolised Nietzsche and Darwin and proclaimed that weak people did not have the right to live. The message of the Kauhajoki shooter was also aggressive: "You will die next" and "Me and my Walther" (referring to his gun) were some of his slogans in his self-portraits.

The patterned repetition of symbolic communication on death, audio-visual elements of violence and hatred – e.g., performance of aggressive music, guns, and strong colour contrasts (black and red) – played a key role in this deadly ritualisation. The connection between symbolic communication and actual violence was additionally enforced as the both killers revealed their intentions in IRC-gallery and YouTube just moments before they committed their crimes (Sumiala 2011a).

Ritualisation in and via the mainstream media

The subsequent phase of ritualisation was performed by the actors in the professional mainstream news media. National news media (*Yle* and *MTV3*,

Helsingin Sanomat, *Ilta-Sanomat* and *Iltaalehti*) all fired their news engines to full alert. The ritual tone was set by extra newscasts on *Yle* and constant news updates on all online news websites. Masses of journalists were sent to the crime scene, news was updated online via live stream, and extra newscasts were aired (see Raittila, Koljonen and Väliaverronen 2010).

According to Liebes (1998), in a media disaster, at the moment of the catastrophe, the media “takes over” and constructs a ritualised time-out for a disaster. During that time, journalists, editors, producers, directors, photographers, and the audience all follow a familiar, highly ritualised script in which everyone has a part (e.g., Nossek 2008: 314, 317; Becker 1995; Coman 2005; Kitch 2003; Pantti and Sumiala 2009). Clearing space for a disaster creates enormous pressure in the media for repetition, the anticipation of developments, and the creation of news (Liebes 1998: 76). The orchestration of the media event demands a script, which must be instantly recognisable.

In these cases, the national news media ritualised public death by emphasising the dramatic tension between the victimiser and the victims. The news media offered a vivid and highly patterned performance of the shooters based on the visual material they had produced and offered to the media themselves. This gave public ritualisation a strong bias towards violence and destruction. The killers were portrayed as the “absolute other”; they were given a “deviant identity” in the media, to use Greer’s (2004) formulation, and, thus, they represented the ultimate evil. In the ritual narrative performed by the media, these young men were represented as people who were powerful enough to destroy the community by killing innocent people in the midst of their daily activities at school.

Against this ritualised performance of evil, the consequences of death were performed in the mainstream media by underlining the public reaction towards the killers and killing. One key category of ritualisation is played out by the performance of the victims in the media. The fact that the victims, people who had been killed by the shooters, were basically invisible in the visual ritualisation of Jokela and Kauhajoki shootings is striking. The one victim who was given some visibility was the Jokela headmaster, Helena Kalmi. She was among the rare victims who were given greater visibility – a face, a name, and a story – whereas other people who had lost their lives (the school nurse, the teacher, students, and classmates) remained, to a large extent, non-existent in the media imagery during the days of intense ritualisation. Instead, the category of the victim was prominently filled with images and interviews of young pupils who had survived the attack by escaping the school building. This was especially true in the case of Jokela. In the Kauhajoki case, there were even fewer images available of survivors and witnesses, as the police had evacuated the rest of the school while hidden from the media. In this perspective the absence of the victims in Jokela and Kauhajoki is in drastic contrast to many other studies on violent public death, which have argued for the growing importance of

the visual representation of the “idealised victim” in the ritualisation of public death (cf. Greer 2004).

Ritualisation in the social media

Ritualisation of death extended beyond the work of professionals in the national news media. There was not just one, but many sites of ritualisation that emerged in the media, as users of social media both in Finland and elsewhere were drawn into ritual time to participate in the collective performance of death. Moreover, ordinary people were invited to participate in the ritual performance of collective effervescence through different forms of social media, which gave them opportunities to produce their own sites of mourning and commentary where people could share their emotions and thoughts with other members of these virtual communities.

Users of social media had been fast to download the killers’ images for circulation and remediation, before this material was removed by the modifiers, operators, and the Finnish authorities (cf. Bolter and Grusin 1999). An important element in the visual ritualisation was participation carried out by amateur users of social media. Many “YouTubers” – that is, amateur users who create content on YouTube – created their own videos, in which they combined their material with the killers’ material, which was already circulating on YouTube (Burgess and Green 2009; Lange 2007; Wahlberg 2009). Many of the amateur users used rich source material to make their videos, thereby participating in public ritualisation. The material was gathered from several sources, from the killers’ videos and news materials from large media corporations to clips on current affairs programmes, documentaries, and investigation material by authorities who were commenting on and discussing the shootings. Some users used film, including movies related to school shootings, to create new videos. The content produced by the YouTubers varied widely, as did the emotional and moral tones related to these videos. There were videos with explicit religious undertones, such as the video “My message of peace”, in which the content creator addressed his message to the Jokela killer, but also to the world, asking for peace in prayer.

The emotional register in the amateur images and video clips that contributed to ritualisation of death varied from anger, pity, mourning, and grief to the celebration of these violent acts. In some videos, the tone was highly ambivalent and it is difficult to interpret the motivation behind their making. There were memorial videos – an important element in ritualisation for the mourners – that consisted of news pictures from the school and were filled with strong emotions and symbols of mourning and grief, such as stuffed animals, candles, flowers, and notes. Sometimes, the producer had included his/her condolences

in the video. Also, there were videos that can be described as “collages of the events”. These videos often included videos uploaded by the killers combined with music and comments made by the content creator. Another category of the “collage” consisted of a collection of the images of school shooters, not only those in Jokela and Kauhajoki, but also those in Columbine and Virginia Tech. These videos had been constructed from photos and materials about the school shooters that were already available on YouTube. There were also videos that can be called “commentaries”. These videos consisted of vlogs, in which active YouTubers commented on the events. To give an example one vlogger who was active in uploading his videos and commenting on the events used the username *The Amazing Atheist*.

Mediatized ritualisation

The Jokela and Kauhajoki school shootings included many elements that are distinctive of ritualised performance of public death in and via the media: (i) ritualisation was scattered around many different media, in both mainstream and social networks, (ii) it spread ubiquitously to a range of different mediated locations and times; and (iii) the roles of ritual participants were flexible. The ritual mastery – to use Catherine Bell’s (1992) terminology – the social capital to dramatise public death, was carried out not by any single professional actor, but by the three types of media actors: killers, professionals, and non-professional users, all of whom contributed to ritualisation. A special role in this public ritualisation was given to the shooters, as their images of high symbolic value, which expressed hatred and destruction, circulated vividly from one medium to another. Nonetheless, there was also ritualisation of mourning and grief (images and videos of people crying, comforting each other, symbols of death, candles, flowers, notes, stuffed animals) to be found in the media material (see Sumiala and Tikka 2010). In sum, the key components in mediatized ritualisation in the Jokela and Kauhajoki cases are the following (cf. Grimes 2006: 109):

Ritualised Action	Patterned mediation: Screening, broadcasting, up- and downloading, remediating, sharing visual material on public death. A special role is given to killer material and public mourning.
Ritual Place	News rooms, different media platforms, websites (i.e., IRC-gallery, YouTube)
Ritual Time	Created by media professionals, amateur users, audience and the killers (extra newscasts, constant updating of news material, remediation, commentaries, and post-ings)

Ritual Objects	Symbols, icons (guns, violent slogans disseminated by the killers, the Finnish flag, flowers, candles, notes, killer self-portraits)
Ritual Participants	Professional and amateur media users, media audience
Figures and Roles	Victims, witness, victimisers
Qualities, Quantities	Massive, repetitive circularity of the killer images as symbolic communication of death
Language	Mythologising the killers and their powers to master ritualisation
Sounds	Music from the killer videos, opening sound/theme (news media)
Beliefs, Emotions	Creation of symbolic immortality, celebration of violence, collective effervescence, mourning and grief

In the Jokela and Kauhajoki cases, the media in all its variety became a critical site for ritualisation in the Finnish society. Based on the content, form, as well as the volume of the material that was circulating, we can see that the media became a significant centre in which Finnish society acted out its symbolic reality and dramatised abstract, invisible conceptions of death and its social and cultural ⁴consequences. To use Bell's (1997; 1992) term, the mainstream media played a substantial role in orchestrating ritualisation around public death. The mainstream media, in particular television and tabloids, structured their ritual narratives around a story known here as "the victory of the perpetrator over the innocent victims". In the ritualisation of public mourning, the line between private and public grief became blurred in many media representations, such as memorial videos and virtual sites of mourning. Many of these videos and sites of commemoration were created by ordinary people who wanted to participate in the ritualisation of public death. New actors were offered the possibility to participate in ritualisation, not only by making and remaking videos about the shootings, but also by commenting on and sharing them. All of these media-tized actions increased ritual mastery among ordinary people in their attempt to manage public death as a shared social matter (cf. Bell 1992; 1997).

All in all, the actors that participated in this mediatized ritualisation of public death were many and their roles were flexible. It was not only media professionals, as high priests of ritualisation, who orchestrated the events. As emphasised above, a high level of ritualisation was also carried out by the amateur users of social media, the Jokela and Kauhajoki killers themselves, and audiences who participated in ritualisation as amateur users, thus transforming the category of producer and consumer/user through ritualisation. All of this multiplication of the actors enforced the role of the media and mediatized communication as the key point of condensation for Finnish society.

Transforming sites and frames

As a nationwide public event, death in the Jokela and Kauhajoki school shootings was transformed from “a Church event” into a media event, i.e., from a Christian context to a secular one. From this perspective, it is no overstatement to say that the media became the secular sacred centre in which the society as a nation acted out its ritual work in a moment of great public crisis (cf. Couldry 2003; Hobart 2005).

One of the most puzzling findings in the material is that the transformation from living to dead, one of the key functions of death ritual as pointed out above, was carried out in this public ritualisation without practically any visual evidence of the biological death of a corpse, be it the killers’ or victims’. The actual death – in the form of bodies and concrete, physical signs of death, therefore, remained to a large extent absent in the visual images that performed public death in the media (cf. Metcalf and Huntington 1997). There were basically no images of bodies or people injured circulating in the media, neither of the victims nor of the victimisers. The Google search engine found only two vague pictures of the Kauhajoki killer on the stretcher as he was taken to the hospital in Tampere. In those pictures, the physical features of the Kauhajoki killer remain almost invisible. This type of invisibility of biological death was only highlighted by the fact that very few dead victims were identified by name and face; most of the people killed remained anonymous.

If and when the trajectory from life to death was brought into ritualisation, this was carried out by the visual representation of the actors who represented the Lutheran Church of Finland. But even when church leaders were involved in the public space to give a voice to the public mourning or when ordinary people used religious symbols (such as angels), which they disseminated in the media as part of their mourning, the communicative emphasis was rather implicit.

At these moments, I claim, religious symbols and language offered tools to communicate emotions and ideas evoked by the public death. Religious material was used to a much lesser extent for explicitly theological or existentialist purposes – to interpret and understand death as the end of life and/or a gate to the afterlife. It is also important to observe that the funerals of the killers and the victims remained private, hidden from the public eye. This again could be interpreted as underlining the scope of this-worldliness of mediatized ritualisation. Christian funeral ceremonies, which make explicit reference to God and heaven, remained very much absent in the public space. What follows, the trajectory from life to death, was rather perceived as a transformation from mortality to symbolic immortality (e.g. Lifton and Olson 1974). The dead and the mourners were separated in the media first and foremost symbolically, by transforming mortality into an element of the category of symbolic immortal-

ity via rich visual representation of symbols of death and mourning, with the underlying theme of the notorious role of the killers in this death.

Through ritualisation, the school shooters were made into people “not like us”, they were excluded from the community – in the logic of contemporary media – by becoming massively visible in the media. It was precisely this immense visibility that transformed the killers on the symbolic level. Their images became iconic on a scale not even imaginable for previous generations of young male killers in Finland. In the absence of the image of an “idealised victim” with which the members of the community could identify, the audience was left to participate in ritualisation through emotional attachment to the collective loss in a more general and abstract sense, with no visual reference of the biological death of the victims (cf. Greer 2004).

Mediatized ritualisation, capable of creating new modes of mediated public performance of death, shows that ritual as core practice of social life in times of great public distress is by no means disappearing from the stage in Finland, even in this age that Taylor (2007) and many others have labelled secular. In line with Robben (2006) and many other scholars of anthropology of death, I propose that at the heart of the ritualisation of the Jokela and Kauhajoki public deaths, there was still fear and anxiety caused by unexpected and cruel death, and mediatized ritualisation functioned as a key form in this repair work. This work was carried out by dramatising symbolic immortality, in which the killers’ rage was contrasted against public mourning and grief in the media performance of death. The belief that came to be confirmed in the ritual action generated by the public killings was the belief in “this-worldliness.” The invisibility of the corpses and the absence of the after-life trajectory in public ritualisation both point in this direction. Moreover, the emotional adaptation – empathising with the consequences of death (loss and mourning) and demonising the perpetrator as the cause of death, can be interpreted to comprise key constituents of the repertoire the media and people participating in the media used to negotiate the problem of public death in the mediatized condition of the immanent frame.

Afterword

To study ritualisation in society in and through the media means attempting to grasp something of society’s inner and fundamental logic of social organisation (Rappaport 2005; Rothenbuhler 2010; Seligman et al. 2008). Having said this, the claim that media affects and shapes ritualisation of death in our society should have consequences in our thinking. This implies shifting focus, e.g., in our perception of ritual time, space, and participation. But even more so, it should challenge our understanding of ritual’s function in contemporary soci-

ety. In the classic framework of van Gennep (1960), Hertz (1960), and Turner (1967), theories developed well before the era of intensive media saturation, the ultimate goal of any death ritual is transformation and finally incorporation back into society. Therefore, if and when ritualisation – in case of public death – are to be played out in this mediatized condition, as proposed here, one must ask: What kind of transformation are we actually enforcing? Is it the media, in its abstract singularity, that becomes our ultimate source for symbolic immortality in this case – a true immanent frame for our secular age?

Notes

1. www.pisa.oecd.org.
2. Statistics Finland, 2009, December 18.
3. This chapter is part of the larger empirical study on the media performance of the Jokela and Kauhajoki school shootings conducted as part of the research team in the two year research project "Crisis and Communication" at the University of Helsinki. <http://www.helsinki.fi/crisisandcommunication/>
4. However, an important reservation needs to be pointed out here: media as a ritual centre for public death holds true namely in the national context, i.e., when looking public death on the national level (cf., Couldry 2003). From a local perspective, the Lutheran Church, particularly in Kauhajoki, played a certain role as a ritual site for mourning and grief and a place for spiritual comfort in a time of great collective distress. In addition, there was a slight difference in the mode of ritualisation of public death if we compare the nationwide media with regional or local media. In Kauhajoki, the local media included some explicit spiritual material in its ritualisation of public death. This variation may be interpreted to reflect some regional characteristics in the Finnish religious landscape, Ostrobothnia, the area in which Kauhajoki is located, traditionally holds more religious values than the secularised Helsinki metropolitan area and its outskirts in Jokela/Tuusula (cf., Kääriäinen, Niemelä, and Ketola 2005).

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Religious Identity
and a Changing Media Environment

A Voice of Their Own

Young Muslim Women, Blogs and Religion

Mia Lövheim

The first decade of the twenty-first century has provided several examples of the formative impact of new media¹ on social, cultural and political debate. An obvious instance is the prominent role of blogging, Facebook, and Twitter in the Arab Spring. In the Scandinavian context, too, blogging and, most recently Twitter, have assumed a central role in public debate. The task now facing media scholars is to identify how this phenomenon has changed the ways in which topical subjects are discussed in the media.

The following analysis will consider young female bloggers as a new voice in debates over religion, specifically Islam, in three Scandinavian countries. Young women have hitherto been marginalized by public and official discourses on politics, and only rarely been treated as active agents able to speak for themselves. Religious communities have also largely excluded young women from speaking in an authorized or official capacity. In the Scandinavian countries, migration from non-European and Christian regions during the last few decades has brought religion to the fore as a topic of media and political debate (Rosenfeldt 2007). The place of religion in the public sphere has been a core issue in these debates, which, as previous research has shown, often focus on the lifestyles, dress, and bodies of women, particularly young women (Duits and van Zoonen 2006; Göle 2006).

The question of how young women in Sweden, Denmark, and Norway approach religion on their blogs takes on a particular significance in this context. This chapter will explore these issues by way of three case studies of women who blog about religion, focusing on how they address religion in selected posts, and how they present and legitimize their own position as participants in a public discourse on religion. Comments on individual posts will also be considered as examples of the kinds of responses elicited by the bloggers. Because of limitations of space, this chapter will seek to identify key issues that warrant further research rather than offering a comprehensive analysis of the issues raised. The theoretical starting point for its analysis lies in an

ongoing debate among scholars of media and religion over the applicability of mediatization theory to religious change. The article seeks to contribute to this academic conversation by raising the issue of digital media, gender, and religion in contemporary society.

Previous research: Young women, blogging, and religion

A salient issue in previous research on the implications of new digital media has been its potential for “user-led content creation” (Bruns 2008). This concept refers primarily to the enhanced possibilities for individual users to bypass traditional gatekeepers in order to participate more actively in media production. As discussed by Rasmussen (2008; cf. Rettberg 2008; Russell and Echchaibi 2009), digital media contribute to a more differentiated public sphere by broadening the range both of its participants and of its content (topics, styles, and genres). Some scholars (Miller 2008) have argued that this can lead to the fragmentation, trivialization, and/or commercialization of public discourse, while others point to the potential for artistic expression, social connection, and civic engagement (Jenkins 2006). Christa Lykke Christensen and Anne Jerslev (2009: 14, 19-20) have shown how the new technologies and genres of contemporary media culture, by foregrounding tensions and transformations of the private/public boundary, can become “ethical spaces” for examining and negotiating broader moral and ethical issues in society.

While early studies of blogging focused mainly on “filter blogs” – blogs focused on political and social issues, and written primarily by men – a seminal study by Herring et al (Herring, Kouper, Scheidt, and Wright 2004) has shown that the most common type is in fact the “personal blog”. (cf. Lenhart and Fox 2006). Personal blogs, which are written primarily by women and adolescents, focus on everyday life and personal reflections. A crucial issue in studies of these blogs that also has implications for existing research on women and the internet (Mazzarella 2005; Consalvo and Paasonen 2002; van Zoonen 2002), is the extent to which new digital media enhance women’s participation in public discourse. As argued by Herring et al (2005), blogs are a fusion of older public and private forms of digital communication such as the personal website and the discussion board. Studies have shown that blogs can bring young women’s voices out of the private space of the bedroom or the personal diary and into the public sphere (Stern 1999; Bortree 2005). Several of these studies have focused mainly on the significance of blogs for individual self-expression (Serfaty 2004). Scholars such as Bell and Boyd (Bell 2007; Boyd 2007) have also raised the question of whether personal blogs constitute a new form of media culture that heralds a change in the form and content of public discourse. In Sweden and Norway, for instance, few young women take an active part in

official political discourse. Yet the recent vogue for “pink bloggers” – young women whose blogs on everyday life, fashion, and relations have become highly popular – has provoked a lively debate in the media (Lövheim 2011a). Although these blogs focus largely on personal experiences and emotions, their posts have also provided starting points for collective discussion of broader social and cultural issues, such as self-confidence, relationships, and body ideals, that resonate strongly with young women (Lövheim 2011b).

New media and religion

Since its inception, the study of digital media and religion has taken a particular interest in the opportunities available for individuals to practice religion beyond the control of “offline” religious institutions and authorities (Lövheim forthcoming 2012). Research has shown that digital media networks provide greater opportunities for individuals to produce and circulate religious narratives (Campbell 2010). The work of Cheong (2009) and Teusner (2010) on Christian bloggers has revealed a tendency toward *personalization of religion*: the orientation of digital communications around personal experience rather than official doctrine or community structures. To date, few studies have been made of the relationship between blogging, gender, and religion. Vis, Van Zoonen, and Mihelj (2011) have studied young women’s use of new media in relation to responses to Gert Wilder’s film *Fitna* in videos uploaded to YouTube. They conclude that while mainstream media in this (and other) debates offer a representation of Islam that broadly mirrors traditional orientalist discourse – in which Muslim women are portrayed as passive victims oppressed by Muslim men – “YouTube offers an alternative space to express one’s opinions in different formats than those of mainstream media coverage” (2011: 120). In the videos young women from Muslim backgrounds, whose voices are usually marginalized in this discourse, appear as autonomous agents presenting their own interpretations of Islam. As Vis, Van Zoonen, and Mihelj argue, the sheer number of times that these videos have been watched indicates that they occupy a space that is anything but marginal.

Such findings support the view that digital media, offering as they do a broader variety of topics, style, and genres, are contributing to a more differentiated public discourse on religion as regards both participation and content. However, studies of online discussions of religion reveal a complex picture. Studies of interactions among religious discussion groups have showed that such interactions, despite evincing a wider range of approaches, remain dominated by entrenched oppositions and stereotypes rooted in oppositions between religious groups offline (Lövheim 2004; Clark 2008). For example, studies of debates over religion and immigration in blogs or in discussion fo-

rum maintained by daily newspapers in the Scandinavian countries indicate that discussions of religion, especially Islam, are polarized both in tone and substance, and rely on stereotyping rather than notions of plurality and tolerance (Lövheim 2009; Lövheim and Axner 2011).

Mediatization, religion, and new media

As presented by Hjarvard (2008), the theory of mediatization starts from two interrelated processes of social change in modern society. The first relates to the evolution of the media during the twentieth century into a more autonomous and independent social institution. The second concerns the degree to which the media has been integrated into the workings of other institutions. Thus, Hjarvard describes mediatization as a “process through which core elements of a social or cultural activity (...) assume media form” (2008: 13-14). In the case of religion this means that the media offers a profound challenge to the control which religious institutions exercise over the communication of religious symbols in public discourse. Furthermore, mediatization changes the “core elements” of religion, that is, the ways in which religion is communicated among individuals and groups. On the one hand, this implies an increasing plurality of representations of religion in the media landscape. On the other hand, as Hjarvard has argued, mediatization mainly serves to transform religion along the lines predicted by secularization theories: the marginalization of religion from the public life of society, and its privatization.

Critics have questioned the value of the mediatization of religion thesis for studying the interplay between media and religion in contemporary society (Lövheim and Lynch 2011; cf. Couldry 2008; Hoover 2009). One of the main problems with the present thesis is its limited capacity to explain the relationship between modernization and religion (Lövheim 2011c).

Recent studies in the sociology of religion (Furseth and Repstad 2006: 84; Davie 2007: 52; Woodhead and Heelas 2000) have also increasingly de-emphasized the hypotheses of “strong” secularization theories in favor of a dual focus on continuous secularization and the persistence of religion as a presence in the public sphere. Scholars such as Nilüfer Göle (2006; cf. Eisenstadt 2002) have described the active part being played by religious actors in shaping modernity by means of critical and creative re-appropriations of its core values and consequences. Young third-generation Muslims are bringing religion into the sphere of public debate in Europe. Gender has become a particularly contested issue in this encounter, highlighting the tension between notions of identity predicated on gender equality, individual freedom, and freedom of expression, on the one hand, and, on the other, of identity defined in terms of Islamic values and religious faith. At stake here is not merely the issue of Islam

but the cultural values of modernity in general and their transformation by the arrival of a set of new actors in the public sphere (2006: 141). An additional and related issue is the challenge being made to current conceptions of the relationship between religion and the public/private boundary in modernity (McGuire 1981; Woodhead 2001). A theory of the mediatization of religion in contemporary society needs to be supplemented with a recognition of this challenge and of the agency of religious actors in shaping modern society, as well as a consideration of how the values, traditions, and structures of social relations (especially gender relations) within particular religious settings play a part in the mediation of religion.

In her discussion of Hjarvard's mediatization of religion thesis, Lynn Schofield Clark (2011: 170) proposes a definition of mediatization as "the process by which collective uses of communication media extend the development of independent media industries and their circulation of narratives, contribute to new forms of action and interaction in the social world, and give shape to how we think of humanity and our place in the world".

With its focus on how mediatization creates opportunities for new individual voices as well as collective forms of action and reformulations of existential and ethical issues, this definition connects to Lykke Christensen and Jerslev's understanding of "ethical spaces" in new media genres (Christensen and Jerslev 2009). These spaces are *collaborative* in that they form during interactions between producers, texts, and users, and *performative* in that they expand, differentiate, and negotiate values of what is "good", "right", and "true". This definition addresses the need to complement the mediatization thesis with a focus on agency and the dynamics of religious values and identities (as articulated above). These approaches also parallel Heidi Campbell's (2010) argument about the "religious social shaping of the media", by which religious actors in their use of digital media not only adapt to potentialities of the medium but also take part in the reshaping of technology to fit their values and lifestyle.

Blogs, Young Women, and Religion in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark

Blogs have been an established feature of the Scandinavian media environment since early 2000. More than thirty percent of Danes (Danmarks statistik 2009) and Norwegians (TNS Gallup 2010 as presented in Kampanje) read a blog regularly, while twenty percent of Danes and seven percent of Norwegians also write blogs. Nineteen percent of Swedes read blogs and four percent post to a blog on a daily basis (Nordicom 2010). A similar pattern obtains for age and gender across the Scandinavian countries. Social media, including blogs, are primarily used by those between the ages of fifteen and twenty-nine. Fur-

thermore, more women than men read and write blogs, indicating that young women comprise the largest demographic group among readers and writers of blogs in Scandinavia.

Blogs about religion are a minor category in the Nordic blogosphere. A Swedish survey of the most popular blogs of 2009 shows that only two out of 185 focused on religion (Lövheim 2011a). While the largest blogging sites in Sweden and Norway list the most visited and most active blogs (bloggportalen.se, blogg.no), Danish blog portals rely on search terms and display only the latest posts (danskeweblogs.dk, overskrift.dk). Because none of the blog portals list “religion” as a sub-category, blogs or postings on religion can only be found using search terms. A survey of the blogs returned by the search term “religion” on the largest blog portals in Sweden, Denmark, and Norway indicates that the debate is dominated by three groups: bloggers with links to an established Christian church; bloggers writing from the standpoint of humanism and/or atheism; and blogs debating Islam. Furthermore, it can be seen that blogs on religion fall into two categories: the first comprising blogs which identify themselves as religious, either through the name of the blog or the profile of its author. The second category comprises bloggers who write about religion as one topic among others but who do not explicitly present religion as their focus.

Choice of blogs and method

For this chapter I have chosen to focus on three blogs, one each from Sweden, Norway, and Denmark. They belong to the category of young women writing about their experiences as Muslims in Scandinavia. These blogs, which were found by using “religion” as a search term, were selected from a list of the fifty blogs ranked highest by the blog portals (May 2011). The blogs are not chosen as representative of religious blogs in these countries but, rather, present examples of how individuals from a religious minority in Scandinavia are using a new medium to present their life and experiences. As such, they indicate similarities and differences between young female Scandinavian bloggers writing about Islam that are of relevance for future research.

The analysis is based on the front page of the blog, the blogger’s profile, and posts in which the blogger discusses religion. One post for each blog has been selected for the presentation of the blogger’s self-positioning in relation to religion in the chapter.² These posts were selected by topic (religion being the main one) but also by number of comments. The posts are not taken to be representative for the entire blog but are offered as examples of the kinds of topics raised and the responses they elicit.

Drawing on suggestions in the existing literature as well as on the definition of mediatization proposed by Clark, I explore the idea that where young

women act as agents and speak from a position of authority, mediatization contributes to new conceptions of religion which focus on emergent alternatives to the conventional representation of gender and Islam. In order to assess the bloggers' presentations of religion, my analysis focuses on three aspects:

1. Visual and textual markers of religion. Do these provide a stereotypical or a more diverse image of Muslim women?
2. Social context. Are there references to a private or public sphere, religious or profane setting of life?
3. Sources of authority. Are these personal, transcendent, or institutional (clergy, scripture, community)?

As well as analyzing the content of individual posts, the discussion will also consider comments added to posts as a way of exploring the question of collaboration and interaction in the construction of religion in the blogosphere.

Presentation of the blogs

Among Swedish blogs focusing on religion, Ana Gina's blog stands out (<http://blogg.svt.se/anagina/>). Presenting herself as a twenty-year-old woman of Palestinian decent, Gina blogs about "Weird things I come across in my everyday life". Since starting to blog in 2009, she has become one of the country's most famous young female bloggers. In 2010, she blogged about the Swedish parliamentary elections and in 2011 she hosted a comedy talk show on a digital channel of Swedish public television (SVTplay). Gina's blog has attracted attention primarily for its use of parodic and provocative videos about prejudice towards and stereotyping of Muslims and immigrants. While Islam is not a category on her blog, posts on Islam are a recurring theme, including commentary on public policies relating to headscarves (13 August 2010). The following analysis is based on a post of 22 August 2010 titled "Am I a fake-Muslim?", which generated 101 comments.

"KurdiskMuslima" was chosen as an example of Norwegian blogs. This blog is written by a woman who presents herself as a "nice cheerful girl, age 23, living somewhere in Norway but originally from a warmer country. In my blog I will write about all sorts of weird things..." (<http://kurdiskmuslima.blogg.no/>). The blog, which began in April 2011 uses the following categories: films, Islam, Kurdistan, and religions. Her posts include observations on Islamic teachings, lifestyle, fashion and beauty, and humor. The example used here is a post from 11 May 2011 on "Women in Islam" presenting images of Muslim women, together with commentary by the blogger, which received 22 comments.

The Danish example is taken from Gülay Kochbay's blog. Her tag line reads "A Muslim female blogger!! I blog about most things: Islam, politics, and, of

course humor :). There's a lot of prejudice and hatred directed towards minorities – so get involved in the debate :) Yes, now I have". (<http://samfund-politik.danskeweblogs.dk/politik/gulay-kocbay.asp>). The categories for Gülay Kocbay's blog archive, which goes back to July 2007, include Danish politics; the Middle East; books; films; and the blogger's everyday life. There is a special category for Islam and a page reserved for "humor" with cartoons, videos, and jokes mostly related to gender roles, racism, and migration. Commenting on the blog was permanently disabled in June 2010. When accessing the blog in October 2011, I needed to ask for the blogger's permission, which was granted after a week. Most posts related to Islam are from 2008 and 2009. Accordingly, I have chosen to analyze a post of 23 June 2008 which comments on a debate about hymen reconstruction among young Muslim women in Denmark; the post received 81 comments.

Analysis

Visual and textual markers of religion

What patterns can be discerned in the blogs' presentation of religion, in this case Islam? The first aspect concerns visual and textual markers or indicators of religion. Ana Gina's blog contains no textual or visual symbolic markers of Islam, neither in her self-presentation nor on the front page of the blog. However, one of her most frequently used video characters is "the Muslim sister Khadidje", who is presented dressed in a black hijab covering her hair and upper body. This character is visible via a link on the blog's front page to the video blog posts. KurdiskMuslima refers to Islam in her blog title, although not in her self-presentation. Furthermore, the blog header depicts a photo of a mosque and a veiled young woman reading the Quran. Several of the categories listed on the right hand side as well as the links to other web sites and blogs also refer to Islam. Gülay Kocbay uses the word "Muslim" in her self-presentation as well as the category "Islam" for tagging posts. Several of the links listed on the blog's left hand side contain the words "Islam" or "Muslim". There are, however, no visual indications of Islam on the front page.

Do these features present a stereotypical or more nuanced image of Islam? While the blogs differ in how they represent Islam visually, some patterns can be discerned. KurdiskMuslima's blog very clearly displays markers on its front page that evoke the image of a pious, traditional Muslim woman. In posting on Islam, however, this blogger often uses a variety of images of Muslim women in order to raise questions and nuance prevailing stereotypes. In a post on Muslim fashion, she displays pictures of the hijab in different national settings, but also non-Muslim women and western celebrities wearing hijab (19 May 2011). The blogs of Ana-Gina and Gülay Kocbay are not as explicit

in their treatment of religious themes. Islam figures, rather, as a sub-category that surfaces in particular posts and images. A salient feature is that all the blogs use visual images to challenge stereotypes about the dress codes and behavior of Muslim women. Ana Gina draws on stereotype for the purposes of parody in the character of Khadidje. Gülay Kocbay posts comic strips and cartoons mocking racism and prejudice towards Islam under the category of “Islamic jokes” and “humor”. In a post titled “Hijab girls on a ski trip” (11 January 2011), she refers to the experiences of Muslim women acting in ways that challenge stereotypes. KurdishMuslima also uses humor in her presentation of Muslim fashion and hijab-wearing in order to challenge the stereotyped view of Muslim women’s tastes and lifestyles as homogeneous and traditional. Such examples of bloggers’ using images in a playful and parodic way can be seen as indicators of an emerging discourse characterized by diversity and the challenging of stereotypes of Muslim women in both the local context and the mainstream media.

Social context

Although each of these bloggers writes about personal life in her blogs, their postings are not limited to this topic. On the contrary, several posts address issues traditionally defined as belonging to the public sphere. Gülay Kocbay writes most of her posts on issues such as politics, law, and migration. KurdishMuslima comments on fashion but also recent events in the Middle East and Kurdish history. Ana Gina comments frequently on the experience of discrimination and issues relating to immigration and Swedish politics.

A recurrent theme in these blogs is the boundary which the Quran and Islamic custom prescribes for the behavior of Muslim girls in public spaces, and how it relates to the values and lifestyles of young women in Scandinavia. As is evident from Gülay Kocbay’s post “Hijab girls on a ski trip” and Ana Gina’s post “Am I a fake-Muslim?”, these bloggers are writing in response to attitudes and questions they have encountered in the surrounding culture. Ana Gina wrote her post in response to comments by readers when another blogger posted an image of her wearing a short dress at a dinner for bloggers. The post begins:

“One problem in today’s society is that many people believe that, as a Muslim, you must be VERY STRICT or VERY PROMISCUOUS (...) Apparently I am now a promiscuous girl who drinks alcohol because I went to this blog dinner and happened to be in a photo where my dress looked very short?”.

Comments added to the posts further highlight tensions about behavior considered indecent by Muslims. While a few comments scold Ana Gina for being in proximity to alcohol and other proscribed activities, others admire her for challenging prejudices and showing that for a “modern Muslim” it is not about “how strict you are but about how strong your relationship with

God is". This post also reveals the way in which digital media are blurring the boundaries between situations previously separated by time and space: here, behavior in a private setting such as a dinner, disseminated through digital cameras and cross-posting by other blogs into a public setting far beyond the original blogger's control.

Sources of authority

In order to exemplify their stance on religion, I will now focus on the values and authorities the bloggers use to ground their arguments.

The core theme in Gina's post "Am I a fake-Muslim?" is authenticity. Defending herself against comments relating to her faith, she refers to the practices of pious Muslims: "I pray now and then, I donate money every month to the poor and needy, and I fast when I am well, just as the Quran says!". She also states that she is not "VERY strict". These arguments, which allude to institutionalized practices, are mixed with arguments which assert her right to be herself: "I have NEVER said that I am a perfect Muslim, I have never said that I am this or that." Later, she writes: "I am not representative of Muslims. I am just an ordinary girl who happens to be Muslim".

This tension between institutionalized practices and individual choices and opinions reappears in the responses to Gina's post. Many of the comments are supportive, offering encouragement or admiration for her courage in behaving independently and speaking her mind, and seeing her as a role model for young Muslim women. A recurrent theme is criticism of those who make judgments about other people's religious identity, with transcendence often being invoked as the basis for justification: "...only Allah knows who is a believer"; "God will do the judgment, not you". The connection between traditional religious norms and personal belief is also noticeable in those comments that are more or less critical. A core theme here is the discrepancy between the dinner party photo and earlier posts in which Gina had presented an image of herself as very religious and respectable. As one commentator writes: "...the whole thing is that it clashes with what you write/say in your blog. That is called having double standards". This comment underscores how the blogger must construct her authenticity using a display not only of sincere belief but also of honesty and consistency – attributes which previous research has shown to be a core theme of personal blogs (Schmidt 2007).

In her post of 23 June 2008 Gülay Kochbay also starts by responding to a reader who has asked her opinion of the practice of reconstructing hymens among young girls in Denmark, and of the claim by a Danish imam that this practice does not make anyone a virgin and should be seen as a "patchwork solution" for adapting to the expectations of the surrounding community. Kochbay refers to the Quran and the Prophet in order to argue that "for pious

and practicing Muslim women OR men (...) the same requirements apply, and sexual relationships are without exception permitted only within the framework of marriage". She goes on to argue that no excuses – an implicit reference to hymen reconstruction – can change the responsibility of each individual to God on the day of judgment.

In the comments that follow, one reader asks Kochbay for her opinion as to whether this kind of operation is "a culturally conditioned necessity" and, if so, who should finance the operation – the woman, the family, or society. Kochbay replies that it is unreasonable to use taxes for cosmetic operations, and insists upon the responsibility of each individual to answer for his or her own actions. She continues:

I do not mean to say that an operation is culturally necessary, because I think it is important when forming a family that you are honest and frank. It is not right to deceive another person into marriage by means of lies and fraud. I think it is important that women in this situation choose to be honest and to find a man that will accept them the way they now are. (24 June 2008)

In this way Kochbay lends her personal authority to an emergent practice among young Danish Muslims, but grounds her arguments in institutional authority in the Quran and the words of the Prophet. However, it is also interesting that she stresses the importance of responsibility, honesty, and tolerance for the individual, whether male or female – values that are highly ranked by young Nordic men and women in general (Lindgren, Lüthi, and Fürth 2005).

In several posts KurdiskMuslima seeks to enlighten readers about the teachings and practices of Islam. In a post on women in Islam of 11 May 2011, she argues that where other religions initially treated women as children or slaves, "Islam acknowledged the equality of women and men in many ways". She grounds her argument in quotations from the Bible and the Quran, the words of the Prophet, and historical evidence, e.g. "throughout Islamic history there have been famous and influential (female) scholars and judges" and "...a range of Muslim countries have actually had female rulers and presidents". She also points to the fact that Islam recognizes women's right to draw up contracts, to benefit from heritage and education, and to serve as imams for female groups.

In the comments section, an anonymous reader starts a discussion challenging the blogger's knowledge of the Bible, which then develops into a debate about whether the Bible or the Quran should be seen as the word of God. In this discussion, KurdiskMuslima asserts her knowledge and the right to speak her mind, as in the following statement:

What makes the Bible an unserious book in my view is that so many people have written and changed it. So many different people have written what THEY see as the right thing. So the Bible doesn't actually contain what GOD said and isn't really a holy book any more (17 May 2011).

This tension between the word of God and the views of the individual is also discernable in her ending of the discussion: “Let us agree that you have your faith and I have mine. You have your book and I have mine. There is a difference between our religions, books, and faiths – that’s just the way it is.” (21 May 2011)

Discussion

In presenting these brief case studies I have sought to explore the idea of mediatization as a process that can create possibilities for new individual voices as well as for collective forms of action and reformulations of existential and ethical issues (cf. Clark 2011). More specifically, my analysis has focused on mediatization as contributing to alternative representations of gender and Islam articulated by young women acting as independent agents and speaking from a position of authority. With respect to the first part of this definition, the empowering of young women as independent media actors, these three blogs constitute new alternative voices in the public discourse on religion in Scandinavia. More than just representatives of a new minority religious tradition in a context historically dominated by Lutheran Christianity, these bloggers are also new voices of Islam. As argued by Vis et al (2011: 123), the sheer act of writing in the blogosphere, a public forum shared by both sexes, is an act of empowerment that transgresses the boundaries traditionally imposed upon Muslim women.

The blogs can also be seen exemplifying the way in which mediatization can open up new possibilities for more varied representations of religion. Analysis of how bloggers, particularly Muslim women, represent Islam by means of images and blog posts reveals a wider variety of approaches than is found in the mainstream media. The blog posts and replies to comments show that these young women are consciously responding to the negative stereotypes that prevail in their everyday life. The bloggers’ playful and parodic use of images in particular shows a desire to confront such stereotypes using the resources of video blogging (in the case of Ana-Gina) and mixing and commenting images, videos, and statements derived from the internet (as in the cases of Kurdish-Muslima and Gülay Kochbay). As Vis et al (2011: 115) argue, this practice of “cutting-and-pasting” – rather than simply re-posting images and statements by other actors – can be a sign of “user-generated” creativity and thus the expansion of the agency of independent media actors through digital media.

A further indicator of how women can assume a position of authority in blogs is seen in their mixing of institutional sources of authority, such as the Quran and the words of the Prophet, with personal experiences and convictions. The bloggers ground their arguments in institutionally legitimized sources while at the same time exercising their right both to speak to wider audiences on

religious issues through the medium of the blog, and to interpret the meaning of these sources in accordance with their life experiences.

Can these blogs also be read as examples of how mediatization contributes to new forms of collaborative action and meaning-making? The discussions generated by comments made on these blog posts would seem to suggest so. In these comments there can be heard several voices, critical as well as supportive of the bloggers. A simple count of the names of commentators on Ana Gina's posting showed that forty-seven were anonymous or used a gender-neutral name, while forty-five were apparently female and seven male. This shows larger gender diversity than in previous studies of women's blogs, where female commentators dominated (Lövheim 2011), and of religious discussion groups, where men dominated (Lövheim 2004). It is also interesting to note how interactions between bloggers and readers sparked a discussion of how traditional religious values and norms should be handled in contemporary culture. An emphasis on true Islam as being about one's personal relationship to God, together with the core values of honesty and authenticity emphasized by each of these blogs, is a notable aspect of this development.

However, there are also important differences between the bloggers, not least as regards their biography and popularity. The example of Ana Gina here points to important issues for further research. On the one hand, in being recruited as a commentator by Swedish public service television, she offers an example of the potential of new media to empowering young women as independent media actors. On the other hand, as the post analyzed above shows, the ease with which images and texts can be recirculated via digital media has ambiguous consequences for her ability to control the meaning of her opinions and actions. That Kochbay chose to disable comments and restrict access to her blog is another example of the ambiguous implications of open access to information and the lack of traditional gatekeepers and moderators in new media forms. Gina's case also raises important questions for further research about the influence of media corporations and commercial interests in appropriating and rebranding talented "new voices" or controversial topics from the digital grassroots media.

Conclusion

Through case studies of three blogs written by young Muslim women in Scandinavia, this chapter has explored a conception of mediatization through new media as a process that can open possibilities for new individual voices as well as for collective forms of action and reformulations of ethical and religious issues. Despite their differences, these bloggers represent examples of how young women have come to use new media, specifically blogs, as a way of

participating in the mediated public sphere and thereby acting as independent agents able to engage with religion from a position of authority. A case study of three blogs is too slight a basis from which to draw larger conclusions about the significance of this kind of mediatization for religion. However, it can be argued that these blogs exemplify the performativity of new media cultures described by Lykke Christensen and Jerslev (2009). On the one hand, the use of personal experiences and opinions in arguments can be seen as a personalization of religion and, thereby, as contributing to the privatization or subjectivization of religion. On the other hand, it can be seen as an example of how new media and the “ethical spaces” formed through them can blur the boundaries of what society considers private and public. In the case of young female “pink bloggers”, their popularity has meant that issues previously seen as belonging to the private domain of a girl’s everyday life have become visible to a larger public, contributing in the process to a discussion of the norms and values that structure the lives of young women today. With the exception of Ana Gina, the blogs analyzed in this chapter do not have the same visibility. Even so, the mere fact of introducing the experiences and voices of young Muslim women into a more public space is serving to expand and differentiate the meaning of religious values and norms beyond institutional boundaries. The fact that several of the issues concern not just the experiences of young Muslim women but also the place of religion in the public sphere – religious practices, dress codes, and values – also means that they are contributing to the larger discussion of the place of religion in Scandinavia’s traditionally secular culture.

For all its limitations, this analysis raises important questions for the study of mediatization and religion. Analyzing the mediatization of religion through the lens of gender highlights how challenges to the boundary between private and public in modernity also call into question the role ascribed to religion in this dichotomy. As pointed out by Göle (2006: 144), religious faith despite losing most of its institutional representative power is becoming a new resource for self-definition, both of personal and collective identity, for a generation of young Muslims. These identities are formed at the intersection between religious faith and the experience of living in contemporary youth culture. As such, they are helping to reshape the boundaries of the space occupied by religion in contemporary society.

Notes

1. Following Lievrouw and Livingstone (2006), I understand “new media” as an infrastructure of technical artefacts and devices based on digital coding of information, practices, and social arrangements developing around them. New media differ from previous media forms in their increased ability to recombine older technologies and network structure, and in how their ubiquity, mobility, and interactivity reform social interaction.
2. The posts have been translated into English by the author.

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Belonging through Believing

Becoming Muslim through Islamic Programming

Ehab Galal

The religious landscape of the Nordic countries has for the last forty years changed due to formation of relatively large religious minority groups of Muslims.¹ Though covering a multitude of different languages, ethnicities, migration experiences, social conditions etc., Muslims have more or less in all countries become a category used as self-evident in public discourse as though it is possible to talk about one group of Muslims behaving and thinking in similar ways (Andreassen 2007; Lövheim and Axner 2011: 58; Open Society Foundations 2011). Specific religious motivations have been accorded to this group, very often related to definitions of Islam rooted in present or past Middle Eastern Islamic interpretations. This has among other things resulted in critique of migrants' access to and use of satellite television assumingly leading to religious conservatism, isolation, or even extremism.² However, very little has been done to explore the relationship between the religious identities of Muslims in Nordic countries and their use of television transmitted from the country or region from where they emigrated. Although I reject the idea that satellite media or any other media in itself creates religious identities, as also convincingly argued by Hoover (2006), it is relevant to look further into the discursive and symbolic resources that the Islamic media is offering across borders potentially reaching an audience in the Nordic countries. In the context of this volume, the key issue is *how* the symbolic resources mediated by Islamic programming offer a space for Muslim identification and belonging, and *how* this may converge or conflict with Nordic ideas of secular and national belonging. By stressing the word *how*, I suggest that it is important not to examine the media content as unambiguous religious messages, but rather to explore how these messages are presented, conveyed, and challenged as part of the programming in ways that position the Muslim audiences as specific kinds of believers. By comparing these positions offered by the Islamic satellite-media with, on one hand, the religious positions offered by dominant discourses on secularity within the Nordic countries, and on the other hand, the minority positions offered by

similar dominant discourses, it is possible to discuss how the Islamic media influence the Muslim identity and belonging in the Nordic countries.

Muslim audiences and media use in a Nordic context

As belonging to a relatively new minority group, Muslims in the Nordic countries have had to find ways to get access to knowledge about Islam and Muslim identity. Mosques, organisations, and families are traditional institutional spaces for the distribution of such kind of knowledge. However, these institutions are not only losing religious influence in Europe on a general level (Davie 1994, 2006), but also among Muslims in Western as well as in Middle Eastern countries (Eickelman and Anderson 1999; Jacobsen 2006; Mandaville 2001). The media, and for immigrants and their descendants the transnational media, might be an attractive alternative not only for getting information but also for debating and negotiating Islam and Muslim identity among Muslims all over the world (Galal 2009; Mandaville 2001). However, the relations between audiences and media are becoming increasingly complex. First of all, the media are globally characterized by huge variety, differentiation, specialization, and interactivity (Galal 2009; Hoover 2006: 70). Secondly, audiences, including the Arab-Muslim audiences, have become individualized, reflective and thus selective in their media use and in their religious identification (Hoover 2006: 72; Eickelman and Anderson 1999). Thirdly, the Arab-speaking Nordic audiences are obviously differentiated: being immigrants or born in one of the Nordic countries; being actively practicing religion or not; having very different ethnic backgrounds as well as socially being differentiated; and living in countries with similar but not equal approaches to secularity and with different attitudes and politics towards cultural and religious diversity. This complexity of media and audiences is reflected within existing studies of immigrants' media use in Nordic countries.

Audiences and media use

Studies on immigrants' media use demonstrate that they are advanced media users who combine different national and global media. Consequently, some only watch the national TV of the country where they live, a smaller group only watch TV from the country of origin, while most combine TV from where they live, from the country of origin, and from other countries (Christensen 2001; Mikkelsen 2007; Roald 2001).³ There is no indication that migrants in general chose to do without television from the national Nordic context in favour of television from their country of origin. However, the studies show that the national channels are perceived as narrowly national oriented in their news coverage, boring and provincial, and not complying with the needs for

more internationally oriented news coverage (Christensen 2001; Roald 2001). A study among Arabic speaking Muslims in Copenhagen and Malmö equally shows that a religious programme such as “Sharia and Life” with Yousef al-Qaradawi broadcasted by al-Jazeera was popular and seen by a little less than half of the respondents (Roald 2001).

These findings emphasize that immigrants have relations to their country of origin which potentially make them ask for news about it. Likewise, Muslims have relations to Islam which potentially make them ask for a space in accordance with the possibility to discuss a Muslim moral order. None of which the Nordic countries’ national media comply with. Public service media attempt to create a space for discussion of religion and Islam in the national public sphere, as discussed by Mia Lövhelm and Marta Axner (2011) in their analysis of the Swedish ‘Halal-TV’. These attempts are, as also was the case with Halal-TV, often met with a heated public discussion questioning the legitimacy of being visibly Muslim. To understand these reactions, one has to look at the traditional Nordic models for secular national religion, which I shall return to later in the discussion. However, regardless of the logic of this explanation, the reactions may support the Muslims’ request for a space wherein they may discuss, disagree and identify as Muslims on an uncontroversial basis. Arab Islamic TV offers such a space, which within a national context could be defined as a ‘subaltern counter public sphere’ as an alternative to the national public sphere. In a counter public sphere, marginalized groups are able to express oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests and needs (Fraser 1997: 81). At this point, the question is what structures and defines this counter-public offered by the Arab Islamic satellite TV?

Islamic programming

Initially, it is important to stress that most – measured in transmitted hours – of the programming at the about 712 Arab satellite TV channels has no religious aims. Sport, entertainment, films, news, children’s programmes, and documentaries without any religious frame of reference all make up the largest part of the programming. Around 48 of the channels define themselves as Islamic. The most popular are said to be Iqraa, Al-Resaleh, Al-Nas, Al-Majd,⁴ although limited by the access or lack of same not least to the key transmitters in Europe, the satellites: Hotbird, Arabsat, and Nilesat. Beside the so-called Islamic channels, other Arab satellite channels, like al-Jazeera, do also broadcast religious programmes, however quite limited in hours. The different Islamic satellite channels are not only different from each other in style and degree of religious conservatism or progressiveness; they also individually broadcast a varied range of programmes from fatwa to lifestyle programmes (Galal 2009; 2010).

Most of the Islamic satellite channels are funded and launched by Arab businessmen, business consortiums, or finance companies. This means that they are mostly *not* derived from religious groups or organisations which often are the case for many websites, various forms of Islamic pamphlet literature, or Arab Christian satellite channels which have more explicit attachment to different groups or churches. Instead of identifying with a specific interpretation or Islamic school, the Islamic channels claim to represent a universal and global Islam. Most channels are Sunni Muslim, a few are Shiite. In practice, the main players, Iqra', al-Resalah and al-Majd, are owned by Saudi businessmen with close relations with the Saudi royal family. On one hand, this alliance supports the promotion of a conservative Saudi Salafi re-Islamisation, although not all channels are equally conservative. For instance, contrary to Al-Majd's traditionalistic Saudi Wahhabism, the Salafism promoted by Iqra' could be categorised as a *Wahhabi-light* Salafism. On the other hand, the channels are identifying as private and economically liberal media focusing on privatisation of religion through economic liberalism which emphasises individual re-Islamisation, and what Roy describes as the privatisation of re-Islamisation (Roy 2004: 53).

In accordance with the Salafi trend, being a Muslim is characterised by a specific Muslim behaviour rather than by a specific way of organising a political society. Several of the channels claim to promote a tolerant Islam, to oppose a radicalised Islam and to correct the distorted picture of Islam in the West (Galal 2009). At the same time, Islam is presented as a leading moral value in all aspects of life, which is reflected in the huge variety of programming: children's programmes, quiz programmes, question programmes, recitation competitions, educational programmes, debates, talk shows, historical films, drama series, etc. By dividing the programmes into three types (which transgress traditional programme genres), it is possible to get a general understanding of how the Islamic frame of reference is translated into the programme schedule. They are:

1. Programmes that explicitly present interpretations and recitation of Quran, Hadith and Sunna, thereby mediating the scriptural tradition. The most widespread application of this type is the so-called fatwa programme which in different variants has the religious scholar's interpretation of the Muslim tradition in focus.
2. Programmes that explicitly or implicitly disseminate ideals of Islamic lifestyle emphasising the religious morally encoded practice of modern life and consumption. The lifestyle programming includes a diversity of different programme genres. What they have in common is that they offer the viewer an identity position as a 'proper' or 'real' Muslim. Among them are e.g. entertaining talk shows about how to find a spouse in the proper Islamic way or how Muslim women are wearing their headscarf (hijab) in a fashionable way.

3. Programmes that present aspects of society without any particular Islamic frame of reference. The programmes falling under this category are few and represent only a small proportion of the total programme schedule. Though not focusing on Islam or religious themes, due to simply being broadcast the programmes are included as a legitimate element of Islamic identity and politics.

Thus, the Arab channels are offering a public and transnational space for religious Muslim identification in the Nordic countries. But what does that mean in practice? What is the relationship between the Arab-speaking Nordic audiences and the Arab Islamic media?

Media as room for identity negotiation

Due to the plurality and differentiation within media and audiences, studies within religion and media should, as Hoover argues, look at the convergence between religion and media in *the social practice* (Hoover 2006: 70).

The main argument is that the media should be analysed as a tool for mediation of meaning rather than a tool to bring about a particular effect. In this perspective, the media offer the audience a range of symbolic resources – a 'symbolic inventory' – which the viewers make use of to negotiate and construct their religious identity (Hoover 2006: 16ff.). Therefore, the object for exploration is not so much the content of the programme, as it is the meaning constructed in the encounter between audience and media (ibid.:16, 34-35). Media become part of the structuring of social conscience and not only an influence on this conscience. When people interact with media, they become involved in a process that simultaneously connects them with their different cultures, with the memories and imaginaries about their past, and with symbolic resources related to these cultures and memories (ibid.: 72). This approach is supported by a general change of perspective in the studies of identity and religious identity. Due to modern processes of individualization, identity is seen as negotiable and reflexive, and accordingly religious identity as *achieved* rather than *ascribed* (ibid.: 39). This being said, the risk by focusing solely on the individual's role is to ignore the collective and societal aspect of religious identity. Studies among young Muslims in Nordic countries, show that they identify themselves by making a distinction between a Muslim 'Us' and a national majority 'them' (e.g. Jacobsen 2006; Schmidt 2007). Furthermore, the symbolic resources offered by the media are not equally open for any interpretation, but has structuring aspects. Media do not offer an endless row of identification and meaning potentials, but *preferred* and *positioned* interpretations (Galal 2009).

Then, the question is what preferred and positioned identities are put forward by the Arab Islamic programming? And how do they interact with positions in the Nordic context for collective identity and belonging? Is the channels' positioning of being Muslim in contradiction to being Danish, Swedish, Norwegian etc.?

In the following, I will answer these questions by exploring and discussing the relationship between space and practice on two levels in the Islamic programming. One is the question of the secular and/or post-secular quality of the programming, and the other is the kind of religious identity being promoted. The analysis and discussion draws on findings from my doctoral study of the Arab Islamic satellite television channels including the analysis of programme schedules and selected programmes at Al-Jazeera ("Sharia and Life"), Iqraa, Al-Majd, and Al-Resaleh. These are chosen due to their popularity, but also because we may see them as mainstream within Islamic programming despite of their mutual differences (Galal 2009).

A secular or post-secular space?

The presence and not least visibility of new religious minority groups in Europe and in the Nordic countries have initiated an ongoing debate that questions the place of religion, and particularly Islam, in public spheres (cf. Lövheim and Axner 2011). The Danish cartoon crisis, the Muslim hijab, prayers in public, the building of mosques etc. are all aspects that have lead to debate and controversy claiming Islam as a threat to secularity. However, the debate often ignores the existence of quite different kinds of secularities. Thus, secularism in the United States differs from secularism in Europe, and also the Nordic countries are mutually different (Casanova 2006; Davie 2006, 2007). Also, 'the public sphere' is not as self-evident as Habermas made it seem in his classical work (Habermas 1991). Not only do alternative public spheres intrude on the national public that Habermas is idealising, but today also global and transnational public spheres are influential (Dillon 1999). It is possible to see the Islamic channels as an attempt to construct such a transnational public. Taking the self-presentation of the Islamic channels for its face value, their aim is to counterbalance the secular influence by offering a transnational and religious public. Islam is not only a private or part time aspect of life, but embraces all aspects of life, they claim. Hence, all programming has to be in accordance with Islam. Thus far the Islamic channels contradict secular ideas in Nordic countries about religion as a private matter and about institutional differentiation. Also, the channels, some more than others, represent ideas and ideologies which conflict with widespread ideas in Nordic countries about gender equality and individual freedom. Simultaneously, by explaining these ideas and ideologies with reference to the Muslim sunna (tradition), sharia or

the Quran, the programming contradicts the idea of the sovereignty of reason that is a key issue of secularism. However, as argued by Davie with reference to Eisenstadt about fundamentalisms, “in their phenomenology of vision and action” they are profoundly modern (Davie 2007: 190). The Islamic channels are not only the result of modern processes; the way they operate is modern. Hence, by looking at the phenomenology of the programming, it is possible to argue that the channels are offering a space and addressing their audience in a way that fosters secularity when it comes to differentiation and individualisation, if not privatisation.

The existence of Islamic channels is the result of a gradually more liberalised and complex media market in the Arab countries. Consequently, new channels have been introduced and taken part in setting off a process which Sami Zubaida has defined as compartmentalisation of the Arab public sphere (Zubaida 2005: 444). Compartmentalization refers to the idea that the public sphere including the media seems to offer people different spaces for practicing different aspects of one’s identity and life. Moreover, Arab TV can be characterized by being increasingly compartmentalized due to programme and channel specialization (Galal 2009). Hence, the introduction of particular Islamic programming may be seen as an aspect of the increasing compartmentalisation. In a Nordic context, the combination of an increasing variety of Arab and Islamic programming and the Nordic audiences’ blend of national TV, international English language TV, and TV from other countries or regions of origin is further supporting this argument about compartmentalization. The Nordic immigrant audiences watch the local Nordic news at one channel, international news at another and regional (Middle Eastern) news at a third channel reflecting the different and simultaneous identifications of the Nordic immigrant. The Islamic programming offers yet another potential identification. They fulfil the audiences’ religious needs in a specific space, which as a space among others is functioning on secular basis, while trying to promote what at first sight seems to be a post-secular identity.

Constructing Muslimness through achievement

Space is a place brought into being through practice, as argued by Cresswell (2002: 26). Thus, what kind of practices forms the space of the Islamic channels? Interestingly, the issues of ritualistic practices and gender issues are just as prevalent at Islamic channels that in the Nordic debates. Thus, one popular genre of Islamic programming is the fatwa programme. Though not necessarily being the most prevalent in transmitted hours, all Islamic channels have one or more fatwa programmes. The fatwa programme is interesting as a practice, because it invites direct interaction between programme and audiences by inviting Muslims all over the world to send or call in with questions thus partly

leaving it to the audience to define the issues of concern and to take part in the negotiation of what it means to be a Muslim. Hence, keeping in mind that the programming is offering symbolic tools for meaning production and identification, it is not a question of analysing the programme content as a closed text, but rather to look at how the programmes position and interact with the audience and offer preferred readings.

The fatwa programme

A fatwa is “the legal opinion of a jurist not institutionalized in the classical sense: it is intended to elucidate, at the request of an inquirer, the position as to a legal issue; it is not binding on the inquirer or anyone else; unlike the judgement of a qadt, it is not enforceable.” (Layish 1991: 449). This definition emphasises the encounter between a jurist, i.e. a scholar into Islamic jurisdiction, and an inquirer. The religious scholar’s task is to interpret what is halal (permissible) and what is haram (forbidden). However, instead of just giving a lecture about this, the fatwa programme is dependent on questions from the Muslim audiences who are encouraged to call in with questions. Many viewers call from all over the world, including the Nordic countries, and the questions are very often related to how to practice Islam in a modern or a non-Muslim society. Hence, the fatwa programme can be analysed as a space for maintenance as well as change and renegotiation of Islamic interpretation.

On the one hand, the fatwa programme underlines the significance of the Quran and Hadith as the basis for interpretation of Islam and the religious scholar as the authority. On the other hand, the diversity of the programmes with different religious authorities and interpretations indicates that other things are at stake as well. The many different fatwa programmes do not only potentially undermine the authorities due to the many different voices; they also question the credibility and reliability of a given fatwa. The Islamic programming is very much aware of this challenge. In one episode of the programme *al-Wasatiya* at al-Resalah the journalist and writer Mohammad al-Baz concluded that the diversity in fatwa “have misused Muslims’ need to ask about everything, small and big, in their lives that could be achieved through reason, logic and reading”.⁵ The discussion emphasises the connection between the increasing numbers of programmes and sheikhs and the demand for fatawa, which suit the individual. The possibility to obtain a fatwa over the phone (a so-called “delivery fatwa”) illustrates that fatawa have become an element in a growing individualization and commercialization (Macfarquhar 2001). Obviously, as a given fatwa is in competition with other fatawas given by other scholars, the authority of each fatwa looses credibility. Thus, rather than as a channel for unidirectional information, the programmes’ success may be linked to the modern audiences’ use of the media as an instrument to practice and reflexively negotiate their own religious

identity. Therefore, the fatwa programmes do not only elucidate the religious interpretations and provide answers, they are offering identity positions.

Furthermore, the identity positions being offered are increasingly detached from the religious institutions and schools. Not only are the channels not belonging to a specific institution, as mentioned earlier, also the mainly Sunni Muslim religious authorities give a fatwa without explicitly referring to any specific law school. On the contrary, they appear to be motivated by individual rather than institutional differences. The fatwa programmes can be seen as weakening the relationship between the believer and the traditional religious institution, indicating what Grace Davie (1994) in an English context has defined as 'believing without belonging'. Nonetheless, a closer analysis of the identity positions offered shows a probable different relationship between believing and belonging than in Davie's example as will be further discussed in the following.

Performing Muslim identity

The fatwa programme is the quintessence of religious achievement. In order to becoming Muslim, one has to practice Muslimness a certain way. Thus, first, it is crucial that the audiences are positioned as Muslims, who by actively seeking answers to questions are participating in an exchange where they confirm the authority of the scholar and thereby the moral order offered by the programming, while their Muslimness is confirmed by their participation. Second, by raising specific questions they reconfirm as well as negotiate what it means to be a Muslim. The most typical questions could be divided into three. A first category concerns the performance of religious ritual; a second category raises more ethical and moral issues; and a third category is about the Muslim woman, the woman's appearance, body covering, etc. Concerning the first category, questions concerning how to perform the five daily prayers in connection to travelling are very common.⁶ Or, issues about other obligatory rituals, like what to do after failing to slaughter a sheep after a baby's birth.⁷ In the second category raising ethical or moral issues fall the many questions about money, business and interest, as well as the repeated question about the sale of alcohol, if you live in a non-Muslim country. For instance a man asked: "What does *hukm* (the theological judgment/assessment) say if one purchases goods for the home from a shop which sells cigarettes?"⁸

The third category of women issues are also related to how to behave outside a Muslim environment and to live a modern lifestyle while keeping up religious practices. One example is the woman who asked about the legitimacy to take off her niqab to obtain a visa in order to visit her son in a European country.⁹ Also, many questions are related to the bodily aspects of the women, like asking about permission to pluck one's eyebrows, or asking about the relationship between being *najis* (unclean) and fasting.¹⁰

The questions continue like that, almost endless. While some scholars will give long complicated theological response, others will provide more concrete and clear answers; some scholars will be more conservative, others more progressive. My point is that it is not so much the answers but the way of raising questions and the type of questions which are important to understand the relationship between the programme and the audiences. The fatwa programme positions the audiences as active participants seeking answers by the help of the religious authority via communication technologies. The answer they receive should enable them to fulfil their obligation as Muslims. Hence, they are positioned as participants in something more than merely an exchange of opinions or knowledge. The viewer is positioned as someone who through his actions strives at achieving a specific position as Muslim. He is expected, on the one hand, to be Muslim and, on the other, through a process to *perform Muslimness*. One must do something to *achieve becoming Muslim*. This is a process of *becoming*, where the practice and observance of the ritual, ethical and moral guidance are the key point. The important position of the audiences is to participate and by participating fulfilling their plight and position as practicing Muslims always on their way to *become* Muslim. To raise a question in the fatwa programme is to perform Muslimness. Concerning the Muslim women the questions typically raised stress that performing *womanness* in the right way is to perform *Muslimness* accordingly, and the other way around. Hence, the fragmentation, commercialisation, and individualisation of the fatwa seem not to weaken its importance to the audiences, on the contrary. By striving for Muslimness, the individual Muslim comes to belong. – Where does this leave the Nordic Muslim?

Belonging through Believing

The Islamic channels' focus on *individualisation* of Islam, on *achievement*, and on *becoming* Muslim raises questions to the relationship between Islam and secularism in the Nordic countries and to different versions of secularisation. Grace Davie is famous for her characteristic of the development of religiosity in England since 2nd world war as '*believing without belonging*' characterising the individual as distancing herself from the religious institutions while developing a more personal and individualised belief (Davie 1994). Reverse, Danièle Hervieu-Léger has, according to Casanova, argued that the development in a European context is characterised by '*belonging without believing*', because the individuals still turn to and are members of the national religious institutions like the Nordic national churches, although this membership or belonging is emptied for active participation (Casanova 2006: 14).

Two aspects rise from these conceptualisations when exploring the meaning of the Islamic programming. One is related to the role of the religious

institutions, in this case the Islamic channels, the other is about the relationship between believing and belonging. Davie has since her work from 1994 developed the term 'vicarious religion'. Davie argues that the ambiguous role of the established churches in Europe can be explored through the concept of 'vicarious religion'. Though the churches don't any longer have a daily influence on most Europeans' everyday lives, they seem to be approved as housing a minority that performs religion on behalf of a larger number of the population (Davie 2006: 24). They do that by conducting rituals and believing on behalf of others, embodying "a certain social and moral order" (ibid.: 26). Davie also asks if the churches may be the room for taking up controversial topics which are difficult to address in other publics, like questions about homosexuality etc. (ibid.: 26).

Some parallels can be drawn to the Islamic programming without it being an identical case. By watching the fatwa programming the audiences get access to others' (the Muslim scholar and the participants writing or calling in) performing religion on behalf of the many more viewers. Instead of letting the individual Muslim visit the mosque and ask for advice, the performance of the programme's participants takes over as a kind of vicarious religion. Also, the fatwa as well as many Islamic talk shows take up controversial issues related to sexuality, gender relations, genetic manipulation etc., though being controversial for different reasons than in the European context. This is not least the case when it comes to the gender issue, where topics around gender equality and sexuality are widely discussed. By raising these questions with reference to Islam, and thus within a specific moral order, they are legitimate, and Islam comes to function as basis for changes of women's rights and for defining new gender roles within Islam (Galal 2010). What makes the Muslim case differ from the Christian is not that it is less individualised, less performative, consumerist, or experiential, as Davie (2006) is identifying as important aspects of present Christianity in Europe. These are all central aspects of the phenomenology of the Islam that the Islamic channels are offering. It is not only Islam that makes religion more visible and public in Nordic countries, it is a general trend, also among Christians, towards less privatization of religion.

The main difference may be seen in the meaning of belonging. Though individualised and detached from traditional religious institutions, belonging seems to be a highly central aspect of becoming Muslim. Certainly, it is not only a matter of a personal relationship between the individual believer and God. It is also a matter of being recognised as Muslim by other Muslims due to identification with a Muslim practice. So, the Islamic channels and religious programming promote a kind of secularism characterised by '*belonging through believing*'. The membership, and thereby I mean the affiliation and identification with the group, leads to belief or religion. That membership is the definitive power is further supported by the results of a European study researching the

position and identifications of Muslims in eleven EU cities. The study shows that the feeling of belonging to the European country of residence is not affected by the display of *visible* religious identity (Open Society Institute 2010: 76) or religious *activity* (ibid.: 261). However, the report on Denmark at the same time shows that Muslims compared to non-Muslims to a much higher degree do not identify as Danish or feel identified as so (Open Society Foundations 2011: 74). In sum, it is not the difference in being a religious practising Muslim or not that makes Muslims belong, but rather experiences of immigration and discrimination (ibid.: 74-75). Muslimness becomes a way to belong which further offers the individual a set of practices and a moral order defined by Islam. Like in Davie's analysis, the Muslim community offered by the Islamic programming does not take its point of departure in the traditional institutions like the church or the mosque, nor does it identify with national state institutions like in Hervieu-Léger's version. However, the idea of belonging to a social group due to individual achievements motivates the belief.

Taking these developments into consideration, I find it crucial to include the media's contribution to collective processes of inclusion and exclusion as an unavoidable aspect of media's mediations of identities. Hence, media becomes an instrument to stage the religiously defined cultural and social style that supports/backs up community belonging. Precisely the performative and participative aspects are central, as Eickelman and Anderson argue (1999), and may be understood as a necessary qualification to claim belongingness. Without a well-defined institutional membership, the continuous signification of belonging and of social position becomes a necessity. Accordingly, belonging is constituted through *achievement*. One needs to *demonstrate* – meaning perform – belonging to be able to become part of the social or in this case religious community. And one can do this through style and positioning. For this purpose, the Islamic channels and fatwa programmes offer symbolic resources. Consequently, judging from the Islamic satellite channels' promotion of religion and religious identity, 'belonging through believing' seems to be characteristic for the present-day religious situation among transnational Muslims. A Nordic Muslim comes to belong to a transnational community through religious achievement.

Concluding remarks

The Islamic satellite channels offer Muslims in the Nordic countries and elsewhere a model for belonging that is not necessarily embedded in a geographical or national territory. In this regard, the religious programming and new media technology is a tool strengthening one Muslim community across borders. The mediated way of belonging leaves room for different interpretations and disagreements about the role of Islam in present day society. What makes the

community is the continuous struggle for achievement by the individual Muslim. As such the Islamic media offer Nordic Muslims symbolic resources that make it possible to achieve Muslimness and thus belonging. The framework is an Islam that is universalised and individualised. It offers a shared religious language through Islamic concepts, metaphors, and standards of reasoning. Hence, the Islamic programming offers the Nordic Muslims a transnational community to belong to while believing. As goes for the ideas of individual achievement and detachment from traditional institutions, it rather supports than disintegrates the participation as citizen in a Nordic country on a secular basis. However, the claim for an unison belonging with reference to the moral order of Islam may support rigid categories of 'us' and 'them' that leave some Muslim individuals isolated or discriminated.

Notes

1. The number of Muslims in Denmark are 3,8% of the population and in Sweden 4,9% (Jacobsen 2007). In Norway 3,2% (2005). In Finland 0,9%. In Iceland there are less than 500 Muslims.
2. In Denmark, particular the political right wing has claimed Arab satellite television to be disintegrating.
3. The most recent study in a Danish context (from 2006) shows that 23% of the respondents (immigrants in Denmark, sample total 950) only watch Danish TV; 39% watch Danish TV and channels from the country of origin; 28% watch Danish TV and channels from the country of origin as well as channels from other countries; 10% only watch channels from the country of origin or channels from other countries (Mikkelsen 2007).
4. The extent of their popularity is difficult to determine, not least in relation to viewers' priorities among different types of channels. There are only few audience studies dealing with the religious channels.
5. In 'Satellite TV's fatwa between benefit and prevention', al-Resalah (01-05-2008).
6. 'The healing answer' (Al-Jawaab al-Shafi), al-Resalah (21-06-2007).
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid.
10. 'Ramadan-fatwa', Iqraa (09-10-2006).

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Religion and Popular Media Culture

Danish *Twilight* Fandom

Transformative Processes of Religion

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Mediatization involves processes of social *changes*. These changes may have the character of *transformations*, as the changes incurred by the media may change the direction, the form, or character of the actual social or cultural activities (Lundby 2009: 11).

This article presents the results of a reception study of Danish *Twilight* fans and uncovers *how* processes of mediatization of religion occur in the particular socio-cultural setting of this fan group. The findings suggests four factors that illuminate *how* these transformations of religion come about as they relate to the direction, the form and the content Lundby mentions in the quote above: (1) for these particular Danish fans, institutionalised religion is losing its relevance and status as a space for exploring beliefs and values. However, (2) there is still a fundamental fascination with supernatural and religious phenomena, as understood through cognitive theory, within the group that the *Twilight* series supports. Furthermore, (3) the religious content, understood through the concept of *banal religion* (Hjarvard 2008; 2008b), undergoes transformations as it is subsumed by media logic in *Twilight*, thus transforming the images these fans have about supernatural and religious concepts. *Banal religion* (Hjarvard 2008) refers to the constant circulation of religious symbols and imagery in popular culture. Finally, (4) the fan devotion signifies transformations in *religious emotions* (Riis and Woodhead 2010), as fans may engage in transcendental emotions, while allowing their emotional responses to be *performances* (Abercrombie and Longhurst 1998) at fan-related rituals. In this process of the mediatization of religion, media narratives have the ability to promote fascination and emotional engagement with religiously charged content for a culturally secular audience, but in doing so it transforms religion in relation to both the dimension of substance and the dimension of function.

The fan reception analysis subscribes to an understanding of audiences that is similar to Abercrombie and Longhurst's (1998) notion of the spectacle/performance paradigm (SPP). Their SPP covers the assumption that being a

member of an audience is more than receiving media messages. Instead some modern audiences are performers in the sense that through watching media narratives, they accentuate certain behaviours and values. Thus, for the fan group in this study, going to a *Twilight* premiere or participating in online fan activities can function as emotionally charged ‘ceremonies’, in a sense similar to Dayan and Katz (1992) use of ceremonies relating to media events. Dayan and Katz (1992) argue for the type of media events that are ceremonies without an antecedent event “...we demonstrate that these are ceremonies which themselves are events. Indeed, it will become clear that these are the most powerful – the most transformative – of occasions” (Dayan and Katz 1992: 149). These ceremonies, or movie premieres, are transformative, because the audiences regard them as ceremonial, and through the fans’ experiences, performances may take on “qualities of sacredness” (Abercrombie and Longhurst 1998: 41). Such transformative processes of more or less sacred ceremonies through media use are possible because of the amalgamation of media and societal institutions (see Hjarvard 2011; Schulz 2004).

Theory

A multidimensional theoretical approach to the mediatization of religion

Mediatization theory introduces the notion that, historically and primarily in a Western late-modern context, social institutions undergo transformations through media in two simultaneous processes; media take over the function and substance of other social institutions *and* other societal institutions adjust accordingly to accommodate to media technologies and formats (Schulz 2004; Hjarvard 2008c; Lundby 2009). However, processes of change are not necessarily applicable to other cultural spheres or other media contexts. For example, processes of religious change might have different implications if we replace the present study’s focus on American produced serial fictions with teenagers’ use of the web for religious purposes, as in Lövheim’s study of Swedish youths (Lövheim 2007).

The article draws on a sociological working definition of religion similar to that formulated by Bruce:

Religion for us consists of actions, beliefs and institutions predicated upon the assumption of the existence of either supernatural entities with powers of agency, or impersonal powers or processes possessed of moral purpose, which have the capacity to set the conditions of, or to intervene in, human affairs (Bruce 1992: 10-11)

Although this definition is formulated within the frame of the social sciences, it includes a link to cognitive research and illuminates why these two approaches

complement each other. Bruce thinks of religion as rituals and institutions (both in a broad sense) that are social and cultural constructions, but his definition embodies the thought that the supernatural and intentional agency are central to religion, similar to the core of the cognitive science of religion studies (Barrett 2004; Boyer 2002).

I propose a multidimensional theoretical approach considering both social and cognitive aspects when studying the mediatization process within Danish *Twilight* fandom. On the one hand, a purely socio-cultural theoretical frame would lack an explanation for how religion and the supernatural continue to fascinate seemingly secular audiences. On the other hand, a purely cognitive anthropological theoretical frame would fail to set mental processes related to religion in their appropriate socio-cultural context. As Zerubavel (1997) suggests in his thoughts on social cognition, we are a product of both our social surroundings and our biological features. In the field of religion, this dual dimension, in my view, has great relevance in order to provide nuance to the current discussions of simultaneous processes of secularisation and de-secularisation in Western societies.

Theory of mediatization of religion is central for analysing a Danish cultural context since the media represent one of the most salient spaces young Danish teenagers may interact with in terms of religion (Hjarvard 2008a; Hjarvard 2011). Although two respondents participating in the current study had a Christian confirmation, it became clear in the interviews that they do not bring this religious element into other aspects of their lives. For these teenagers, institutionalised religion has very little social value. Clark's (2003) study of American teenagers, religion and the supernatural allows us to understand the role of religion in a Danish context through a comparison between Danish teenagers and their American counterparts. In her ethnographic study *From Angels to Aliens* (2003), Clark assigns the respondents to categories based on their approach to media, the supernatural and religion¹. The category Clark labels "the resisters" represents the group most similar to the fans in the current study, but there are fundamental differences. The teens in Clark's group of resisting teenagers opposed traditional religion because they viewed it as an authority to which they will not surrender (Clark 2003). In a Danish context, the teenagers resist and oppose religion because of its *absence* and *lack* of authority and salience in their lives. Furthermore, Clark describes how even the American teenagers that opposed organised religion still saw themselves as spiritual or religious beings. This, Clark argues, is a result of an American cultural discourse in which religiosity is heavily connected to morality. For the Danish teens, there is no link between morality and religion – for them, in specific contexts, it is almost the opposite: strongly religious people are sometimes viewed as prejudiced.

These views of religion found in the fan group are similar to those found in Lövheim's (2007) study of Swedish teenagers' relationship with religion in

cyberspace. Lövheim describes how Swedish teenagers regard religion “as premodern, antiscience, infantile and enforcing beliefs. Religion is a system that limits their possibilities of self-realization and free choice” (Lövheim 2007: 85). The fan group in the current study believes that although some Christian principles are certainly worth noting (e.g., loving thy neighbour), religion for them has mostly negative connotations tied to wars and infantile beliefs. However, these differences with American culture, along with a decrease in institutional adherence in Denmark (and Scandinavia in general), are not an indication of pure secularism. Religion and religiosity have different connotations in a Danish context and the way these fans express beliefs are shaped by a lack of an overall guiding frame that organised religion provides². This point is emphasised by Davie’s thoughts on the sociological condition of religion in northern Europe: “religious belief is *inversely* rather than *directly* related to belonging. In other words, as the institutional disciplines decline, belief not only persists, but becomes increasingly personal, detached and heterogeneous and particular among young people” (Davie 2002: 8). The question then is how and why do religious beliefs persist within a group of teenagers so opposed to organised religion?

Part of Hjarvard’s (2008; 2008b) theory of mediatization of religion is the concept of *banal religion*, and he argues: “The religious meaning of banal religious elements rests on basic cognitive skills that help ascribe anthropomorphic or animistic agency to supernatural powers, usually by the means of counterintuitive categories that arrest attention, support memory and evoke emotions” (Hjarvard 2008a: 15). *Banal religion* refers to religious representations that circulate in a social sphere (both in and outside of media contexts) and are salient and memorable representations. For example, *the vampire* constitutes a banal religious representation. Most of us are familiar with vampires’ physical appearance and supernatural characteristics (eternal life, unable to enter sunlight, drinks human blood etc.). I argue that this representation inevitably is transformed as it is subsumed by media logic (Petersen 2010). Thus, the vampires in *Twilight* are adorable, diamond-glowing vegetarian creatures. I argue that both the banal representation of the vampire, with its counterintuitive properties, and the transformed version fascinate us on a basic cognitive level.

Cognitive anthropologists Boyer (2002) and Barrett (2004) argue that part of religion’s persistence both historically and across cultures is a result of its ability to capture and keep our attention through activation of specific mental processes. Although the teens reject any significance of institutionalised religion, the series still has strong potential for activating mental processes that allow the fans to engage with the supernatural and religiosity. Barrett (2004) uses two dominant concepts to explain his theory: MCI (minimally counterintuitive) and HADD (hyper agency detection device). First, supernatural characters and events are often (minimally) *counterintuitive representations* and these are able

to attract our attention and stay salient in our memories because they break with our intuitive knowledge about ontological categories. The vampires in *Twilight* are MCI³ in the sense that they are recognisable human agents that have the ability to live forever, along with heightened senses and physical abilities. Thus, the concept ‘vampire’ breaks with our intuitive knowledge about the human ontological category. Second, religious or supernatural narratives fascinate us and are salient because they activate our desire or cognitive impulses to detect intentional agency and as such activate our *hyper agency detection device*. The Danish teenagers are prompted by the narrative to read intentional agency into the love story between Bella and Edward: some undefined wilful being (with god-like properties) created the circumstance in which the two met and so they are destined for a life together. In this way the counterintuitive properties and suggestions of intentional agency (Barrett 2004; Boyer 2002) are a primary reason these fans are so fascinated with the *Twilight* series. While there is a basic fascination with the vampire because of its counterintuitive properties, these properties, as mentioned, are transformed in order for the media product to attract our attention. It is the producers’ way of saying: “hey, this story is different from anything you have ever seen before!” This is part of the impact of mediatization; the media are not only mediators of supernatural representations, the media are shaping and transforming these representations and their meanings in order to serve their own purpose and attract viewers. The media both create and follow trends or fashions; the popularity of the *Twilight* book series was, for example, quickly followed by two television series with similar portrayals of vampires, namely *True Blood* (2008-) and *The Vampire Diaries* (2009-). Both series feature benevolent vampires and a destined, but problematic, love affair with a human girl. Therefore mediatization is not a linear process of the media changing society as suggested by Couldry (2008), but rather a constant dialogue between media and society that induces social change.

Another salient element in the empirical results is the emotional intensity that these teenagers have towards the *Twilight* series. Hills’ (2002) suggests the term *neoreligiosity* to describe fans devotion to cult texts. Hills (2002) use of the frame of religion is based on observations of fan cultures’ application of the term in relation to their own activities. For example, a fan can follow a series “religiously”. Within the global *Twilight* fan culture, some fans have developed the term *Cullenism* (Cullen is the last name of the vampire family in the series), which is associated with an almost biblical reading of the series; and thus these fans are forming a fiction-based religion (Davidsen forthcoming) with a complete history and built in values⁴. This level of fan devotion is similar to religious beliefs because it is “based on expressions of communal faith which do not allow notions of ‘proof’ or ‘evidence’ to come into play” (Hills 2002: 122). In fact, these fans disregard the fictional status of the series. Although the fans in the current study do not ascribe to Cullenism, they do

label themselves “fanpires” (fans of vampires), a term that is the title of a fan website they have initiated. I understand the application of this term to be part of the *performance* of fan emotions. In this view, *Twilight* fandom has the potential to transform feelings about aspects of social life similarly to adherents of traditional religious contexts. This brings us back to Davie’s notion of belief being *inversely* related to belonging; the fan community is held together by the commonality of emotions the group shares.

Along the same lines, Riis and Woodhead (2010) propose a sociological theory of *religious emotions*⁵ and explore the nature of these emotions. They grasp emotional states that I understand as relevant for the fan group: “Religious emotions have to do not only with social relations in the narrow ‘human’ sense, but with ‘supersocial’ relations – such as those we may have with sacred sites, landscapes, artefacts, and beings” (Riis and Woodhead 2010:7). Similarly, the fan group not only experiences emotions together with their peers, but towards the object of their fandom: the movies, the books, the actors and any ancillary text or object that may invite them to engage with intense emotional responses. Riis and Woodhead propose that such emotional investment may take on the character of transcendence:

Religious emotional regimes enable transcendence over everyday emotional states, both collective and personal. It is worth emphasizing again that such transcendence need not imply other-worldiness (though it sometimes does), since it is also focused upon alteration of relations with and within this world (Riis and Woodhead 2010: 81).

Thus, emotions within the fan group are both internally experienced and externally performed and it is through this duality that this experience becomes important. In this emotional state, I suggest, *Twilight* fans may experience *transcendental* emotions towards a media phenomenon they ascribe *supersocial* characteristics, in the sense mentioned by Riis and Woodhead (2010) and it is here we can detect transformations in religious emotionality. These emotions are important for *feeling* like a true fan, thus a part of the fandom is concerned with performing these emotions *to* other fans. Performances of emotional responses occur in the movie theatre, on blogs or simply in conversation with other fans. Abercrombie and Longhurst suggest the following regarding the audience-as-performer:

When members of an audience attend to a performance, they concentrate their energies, emotions and thoughts of the performance and try to distil from that performance a meaning of one kind or another (Abercrombie and Longhurst 1998: 43).

The emotional performance of fandom may elevate some experiences to the level of ceremony. Dayan and Katz argue:

The process is reminiscent of what is called symbolic efficacy by anthropologists in their analysis of shamanic healings and transformations... Responding to the subjunctive moment when viewers of such events become converts, at least for the moment, to a new definition of the possible... (Dayan and Katz 1992: 148).

Such a transferring of social functions from one institution to another is part of Hjarvard's argument for mediatization: "Rituals, worship, mourning and celebration are all social activities that used to belong to institutionalized religion but have now been taken over by the media and transformed into more or less secular activities" (Hjarvard 2008a: 10). Going to a *Twilight* premiere and expressing your emotional commitment to the series may be an example of such a transformation. Schulz (2004) proposes four processes for analyses of mediatization: *substitution*, *extension*, *amalgamation* and *accommodation*. Using Schulz' (2004) terms, we can understand this transformation as a process of substitution; media and fan cultures have substituted the function of religious rituals and ceremonies. Nyboe and Drotner (2008) argue that as the performances enter the digital sphere, for example, in blogs, the aesthetic possibilities become a relevant tool for self-representations. Furthermore, as these self-representations are exchanged with others (for example online), social change may take place: "To perform one's cultural identity through aesthetic practices, therefore, invites new perspectives and allows for a transformation of existing perceptions" (Nyboe and Drotner 2008: 172). This is in a sense an example of the increase of media's role in a society of self-reflexive individuals (Giddens 1991) constantly redefining their identities in online spaces (Brake 2008; Lundby 2008).

Method

A qualitative single-case reception study

The findings presented in this article are the results of a *thematically* structured (Schröder 2003) reception study since its primary concern is the intersection of religion, the supernatural and the Danish *Twilight* fan culture⁶. The study was conducted from January 2009 (beginning with the premiere of *Twilight*) until July 2010 (concluding with the premiere of *Eclipse*). In order to analyse the transformative processes of religion, the analysis is based on multiple types of empirical data: observations at three movie premieres, a focus group, personal blogs and an in-depth interview. This is a single case study with embedded units of analysis (Yin 2009) and as such the empirical basis is not proposing to be a representative sample of Danish fan culture. Rather, the object of this reception study is to understand in depth *which* processes occur in the devoted

reception of supernatural/religious narratives and *how* these processes occur in relation to the respondent's existing interest in and knowledge about religion⁷. Robert K. Yin (2009) argues that the single case study has the potential to test existing theory:

A single case, meeting all of the conditions for testing the theory, can confirm, challenge, or extend the theory building. The single case then can be used to determine whether a theory's propositions are correct or whether some alternative set of explanations might be more relevant (Yin 2009: 47).

Furthermore, the single case study presented in this article is subjected to a methodological triangulation and the respective methodological perspectives are discussed below. This triangulating strategy aims to strengthen the case's *construct validity* (Yin 2009) through the use of several sources of evidence.

Focus group

In November 2009, I conducted a focus group study immediately after the premiere of *New Moon*. The three respondents are Danish *Twilight* fans (age 14-15) who know each other through their online fan activities (fan pages and blogs). The fans were found using a *network selection strategy* (Neergaard 2010). One respondent, Rebecca, an active blogger and initiator of a fan webpage, was the access point to the group that is identified through her social network. I chose this method since it was a way of ensuring that I got in touch with fans who had followed the series for a while and identified themselves as fans. The respondents all live in the greater Copenhagen area. Two, respondents, Rebecca and Tine, come from families in which their parents are divorced, and they are very aware that this element meant a stronger identification with the main protagonist's situation (in the series, Bella moves from her mother's home to her father's home in Forks). The interview lasted about 1 hour and 30 minutes⁸. The span of the overall study revealed an aspect of the lifecycle of fandom: by the premiere of the third movie, *Eclipse*, Tine let me know that she was not really a fan anymore. Her friendships with the others in the group do however remain. The interview strategy is similar to what Silverman (2006) labels a *semi-structured interview*. The aim was to gain as much data as possible by balancing between allowing the interviewees to talk and discuss the subject amongst themselves, while keeping the research aim in mind. The flexible interview strategy allowed me to use my own experience as a means for getting the conversation going. For example, I would express my own enthusiasm or knowledge about a supernatural serial narrative in order to see if this sparked a response or stimulated some thoughts that might prove relevant.

Element of observation

In order to grasp the fans' emotional investment and the fascination that surrounded the *Twilight* phenomenon, I watched the premieres of *Twilight*, *New Moon* and *Eclipse*. My role as an observer changed from the first premiere through to the third: at the premiere of *Twilight*, the first in the series, I was a *complete observer* in Lindlof and Taylor's (2002) terminology. None of the audience members were aware of my presence or my role as a researcher. This should ensure an unbiased view of the fans' responses. The disadvantage of being a complete observer, as Lindlof and Taylor (2002) suggest, is that the respondents are not able to adjust or influence my interpretations of the event. At the second and third premieres, I joined a group of fans at the premiere (I saw *New Moon* with focus group respondents Tine, Rebecca and Katja and *Eclipse* with Rebecca and Katja), thus changing my role to be similar to the *participant-as-observer* (Lindlof and Taylor 2002), although these fans were the only ones aware of my aim and purpose for participating. In the role of participant-as-observer, I remained an outsider to the fan group; a guest they had momentarily invited into their fan-sphere.

In-depth interview

In December 2009, I conducted an in-depth interview with one of the focus group respondents, Rebecca, at her house⁹. The interview with Rebecca followed the same methodology as the focus group; the *semi-structured interview*. I chose to talk to Rebecca privately because I recognised that Rebecca was interested in separating the supernatural stories she followed so intensely from organised religion, which she still disregarded as having little value. For example, she dismissed the notion of Jesus walking on water or God sitting on a cloud in the sky; however she playfully engaged with the idea that she might meet and fall in love with a vampire one day herself. I wanted to understand this process of negotiating with personal beliefs and the supernatural narratives she engaged in further.

Personal blogs

The reception study includes content analyses of the respondents' personal blogs. Blogs are a relevant subject of study here since it is the preferred choice of communication for these girls and it emphasises a transformation in social interactions brought on by media technologies. Abercrombie and Longhurst's (1998) notion of the *performing* audience has very explicit implications with this fan group since all of the respondents write personal weblogs or blogs and often write about their fan investments in *Twilight*. I carried out content analysis of three blogs (text and images¹⁰). Weber (2007) discusses girls' adoptions

of new technologies and argues how cyberspace and social websites have in some ways become substitutes for physically meeting up and “hanging out”. This is in itself a transformative process we can understand as a process of mediatization. For this fan group, however, there is an additional performance dimension: the blogs are both a space to perform emotions related to their fan commitment to *Twilight* with visual and aesthetic tools and to receive confirmation as to the validity of this commitment from like-minded people through commenting on each other’s posts.

The results: Transformative processes of religion

Rejecting traditional religion

A primary finding is how the role of religion in these teenagers’ lives shapes their reception of *The Twilight Saga*. Some responses stand out: (1) the fan group rejects institutionalised religion as a source of values and beliefs. (2) Furthermore, they have little awareness of or ability to recognise explicit religious references or symbols as they appear in the narrative. Some of these characteristics are understood as an element of suspense, rather than a religious reference. However, (3) even without this recognition they have strong objections to parts of the narrative that do in fact seem informed by the author’s (i.e., Meyer’s) personal religious beliefs (Mormonism). When asked about the role of religion in their own lives, the answers were a dismissal of biblical narratives:

- Interviewer* How much is religion a part of your everyday life?
Rebecca Not very much, I think. I have had a confirmation, but I don’t believe in God ... not really, not really a believer. Of course there is something up there, but I do not believe that Jesus could walk on water and stuff like that.

In the focus group, Tine expressed a similar rejection of traditional religious concepts:

- Tine* ...I just cannot imagine that there could be another world up in the sky, where a God is sitting and letting you through a gate and stuff. I really can’t...

As far as their reception of religious concepts within the narrative, their religious critique takes on a different character. In *Twilight*, the lead character Edward, the vampire, insists on waiting to have sexual relations with his girlfriend Bella until the two are married, and the Mormon author Meyer has expressed she will not allow her main characters to have intercourse before marriage (interview in *A Motley Vision*, 2005). Although the series quite openly integrates values and

beliefs connected to the Mormon faith, it is initially unnoticed by the Danish fan group. Rebecca states the following:

Rebecca Well, I also think, it was after I read a long interview with her [Stephanie Meyer], where it said several times that she was a Mormon and stuff. And so I went and looked it up; then I found out what it was. It's only afterwards that you begin to draw parallels to the books and stuff. Otherwise I would have never guessed.

Instead, these elements are viewed more positively as a narrative device that creates suspense, but still not as the series proselytising Meyer's views:

Tine Well [...] one thing is that he [Edward] wants to wait [with sex] until they are married, but it's just about him wanting to stay away from her as long as possible, right? You hear a lot about her wanting to for a really long time and he says "alright, after marriage" and stuff, right? I don't really think that it matters if it is after marriage or after she becomes a vampire or after something else. I just imagine it as a sort of limit, a rule, for them to keep away from each other.

In the fourth book, *Breaking Dawn*, the couple gets married, Bella becomes a vampire and pregnant with Edward's baby. As the narrative in *Twilight* is removed from easily identifiable socio-cultural surroundings and experiences, so are the fans' ability and desire to identify. To be married and to become a mother at the age of 17 or 18 is simply just too unattractive for these girls despite the promise of eternal destined love¹¹. So even as great fans, they disregard religiously charged aspects of the stories that they find irrelevant to their own life situations.

Rebecca I wouldn't mind a different ending to *Breaking Dawn* [the fourth book]... in fact I would have liked to see the series end with *Eclipse* [the third book], because I do not think that *Breaking dawn* is one of the most fantastic books. I think it ends really badly and I don't like the way it's written. [...]

[...]

Tine Also this thing about her having a daughter, because I just can't see Bella as a mom and I can't really see Edward as a dad [...].

Rebecca They also are just 17 and 18, right?

Although the teenagers dismiss institutionalised religious beliefs, they do not object to the notion of "belief in something". A literal interpretation of biblical stories is seen as almost infantile. Instead beliefs are coupled loosely to mys-

tery and the supernatural. A cognitive anthropological view provides us with further knowledge about these elements.

Fascination with the supernatural

A prerequisite for media's ability to transform religion is its ability to fascinate and capture audiences. The supernatural elements in *Twilight* fascinate the fan group in several ways: (1) through counterintuitive characters and events and, (2) through suggesting (supernatural) intentional agency. In *Twilight*, the story revolves around respectively a community of *vampires* and of *werewolfs* living in the woods in Forks. The werewolves are *shape shifters* that can transform from their human bodies into large wolves at will. Both of these supernatural beings are examples of minimal counterintuitive representations (or MCIs). Katja formulates how the presence of the supernatural almost strengthens her interest in engaging in the story rather than creating a distance through the portrayal of an alternate reality.

- Interviewer* Yes, what if there had not been the magical parts [in the series]?
Katja ... Yeah, I also think that you can kind of better engage in the story...that there are some supernatural things that you won't experience every day, so it's just cool to engage in another universe...

This view differs significantly from their view of counterintuitive elements of organised religion, which was seen as infantile. In *Twilight*, the supernatural is cool. Rebecca offers similar thoughts as to the importance of the supernatural:

- Rebecca* ... I think fantasy and the supernatural have always caught my interest [...]. And then you just dive into another universe and imagine that you're there, and dive into another person's thoughts.

The fan group also reflects upon the counterintuitive element of an afterlife as this concept is relevant to the series' portrayal of vampires. Katja offers her perspective:

- Katja* Uhm, I think... you don't have any clear answer to what happens [when you die], so perhaps when you read different things and watch different movies, then it gives you something.... Perhaps not a clear answer, but more like "oh, it happens like this" and then you can choose to believe it. Because then you have *something* you can believe in and you can choose to believe that. And you can hold on to that...
Rebecca But I also think that all people need something to believe in
Katja Yeah, I think so too.

The quotes above reveal how Katja uses media representations as inspiration for her own vague imagination about supernatural issues. Furthermore, they reveal a cognitive dissonance, since only moments later in the interview all three girls stated that religion had a very small place in their lives. This discrepancy or cognitive dissonance is not, in my view, a result of confusion or indecision on the girls' part, but rather a testament to how they can easily entertain religious imaginations and beliefs as part of fictional supernatural narratives despite their socially informed views of religion and spirituality.

Furthermore, the love story between Bella and Edward is of epic proportions. They are "meant to be" and no obstacle is too great for their relationship. The fans expressed that Edward and Bella's relationship was probably reserved for the few, but still found great pleasure in thinking that a powerful *intentional agency* (Boyer 2002; Barrett 2004) keeps the couple together through hard times.

Katja I also think that although you might think it is a little bit over the top with this "we are meant to be" story and so on, it is still what we dream about.

The supernatural counterintuitive elements in *Twilight* increase the fans' investment in the stories. Rather than creating a distance through establishing an unfamiliar magical setting, the narrative draws the fans in further.

Transformations of religious imaginations

In addition to *Twilight's* ability to fascinate the fan group with its religiously charged supernatural content, the narrative is also able to transform their imagination about religious concepts and symbols: (1) *Twilight* readjusts their imagination about specific supernatural representations and furthermore (2), the representations in *Twilight* become their imaginary default, which they hold against other similar narratives. The latter process is an example of *cognitive dissonance reduction* (Boyer 2002), which includes the readjustment of memories or previous beliefs to correspond with current imaginations, sometimes disregarding what they may have imagined before.

In contrast to most vampire representations, the Cullen family members are moral beings who refrain from consuming human blood and are vegetarians. In accordance with the benevolent vampire storyline, they do not melt or dissolve when entering sunlight, but glow like diamonds. Thus, *Twilight* offers a variation or transformed representation of the familiar vampire figure. This transformation of the *banal religious representation* (Hjarvard 2008; 2008b) of a vampire is undoubtedly a narrative strategy to strengthen the romantic elements of the story. The visual appeal of a diamond-glowing hero rather than a gruesome melting face is obvious and perhaps even necessary to make the transcendent love-story believable.

The fan group responds to these transformations and Tine offers her view on the representation of Edward's role as a benevolent vampire:

Tine Edward sort of has God-like status doesn't he?

And elsewhere, Tine elaborates on the transformed status of the vampire and the werewolf:

Tine ...They are almost like two superheroes that are just fighting on different teams, right? It's like they are fighting evil in a way... uh... sometimes they fight each other or their own kind. Werewolves are fighting werewolves and the other way around and stuff like that. But still they are fighting evil to save the heroine right? The prince on the white horse coming to save the princess from the dragon...

For Katja it is the transformation from evil to good in both vampires and werewolves that stands out

Katja But it's the same as cowboys and Indians, right? You know, who are the best? Who are the good ones, right? Because the vampires can be good, right? And, werewolves can also be bad.

Katja's intuitive non-reflected knowledge about these supernatural representations can be challenged. Cognitive theory would argue that a counterintuitive representation is sufficient to demand attention, but as some representations are constantly circulated through banal religious representations and become familiar, it is the modified concept that now steers our attention, rather than the original representation. This process of constant modifications of religious concepts is strengthened by the high status *Twilight* has in their lives. In a sense, *Twilight* becomes the work of reference other narratives are weighed against:

Katja But that story that's called... what is it now? Isn't it "Interview with the Vampire" by Anne Rice? I think that is very similar.

Tine Aren't they also vegetarians? And eating rats and stuff?

Katja But then I also think that after you have read *Twilight*, I find it difficult to read other vampire stories, because they all are just copy-cats.

Even if Anne Rice's book was adapted for a movie as early as 1994 and might be seen as a forerunner to the *Twilight* stories, *Twilight* has become the closest and most relevant work of reference for their imaginations about vampires. The transformative process of the fans' religious imaginations occurs simultaneously with a process of transformation of transcendent or religious emotions.

Transformations of (the performance of) religious emotions

As the aforementioned banal religious representations enter media narratives, these representations in some ways undergo a process of secularisation as their original religious meaning and context are changed or removed. A similar dynamic is present when we discuss religious emotions related to fan ceremonies. The fans in the current study do not pray or worship an ominous God in the sacred context of a church; instead they ascribe the *Twilight* series an elevated status as a quasi-sacred (or secular-sacred) phenomenon. As with traditional organised religion, *Twilight* only attains an elevated status because fans (or adherents) treat it as such. Without the dynamic between the social behaviour and emotional investment these fans approach *Twilight* with and popular media's aim to satisfy their investment through promotional events and so forth, the transformative effects would be less significant. This is central to the mediatization process: the media has the ability to induce transformed social (religious) behaviour that goes beyond the viewing experience. Through a conjunction of the fans' elevation of the series and the series' integration of supernatural intentional agency, the teenagers have the possibility of engaging in emotional transcendence, or in other words: they have the possibility of feeling like they are emotionally connected to something "larger than life". The transformative process of religious emotions occurs on two levels: on the one hand, *Twilight* offers a space for exploring deep intense emotions that may include elements of transcendence and, on the other hand, these emotions function as a form of self-presentation or performance to signal that the individual fan is part of a community of like-minded individuals. This self-representation is carefully constructed through blogs, physical appearance and behaviour at ceremonies such as the movie premieres. As such, performance does not mean their relationship with the object of their fandom is superficial or focused on form and empty of meaning. In fact, it may very well be that the performance enhances the emotional meaning that these fans are able to ascribe to their participation.

As mentioned, the emotional investment and devotion these fans held regarding *Twilight* and its characters were very visible during the observation at the movie premieres. Some members of the audience had covered their faces in white lace veils or drawn fang bite marks on their necks, while Rebecca, from the fan group, wore a t-shirt stating "I'm with the vampires, of course" to the premiere of *New Moon*. The fans I joined knew the soundtrack by heart and often sang or hummed along during viewing. I understand the fans' singing and humming, while in a packed movie theatre, to be a way of situating themselves as being in-the-know and embedded in the fan culture with equally involved fans. The audience in general often broke out in spontaneous clapping, some cried and others hid their faces in their hands not being able to bear the events on the screen. On her blog, Rebecca labels certain emotions as having the "*Twilight*-fever":

Rebecca ...had a minor attack of the *Twilight*-fever today. You know... it's when you can't sit still, are breathing way too fast, have a big smile plastered on your face and are talking, raging fast. Yes – that's me (www.breakingfree.dk March 11th 2010).

Naturally, the online fan activity provides a space for increasing the frequency of *Twilight*-related behaviour. The immense number of discussion forums, web-pages and fan groups allows for an exploration of ancillary texts that can (and sometimes do) take up most of these fans' free time. In the in-depth interview, Rebecca reflects on the impact *Twilight* has on her life.

Interviewer How much time does *Twilight* take up in your everyday life? Just on a regular day?

Rebecca Oh it takes up a lot... a lot of my time I think.... Almost all of the time. I have never felt this way about a movie or a book before, but now this thing, it takes up a lot. I don't think there is a day without me checking *Twilight*-news or reading in one of the books or watching clips from the movies or talking to somebody about it... constantly.

This transformative process of religious emotions is strengthened by the presence of likeminded people; as Hills' (2004) concept of *neoreligiosity* suggests, the emotional commitment to *Twilight* is to a high degree about *feeling strong feelings* in the company of others and *sharing strong feelings that are similar* to those of others, whether in a movie theatre or in an online space.

Weber (2007) pointed out how social online media provides a space for teenage girls to "be together". On these personal blogs, the performance of fandom not only relates to the written word, but to the visual and aesthetic construction of one's blog (Nyboe and Drotner 2008). Below is a picture that served as the title or header image of Rebecca's blog. Therefore, we can assume that this image represents part of how she wants others to see her. For the equally engaged fan, it is obvious that Rebecca draws on imagery of Bella and characteristics Rebecca shares with Bella: she has placed herself in a meadow-like scenario, similar to familiar images of Bella from the *Twilight* movies, and she drinks coffee and reads books (Rebecca, like Bella, has a great interest in books). On the left, we see four images that are ethereal, over-lit images of nature. These, to me, are Rebecca's way of linking herself to a dream-like or magical universe that she is introduced to through *Twilight*. We may understand this form of self-representations as a way of feeling closer to the *Twilight* series; perhaps even as a part of it and the elevated transcendental emotions it promotes. At the same time, we may see Rebecca's aesthetic display of "self" as a performance of how she wants to be perceived by the blog's followers (Brake 2008).

Figure 1. Picture from Rebecca's blog, www.breakingfree.dk (where it has been the title banner).



In the absence of a traditional religious setting, we can understand these fans' emotional devotion to *Twilight* as a transformed display of religious emotions. The media narrative that constitutes the *Twilight* series stands at the centre of these transformations.

Conclusion

Processes of mediatization include, as Lundby (2009) points out, changes or transformations in both the direction or form and the character of social activities. In the particular context of Danish *Twilight* fan culture, the transformative processes of religion are contingent on a series of factors that the results of this study points to. Transformations of religion are here both connected to socio-cultural and cognitive factors; it is in the conjunction of the theoretical frame that we can identify media narratives' ability to induce change.

The four key factors discussed in the results section of this article are specific to the context of Danish *Twilight* fans and the religious representations in the *Twilight* series. In a different cultural context or in relation to a different media narrative, we might identify other transformative processes. Mediatization of religion is, I suspect, particularly prevalent within a Danish cultural context, since media narratives serve as a dominating space for engaging with religiously charged content. Media is also, in the eyes of these teenagers, far more desirable to engage in than organised religion, which stands out as outdated and infantile. More so, the absence of a homogenous religious worldview allows these teenagers' religious imaginations to be informed by the transformed and disconnected banal religious concepts they come across in media narratives. These teenagers do not have the input of a religious authority available to weigh their imaginations or emotions against; instead media narratives, such as *The Twilight Saga*, are able to gain an elevated status in their representation of the supernatural which appeals to the fans on a basic cognitive level.

The Twilight Saga, and perhaps supernatural narratives in a broader sense, has the ability to promote spiritual and religious issues along with an emotional investment in such issues. But this fascination and emotional investment happen in a form where the media product can quite easily be replaced with

a different supernatural narrative, as long as it supports similar cognitive and emotional functions. Since one central function relates to social performances of fandom in this group, we may assume that whether or not a media narrative is able to generate social change is conditional on audiences' motivation, cognitively and socially speaking, to let it do so.

Notes

1. Clark's categories are: the resisters, the mystical teens, the experimenters, the traditionalists and the intrigued teens (2003). I suspect that these categories are also present in a Danish cultural context; however, the cultural implications, as I suggest, are different.
2. I argue elsewhere that Danish teenagers with strong religious ties bring their established religious imagination into the reception of serial supernatural narratives (Petersen 2010a). These teenagers adjust both their knowledge of the organised religion they belong to, as well as their reception of the narrative. In cognitive terms, they perform a *cognitive dissonance reduction* (Boyer 2002) as they attempt to minimise the discrepancy in order to hold on to a homogenous worldview. This is not the case for the teenagers without a religious framing – their reception is much more heterogeneous and includes sometimes dichotomous beliefs.
3. We could challenge the *minimal* aspects of Barrett's theory about MCI's. In other words, the minimally counterintuitive has a greater relevance in oral cultures. Popular media narratives can easily be revisited by the interested viewer and so the characters and supernatural phenomenon can be more complex and perhaps even *maximally* counterintuitive, while preserving their ability to be memorable.
4. Markus Davidsen (2012, forthcoming) describes fictional based religions, most prominently featured in Star Wars-inspired *Jedism* and in relation to *Lord of the Rings*.
5. Although Riis and Woodhead's book is titled *A Sociology of Religious Emotions*, the authors propose an approach to the field that is more in tune with the social cognition paradigm established by Zerubavel (1997). They stress that emotions are both personal and social and religious emotions must be understood in this light.
6. The fan study is part of a broader study of Danish teenagers, the supernatural, religion and serial narratives conducted during the fall and winter of 2009 (see Petersen 2010a). The study included 72 teenagers, four focus groups, four in depth interviews. The respondents for the broader study were selected on two parameters; devotion to religion and devotion to supernatural audiovisual serial narratives.
7. An obvious next step would be to conduct a broader study of Danish fan culture regarding supernatural narratives.
8. The focus group interview was recorded and is transcribed, and is part of the appendix of my dissertation (2012).
9. The in-depth interview with Rebecca was recorded and is transcribed, and it is part of the appendix in my dissertation (2012).
10. The blogs can be found on the following sites: Rebecca's blog: www.breakingfree.dk, Tine's blog: www.pagaya.dk; and Katja's blog: www.tell.pagaya.dk.
11. Certainly a popular Danish TV-series following the lives of teenage mothers (*The Young Mothers* 2004-, Danish title: *De unge mødre*) has reinforced this view. The docu-soap series shows a group of more or less mature teenagers attempting to deal with motherhood in a less than flattering way.

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Religious Change and Popular Culture

With a Nod to the Mediatization of Religion Debate

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In 2008, the Danish media studies professor, Stig Hjarvard, published the article 'The mediatization of religion: A theory of media as agents of social change,' suggesting that the media have taken over cultural and social functions formerly performed by institutional religions, rearticulating religious expressions in the form of 'banal religion,' and eventually contributing to the secularization of society.¹ Since 2008 Hjarvard has continued to develop the theory of the contemporary mediatization of religion in a handful of articles, most recently in the present volume. Simultaneously Hjarvard's thesis has become an important point of reference in both Nordic and international debates on the relationship between popular media and religious change.²

The current article enters into this ongoing debate, referring both to Hjarvard's thesis and to its reception in international research and taking empirical data from recent studies of contemporary Norwegian popular culture as its discursive point of departure. In this article, I wish to point out some considerations prompted by empirical studies in the Norwegian context, as well as to contribute to the further debate of some crucial theoretical insights. Particular interest is devoted to the notion of religion assumed by the mediatization of religion-thesis, expanding the theoretical frame suggested by Hjarvard already in his 2008 article.

Det folk vil ha: Religion og populærkultur: a look at contemporary Norway

The point of departure of the current article is empirical studies conducted in the context of, and inspired by, the publication of the book *Det folk vil ha: Religion og populærkultur* [What People Want: Religion and Popular Culture], co-authored with professor of religious studies at the University of Bergen, Dag Øistein Endsjø, and published in January 2011.³ *What People Want* offered up-

to-date studies of religion and popular culture, most chapters focusing explicitly on the use of religious representations in popular culture in the Norwegian context in the period from 2000 to 2010.⁴ The main aim of the book was to highlight the extent to which religious expressions are present outside religious institutions as well as to urge us to think differently about what and where religion is and how religion operates in contemporary Norway.

Whereas the study of religion and popular culture is an established field of research in many other countries, this has not been the case in Norway until recently. Although a handful of studies – several of them solid contributions to the field – have been published during the last decades no books have attempted to present a more comprehensive map of the Norwegian situation.⁵ *What People Want* aimed to fill this lacuna. One chapter is devoted to religious representations in the Eurovision Song Contest, another to religion in commercial ads, one chapter deals with amusement parks, and another with media representations of interior decorating practices. Two chapters discuss religion and film, and finally the last chapter deals with the input of popular culture to contemporary Christmas celebration. Consequently, *What People Want* is a preliminary *mapping* of the Norwegian field and more empirical research and theoretical sophistication are needed.

Several of the main findings of the book corroborated those from other research contexts and other countries, identified by other scholars of religion and popular culture. This comes as no surprise: Norway is not an island – tendencies in the Norwegian context run in parallel with, and are intrinsically part of, trends in other regions of the world, Europe (and North America) in particular.

The first main finding of the study was that popular culture applies religious representations to a considerable degree and that it creatively produces religious expressions – in Norway as well. This is hardly surprising to those familiar with the situation in other countries and with trends of international research.⁶

The second finding in *What People Want* was that popular culture tends to give priority to religious expressions that are visually strong, to emotional and fascinating aspects of religion, and to aspects that accentuate atmosphere and experience. Dogmatic correctness and doctrinal coherence are on the other hand downplayed (Cf. e.g. Morgan 2007; Tønnessen 2007; Repstad 2008, 2010). The expressions are often ethically and morally conservative, but at the same time very creative in their use of religious commonplaces, symbols, and myths. There is nothing unique to the Norwegian scene in this respect either. Rather, our findings reflect the national version of a larger international trend.

Our third main finding was that we still know relatively little about whether and how popular culture shapes religion and religiosity in Norway. There has been little research on how Norwegian audiences apply and engage with religious resources of popular culture (cf. however, Halse, forthcoming). Since the focus of *What People Want* was primarily studies of religious representations

in popular culture and to a lesser extent the reception of these cultural expressions, the book added only a few new insights in this regard. What we did see, however, tended to scaffold earlier research. First, we saw clear indications of generational differences (cf. Tønnessen 2007; Lövheim 2007). Popular culture aimed at children will in all probability shape a different set of cultural and religious references from the ones which guide the older generations. Second, we saw explicit differences between cultural expressions aimed at women and at men: a relatively large number of blogs, magazines, commercials and TV shows are obviously gender specific, and draw on sometimes quite radically different religious representations (Romarheim 2011; Gresaker, forthcoming).

Our fourth finding was that religious representations were drawn from several traditions, but they were far from equally distributed. The dominance of (originally) Christian representations in Norwegian popular culture was striking. The fact that this dominance seems to be mostly ignored by researchers and laypeople alike made this observation interesting. Whereas the presence of traditionally Christian symbols, narratives and conceptions is strong and visible in Norwegian popular culture, these recycled and reworked representations look different when they appear in the context of popular culture from what they do in the context of churches and congregations – to the extent that many would no longer recognize or acknowledge them as originating from or having anything to do with that religious framework. The expressions are not, as suggested above, theologically correct or doctrinally consistent. They do not assume a consistent world view, they are symbols, events, or objects which are meaningful first and foremost in the given popular cultural context they appear in, and in that context they appear as ‘something other’. Depending on our analytical approach to the identification of recycled religious commonplaces in popular culture, religious representations that are moulded anew in popular culture could certainly be analyzed as something other than the original representation they draw on, and yet they could also be studied as new cultural exponents of contemporary Christianity, possibly affecting current Christian practices. Perhaps this is what Christian practices *also* look like in our time (Cf. Partridge 2004; Sky 2012).

Whereas religious representations of Christian provenance were numerous, representations of Islamic origin were almost absent, positive representations of Islam and Muslims in the feel-good-strands of popular culture in particular. Although this situation has been slowly changing since 2011, this was the clear impression given in the period in which the book was written (2007-2010). When compared with the presence of Buddhist representations in popular culture, this lack of expressions of Muslim origin was rather striking. Whereas Buddhist symbols, narratives, and artefacts were relatively well represented in films, commercial ads and interior decorating artefacts, for instance, Islamic ones were not. A likely reason might be that Buddhist practices and practition-

ers are generally regarded as ‘the familiar and wise other’ and a real alternative in other parts of the Norwegian public sphere – school books and medicine are but two examples which show the role ascribed to Buddhism in Norway (e.g. Thobro 2008). Muslims and Muslim practices, on the other hand, tend to attract a negative value in Norwegian news media and public debate, and have a cultural role that seems to be in conflict with the adaption of positively inclined representations of Muslims in popular culture (cf. Døving 2012).

Finally, we observed a relatively high degree of cultural interchange between the practices taking place in the context of religious institutions and popular culture. As pointed out above, popular culture in Norway makes use of religious representations originating in the institutional religions *en masse*, and Christian commonplaces in particular. Conversely, we also noted that the genres of popular culture were used in religious institutions. References to pop-cultural phenomena were played out during Sunday services as a kind of rhetorical common point of departure. We also saw the production of step-for-step guides for priests as to guidance on arranging “Lord of the Rings” services in their own congregations. In addition, religious communities hooked onto popular cultural events, using them creatively: for instance, Eurovision Song Contest services were held in Oslo Domkirke when Oslo hosted the contest finals in March 2010.

Hence, *What People Want* showed that the trends in the Norwegian context to a large degree confirm international tendencies. As David Morgan (2007) has pointed out, references to and active use of religious representations is one of the main characteristics of popular culture in the first decade of the twenty-first century. Norway is certainly no exception in this regard. The book also showed that the trends we detected in the popular culture context mirror religious trends in other Norwegian cultural spheres, and probably that popular culture is involved in the creation of those current trends as well. One important example is the streamlining of what only a few years ago would have been referred to as “alternative religiosity.” These alternative religious practices now seem to be becoming more and more common.⁷

The mediatization of religion thesis from the perspective of Norwegian popular culture

Hjarvard’s thesis of the mediatization of religion served as a fruitful analytical perspective and as an explicit point of departure for the empirical studies conducted in the context of *What People Want*.⁸ The stress on the importance of the media for social and religious change served as an analytical eye-opener in our writing process, and Hjarvard did us a great favor by pointing out the importance of popular culture genres for the spread and transformation of,

religious material. Although Hjarvard was not the first to point out the role of these genres in religious- and cultural change (cf. e.g., Partridge 2004, 2005), he placed the logic of popular culture genres more firmly into a theory of media and religious change and hence made it far easier to engage with the topic. The cultural dynamic presumed by the theory turned out to be fruitful analytical concepts. In addition, unlike the majority of theories on the complex relationships between religion and popular culture which have been produced for Anglo-Saxon societies by Anglo-Saxon researchers (cf. however, Meyer 2009), Hjarvard's thesis grew out of studies of, and was primarily intended for the grasping of, the current situation in North-Western Europe, and the Nordic countries in particular.

Just as Hjarvard's thesis was helpful to the development of the argument in *What People Want*, as a subsequent step, the studies in that book are useful as empirically-based elaborations and modifications of the further development of the mediatization of religion thesis. Thus, the focus of this article is now on a discussion of the analytical force of the thesis, based on empirical studies of the phenomena which the thesis was designed to explain – in the cultural environment it was meant to grasp. Hence, I will not consider all aspects of the thesis, but rather limit the debate to the relationship between the predictions of the thesis and the empirical findings in the Norwegian context.

Mediatization – and parallelisms

A first observation is that the notion of a mediatization of religion may be truer for some cultural sectors or discourses than for others. This observation implies that the thesis makes an excellent analytical tool for explorations of some cultural phenomena, while at the same time admitting that the thesis *alone* does not necessarily explain the larger picture of religious and cultural change.

In the study of current apocalyptic and eschatological discourses, for instance, the explanatory force of the mediatization of religion thesis is potentially strong. Contemporary apocalyptic and eschatological ideas and practices are in many regards thoroughly mediatized. Although popular media genres are obviously playing on and recycling cultural expressions originating from the major religious traditions, it is less likely that audiences would recognize them as such. Rather, contemporary notions of other worlds and realms, beings associated with them, visions of the great disaster and the end of the world etc. are thoroughly dominated by media material and media language. In this sense, modern media technology and media institutions are major channels and producers of apocalyptic worlds and thoughts. Moreover, apocalyptic discourse can frequently be found in both popular and news media. Audiences are engaging with these ideas almost on an everyday basis through different media genres, primarily films, games and magazines, but also through the news,

weather forecasts, documentaries, and popular dissemination of science. These ideas and imagery have become part of contemporary everyday life: when we turn on the engine of our car, when we recycle our waste, when the rain will not stop pouring down, imagery and language from films we have seen, TV shows we have watched, and popular music we have heard are available as cultural contexts for immediate, online interpretation (Endsjø and Lied 2011). Hence, in this cultural climate, it is relevant to ask if, and the extent to which, mediated apocalyptic material can also influence imagery traditionally owned by religious traditions like Islam, Judaism and Christianity, as well as how it affects the actual ideas and formats of apocalyptic and eschatological discourses.

In other cultural and societal sectors and in other aspects of contemporary religious life, however, the explanatory force of the thesis of the mediatization of religion is not very obvious. Alternatively, the thesis serves as one of several perspectives needed to grasp the current situation. In her article 'Mediatization of religion: A critical appraisal' (2011), Mia Løvheim points out that whereas the role of media institutions with regard to contemporary religious change in the Nordic countries should certainly not be denied, the religious institutions still seem to play a vital role in these societies. Large numbers of the population in these countries are still members of the national churches (80% of all Norwegians in 2009), others are members of other religious communities, and people still rely on religious institutions like churches and mosques for the performance of important rituals such as weddings and funerals. For many of the Nordic populations religious institutions are still part of their context of belonging in one way or another (Løvheim 2011; cf. Davie 2002, 2007; Ammerman 2007).

Another aspect mentioned by Løvheim is the persistent role of the Nordic national churches in times of crisis (Løvheim 2011: 158). In the aftermath of the terror attack in Oslo and Utøya on 22 July 2011, churches and mosques and their religious specialists played important roles. Oslo Domkirke, Oslo's main cathedral, became a key symbol in the public process of coping with the tragedy, and 20% of the population of Oslo visited a church in the weeks following the terror attack.⁹ The greater part played by religious institutions during those months in 2011 does not mean, however, that media did not also have a part to play. Most Norwegians never visited Oslo during these months and they did not go to church. They obtained most of their information through the media, they took part in church services through television broadcasting, and they took part in the public coping process through engagement with media of various sorts. In this sense, the terror attack and the cultural processes it ignited could also be described in terms of a "media event" (cf. further Dayan and Katz 1992; Couldry 2003; Couldry *et al* 2010). At the time of writing, however, research on the 22 July incident, and its effects on Norwegian society and religiosity, is still in an early phase and the roles of media and religious institutions still need more research. A preliminary hypothesis is that this sad

event and the cultural processes it engendered may serve as an example of how religious and media institutions may have both intersecting and parallel roles at a time of crisis (cf. also Hjarvard 2008:18-19).

In other words, although the mediatization of religion thesis offers a useful perspective on some contemporary discourses, it is unlikely that what we are looking at in the Norwegian context is a thorough mediatization of religion. I would suggest, then, that exploring sectors of religious life or imaginations in terms of mediatization, or exploring the parallelism of the media and religious agents in religious life, would be a fruitful way of bringing the mediatization of religion thesis into play in empirical research (cf. Lövheim 2011).

Studying the mediatization of other institutions

One of the main assumptions of Hjarvard's thesis of the mediatization of religion is the idea that the media have become integrated into the workings of other social institutions. According to Hjarvard, media have become "commonplace, natural components of everyday life such as education, politics, family life and religion" (2011:122). This theoretical assumption is one of the reasons for the general fruitfulness of Hjarvard's thesis, since it suggests how the media may serve as agents of change in contemporary social life. Hjarvard holds that media are both appropriated to serve the needs of these institutions and that the institutions themselves are transformed owing to the integration of media (2011:123). He does not, however, address how media themselves may be transformed when integrated by other institutional contexts. When these theoretical assumptions serve as a point of departure for empirical research on the role of media and media material in other societal institutions, this issue becomes pressing: to what extent is it useful to describe the social processes we observe in the context of these other institutions in terms of 'mediatization', and to what extent does that perspective make us blind to the cultural and social dynamics unique to those other institutions?

One of the institutions mentioned by Hjarvard is education. In the following, the Norwegian educational system and the Norwegian version of Religious Education (RE) serve as an example.¹⁰ It is beyond doubt that media of various sorts have been integrated into the Norwegian educational system. RE classrooms, particularly in the secondary school context, see the frequent use of media and media material. Media material is part of pupils text books; media technology and genres like YouTube, films, and even material explicitly produced by media institutions for the purpose of being used in schools (e.g., 'NRK skole') often serve as the point of departure for a teaching session; and sometimes media material relevant to religion is itself the main subject discussed in class. This relatively frequent use of media-produced material means that mediated religious expressions of various sorts often set the agenda for what

Norwegian pupils learn about religion: they become important elements of how religion is represented, talked about, and assessed. In this sense it may be fruitful to talk about this phenomenon in terms of ‘the mediatization of Norwegian classrooms.’

This interpretation, however, runs the risk of denying the social dynamics of schools and the cultural genres of classroom interaction. These genres decide how pupils and teachers engage with media material, and the rules of classroom interaction will form their impression of the media texts (cf. Skeie 2000; Lundby 2009). Hence, whereas media and media material are certainly part of the Norwegian educational system, it cannot be taken for granted that the educational system may serve as an example of an institution characterized by mediatization. Media material is reshaped and reinterpreted in an institution which has its own cultural logic and which is likely to turn the conception of what was originally media material into something else – into ‘school stuff.’ In the context of RE, we might add that the reshaping of media material on religion could be seen as a second round of mediatization of religion; first in the context of a media logic and second in the context of a classroom logic.

The term ‘mediatization’ might of course still be fruitful, but it runs the risk of putting too much emphasis on the original context of the producers and the media, and too little on the contexts of use and transmission. We would for instance need to account for the differences in media use and conception of media material developed in the classroom environment vis-à-vis the conceptions of media material growing out of other contexts of media consumption of which the pupils are part on a daily basis: for instance young people’s ‘bedroom culture’ context of media use at home (Livingstone 2007). Mediatization at home would be radically different from mediatization in school, and both forms would obviously be colored by the cultural dynamics of the institution into which media are integrated.

Religion and ‘religion’

As suggested above, one of the most intriguing aspects of the mediatization of religion thesis is the insistence on the role played by popular culture genres in the ongoing reshaping of contemporary religion. According to Hjarvard, popular media and their genres create a form of religion that circulates almost unnoticed owing to its implicit, ‘unwaved flag’ qualities (2011: 128). Religious expressions appear as part of the background, or as elements of another narrative, in order to “invest the story with mysticism, magic and excitement” (ibid). The religious aspects are never explicitly referred to as ‘religion,’ however: the flag remains generally ‘unwaved.’

Hjarvard holds that the implicit, unnoticed quality of this form of religious expressions, which he refers to as ‘banal religion,’ is an important reason for

the current spread of these media-produced forms of religion. As they are not necessarily identified and talked about as belonging to the category 'religion' religious expressions like these tend to spread with less friction than they would otherwise and hence effectively affect contemporary everyday religiosity. This is a salient point.

On the other hand, if it is correct that popular media produce religion, or religious content, that goes almost unnoticed – to what extent do popular media really transform religion when the general conceptualization of 'religion' is not transformed accordingly? In other words, to what extent does a change in the cultural phenomenon of religion depend on a simultaneous change of the public conceptualization of religion?

An observation from the Norwegian context might be relevant in this regard. It may seem as though contemporary media at the moment are drawing religion in two opposite directions. On the one hand popular media certainly produce religious expressions of the unnoticed type. Typically, these expressions are not referred to as 'religion'. They are rather categorized as 'superstition,' 'magic,' or 'paranormal ideas' (Hill 2011). News media, on the other hand, tend to cement the traditional view of religion as 'The Religions,' as religious institutions; as traditional, denominational boxes and as pillars – entities clearly demarcated from their surroundings. Cast in the role of 'the typical religion' is Islam, referred to as the tradition of the cultural and religious 'other.'

As 'The Religions' still tend to dominate what is talked about as 'religion,' what we might be witnessing is a dual process; one expanding the repertoire of religious expressions and content, the other restricting the concept of religion.

Religion, 'banal religion,' and religious institutions

It has already been pointed out by several participants in the ongoing scholarly debate on the mediatization of religion thesis that the notion of religion implied by the theory limits its validity.¹¹ It has been suggested, for instance, that the thesis does not account for agency among religious groups and individuals (Campbell 2010; Lövheim 2011), nor for intersections between religious and media institutions (Lynch 2011). It has also been maintained that non-institutional or unofficial religions are not accounted for (Boutros 2011), that historical continuities, parallels, and complexities are easily overlooked (Morgan 2011) and that the general complexity of contemporary religion is not grasped in any fruitful manner (Hoover 2006, 2009; Lövheim 2011).

A major point in Hjarvard's theory is that contemporary religion is increasingly mediated through secular, autonomous media institutions and shaped according to the logics of those media – at the expense of the relevance and authority of, and the public engagement with, traditional religious institutions (2008, 2011). According to Hjarvard, this mediatization of religion should first

and foremost be understood as a process intertwined with processes of secularization (2011: 133).

In order to grasp Hjarvard's argument it is important to note that the mediatization of religion thesis is a meso-level theory (Lynch and Lövheim 2011). The thesis is not designed to grasp larger societal changes on the macro level, nor does it engage with the micro level of the social actor. Rather, Hjarvard discusses mediatization on the level of institutions. This is in many ways a helpful *theoretical* novelty. It is a way of putting the theoretical apparatus of mediatization, which has so far mostly been applied at the macro level of theoretical analysis in order to explain mediatization as a global large-scale phenomenon (alongside globalization, individualization and commercialization), into play at the meso-level. In other words, Hjarvard's discussion concerns 'institutional religion' and 'religious institutions'¹² first and foremost, he defines 'institutional religion' as implying "the official religious texts and practices advanced by the priesthood" (2011:130), and he refers explicitly to religions such as Islam, Protestantism, and Buddhism as examples of such religions (2011:128).¹³

Opting for the meso level of analysis could have been a fruitful point of departure for making the theoretical apparatus of mediatization operational for empirical research. As for instance Butros (2011) has already pointed out, this focus on religious institutions serves dramatically to delimit the scope of the theory geographically as well as historically to the countries of North-Western Europe and primarily to the Nordic countries. These are societies that are assumed to have religious institutions, first and foremost established Christian churches, which have been visible in the public sphere of the nation state. In addition, the Nordic countries are today often characterized as highly secularized societies with autonomous media institutions. Already in his 2008 article, Hjarvard made it perfectly clear that the mediatization of religion thesis is first and foremost meant to grasp a situation in these Nordic or north-western European societies (2008:11). This limitation of the geographical and societal scope of the theory is obviously necessary since the theory does not necessarily apply equally well to other parts of the world.

If Nordic and north-western European societies are the main focus of the thesis, we need to ask whether and to what extent the theory usefully describes contemporary religion in these target areas. As mentioned above, Lövheim, among others, has shown that the primary focus on religious institutions tends not to grasp the general complexity of contemporary Nordic religion. In this regard, Lövheim's conclusion agrees with most studies of the Norwegian context. It is widely recognized that religion in Norway is, and probably always has been, more than just religious institutions. Studies of historical data and contemporary circumstances reveal a spectrum of diverse religious forms, for instance a living and steadily developing folk religiosity, vivid layreligious activities outside or at the margin of institutional practices, Sami and other minority religious practices,

and since the 1970s a growing familiarity with spiritual practices of various sorts – either alternative or complementary practices.¹⁴ Hence, the conclusion that Norwegian religion is more than institutional religion is not controversial, and needs no further elaboration here.

My further comments are thus primarily of a methodological nature. First, Hjarvard's focus on the level of institutions, made operational by studying church attendance, baptism, and belief as main indicators of Nordic religiosity (2011: 131), implies that the theory will first and foremost grasp an imagined traditional, Protestant, institutionalized form of religiosity. Empirically, this is a clear reduction of the scope of a theory that aims to deal with 'religion.' Hence, at best, the theory will grasp religiosity structured by the traditional Protestant format, and not the broader phenomenon of religion in Nordic societies today.

Second, the theory runs the risk of ascribing a *stereotypical* and possibly even *normative* understanding of traditional Protestantism to the religious life of contemporary religious communities. It is easy to mix collective memory with historical 'facts'. Representations of Scandinavian Protestantism are easily confused with actual social situations of the past. Or perhaps, in our capacities as scholars, we tend to take the historical narratives of religious institutions at face value. These are narratives we need to read against the grain if we want to look for historical information. The historical memory of a given tradition or institution should not be mistaken for neutral historical sources. It is a way of making the present meaningful, and a valuable source of representations of tradition, but it is not an unmarked window into the past.

Third, we cannot discuss what the empirical field of religion is today solely by comparing it with what it was. When we discuss change, we cannot freeze a given historical form of religion and look for parallels with the frozen image in contemporary social processes. It is a mistake to see the Protestant religiosity of yesterday as the main content of the category 'religion' – religion today is much more than that. Hence, we need to look for social practices in their own historical context. If we approach religion as ongoing social actions and culturally defined practices of various formats, we must acknowledge that religion will look different at different times (cf. Lynch 2007; Lövheim 2011).

Fourth, there is a common tendency in research to forget that religious institutions consist of individual members and subgroups that navigate in a wider religious landscape. Today, members of religious communities, even religious specialists, tend to put their own personal touches to their religious practices and beliefs.¹⁵ In other words, the concept of 'religious institutions' hides a complex variety of religious practices and imaginations that often run across institutional borders.

Fifth, a methodological note on the historicity of so-called 'banal religion'¹⁶ should be brought into the discussion. Following Hjarvard, the media rearticulate religious expressions in the form of so-called 'banal religion' The concept

'banal religion' refers to the kind of religious expressions that the media will typically produce: implicit and unnoticeable representations that primarily constitute a backdrop. 'Banal religion' does not contain highly structured notions of metaphysical order or meaning of life: rather, it is a kind of religion that evokes cognitions, emotions or actions that imply the existence of supernatural agency. It is a kind of religion that mix elements from traditional folk religion, aspects of institutional religions, as well as elements taken from stories, ideologies and symbols not necessarily thought of as religious (Hjarvard 2011:128; cf. 2008:15).

While asserting that 'banal religion' is the kind of religion typically produced by the media, Hjarvard also notes that it is not synonymous with religion in the media or restricted to the realm of the media (2011:129-130). On the contrary, Hjarvard holds that the formats of banal religion in all due probability have a long history, since banal religious representations may be seen as part of the common human cognitive inventory.

The interesting fact is, however, that we still know far too little about the historical distribution of the religious formats that would fall into the category of 'banal religion.' Seeing religion as emotion-driven and intuitive, or studying the entertaining aspects of religion, has not constituted a typical research program for most religious scholars. Historical studies of such 'banal' forms of religion are particularly wanting. An obvious obstacle to studies of this sort is that the fast, online religion of everyday life, the unnoticeable religion, has not been manifested in writing and stone in the same way as doctrine and official points of view. They are simply not easy to study. Yet we do see traces of these forms of religion in several parts of the world: for instance, in magical texts and documents, in amulets, in graffiti, in paintings, on steles and in graveyards. 'Banal religious' expressions have probably inculcated religious institutions as well as folk religion – historical evidence at least suggests that they have done so. As our historical knowledge is still meager, however, it is methodologically problematic to assert either the historical change or continuity of so-called 'banal religion'.

Consequently, the focus of the mediatization of religion thesis on the institutional level of religion in the study of the Norwegian (and the Nordic) context runs into both empirical and methodological difficulties. Consequently, the further prediction of the thesis, suggesting that the process of mediatization of religion is intertwined with processes of secularization also needs to be discussed critically. Although Nordic countries can certainly be usefully described in the light of a secularization discourse, we cannot take for granted that the assumed weakening of religious institutions is *necessarily* synonymous with secularization. Change in the traditional forms of Protestantism is not necessarily synonymous with secularization, either. Such a conclusion runs the risk of mistaking change in religious practices for secularization and would disregard religious plurality. The development of religious forms that do not hold

attendance and belief in high regard but that accentuate for instance lifestyle, orthopraxy, belonging, or experience certainly represent change; but they are not necessarily indications of secularization. Processes described as secularization may thus not *only* be secularization, but may *also* be change of dominant social forms and processes in the cultural phenomenon we could call religion (cf. e.g., Meyer 2009).

‘Religion’ – again

How can we approach religion in contemporary Norwegian and Nordic societies in a way that will also engender fruitful rethinking of the conception of religion within the frame of the mediatization of religion thesis?

First and foremost we must acknowledge that, although the question ‘What is contemporary religion?’ is a theoretical one, the answer to this question always depends on empirical data (Staussberg 2009). We can never grasp contemporary religion directly, because religion does not exist ‘out there’ as an assumed blueprint of our analytical conceptions. Ongoing social and cultural practices do, however.¹⁷ The social and cultural practices we choose to grasp as empirical phenomena belonging to the category of religion are fruitfully explored as parts of an ongoing interaction between flexible analytical thinking and empirical research.

With that as a point of departure, contemporary religion is in my view best approached as an integral part of culture. I see religion as an aspect of human cognition, experience, activity, and discourse. Religion is not only a tradition received, but a continually created mode or aspect of life (Henriksen 2011). Religion is thus not only an integral part but a *dynamic* part of culture. Religion is obviously shaped and reshaped in the contemporary cultural context and also contributes to the reshaping of other culture. Hence, religion is an integral part and obviously converges with other social practices, affecting and being affected by the development and changes in that social practice – much more so than perspectives of modernity, for instance, have commonly allowed for.

Religious institutions exist, and so does the idea of religious traditions. Or to put it another way, religion is part of culture, and sometimes religion takes the form of religious institutions and is perceived as traditions. Yet ‘The Religions’ are not ‘religion’ *per se*. They represent ways of structuring and institutionalizing memories of past religious practices into coherent wholes, authorizing and making religious practices of the present meaningful by referring to the past. ‘Religion’, however, understood as ongoing social action and culturally defined practices of various formats, is not fully contained by ‘The Religions’. Thus, the categories ‘religion’ and ‘The Religions’ should not be conflated, nor is the concept ‘religion’ a conceptual mirror image of institutional religion.

Consequently, approaching religion as something other than or above/beyond culture is misleading. It is misleading to give primacy to doctrinal perspectives of religion, to belief as the key factor of religion, focus on religion as equivalent to coherent worldviews, or on institutionalized religion. This view only contributes to a 'beside culture-approach' to religious life which it is important to overcome.

An 'other' approach to religion

Hjarvard's ongoing elaboration on the mediatization of religion thesis (2008 to date) displays a certain tension in the descriptions of the relationship between 'banal religion' and other religion. On the one hand, 'banal religion' is presented as a fundamental and important kind of religion (2011:129). On the other hand, it is also seen as an antithesis to other religion, in the sense that banal religion is involved in the secularization of society (2011:133). It is my contention that the mediatization of religion thesis would benefit from presenting religion as a *continuum of religious formats*. Institutional religion is only *one* of the modes of religion in contemporary society, but this format intersects, overlaps, and is both in tension with and complementary to other formats, so-called banal religion being one of them. From this perspective, 'banal religion' would not stand out as the antithesis to other religions in the sense that it serves to secularize society. Rather, it could be studied as one form of religion, a form that would be treated as an equally interesting exponent of contemporary religious expressions. In other words, instead of being situated outside the confines of 'religion proper' banal religion should be allowed in. Consequently, secularizing discourses could be studied not as something inherently different from, but rather as parts of an ongoing contemporary discourse of and in religion (Beyer 2006).

The choice of references and nomenclature in Hjarvard's 2008 and 2011 articles shows that current cognitive approaches to religion have colored his way of thinking (cf. e.g., Grodal 2009). This has potential that could be developed further. Within the field of cognitive studies of religion, a persistent theoretical framework has been so-called dual processes theories. These theories certainly do not go unchallenged, and clearly have potential for further development, but they have been brought up several times during the last two decades, and belong to what Jeppe Sinding Jensen has referred to as "the standard cognitive science of religion" (2009).

This theoretical approach takes human cognition as its point of departure when describing religion as a cognitive and cultural phenomenon, suggesting that the diversity of religious forms is best understood on the basis of the *cognitive efforts* involved in processing them. *Intuitive* strategies of cognition produce spontaneous, associative relations, and emotionally colored thinking,

using innate information, analogical reasoning, personal experience, images, stereotypes, and associative relations. *Reflective* strategies, on the other hand, serve rational deliberation, analysis, and verification and lean on rules and conventions.

Ilkka Pyysiäinen describes the distribution of religious formats along a *continuum* of representations and ideas, one endpoint consisting of intuitive ideas, the other of reflective notions, and he also points out that empirically-found religion will always include aspects of both strategies. To a certain extent, though, intuitive strategies – being cognitively cheap – constitute the fast, online religion of everyday life, whereas the theological systems of the religious institutions are typically constituted by cognitively costly reflective strategies, leaning on institutional support. Importantly, both ends of the continuum and every point in between are equally important and constitutive parts of religion. One strategy is not given precedence over the other: the model does not describe a divide between orthodoxy and heresy, religion and non-religion, nor does it locate variance as difference between individuals, groups, or denominations. Hence, this approach is open to new insights into the ways in which religious formats are combined, and encourages a new evaluation of the range and scope of the analytical category of religion (Pyysiäinen 2004; 2008).

During the last couple of years, it has become more acceptable to add *aspects* of cognitive approaches to religion to theories that are otherwise dominated by cultural-turn or social science-perspectives (cf. Loumanen et al 2007). A blend like this could create new opportunities for exploring how media engage with religion in various modes of religiosity, it would describe media-induced change along a continuum of religious forms, and instead of giving preference to religious institutions when describing religion it would allow for a view of religion as a varied and broad cultural phenomenon that interacts with media in various ways. The major change it would introduce to the mediatization of religion thesis, though, would be a change of its predictive potential: instead of seeing secularizing tendencies, we would see changes of dominance of religious forms and practices in society – from a large number of institutional religious forms to a larger component of non-institutional, implicit and unnoticeable religious expressions, the form of religion Hjarvard refers to as ‘banal religion’.

Notes

1. For a thorough introduction to the mediatization of religion thesis, cf. the introductory chapter of the current volume.
2. Cf. Hjarvard 2008; 2011. For the reception of the theory, cf. *Culture and Religion* 2, 2011 and the present anthology.
3. The article also draws on my further work on religion and popular culture. Cf. Lied forthcoming 2012 and Lied forthcoming 2013.
4. Norway is not the only empirical focus of the book. Some chapters are exclusively ‘Norwegian’;

- others bring in Norway as one of several contexts. But, since popular culture is a national, 'global', and a 'glocal' phenomenon, a national perspective tends to go hand in hand with an international and/or transnational perspective.
5. Cf. Endsjø and Lied for an overview (2011: 20).
 6. Cf. Partridge 2004-2005, Lynch 2005, Hoover 2006, Morgan 2007, Clark 2007.
 7. Alver *et al* 1999, Aadnanes 2008; Romarheim 2010; Botvar and Schmidt 2010.
 8. The mediatization of religion-thesis is one out of three analytical approaches referred to in the introduction to the book (Cf. Endsjø & Lied 2011: 13-15), framing the empirical analysis.
 9. KIFO/TNS Gallup; 'Etter terroren deltok hver femte innbygger i Oslo og Askershus i kirkelige markeringer', *Vårt Land*, 23 January 2012.
 10. The Norwegian educational system has compulsory religious education in primary and secondary schools, the so-called *Religion, livssyn og etikk (RLE)*-subject. This Norwegian version of RE (at least supposedly) is denominationally neutral and academically inclined.
 11. Cf. e.g., Hoover 2009; Morgan 2011; Lynch 2011; Boutros 2011.
 12. The two concepts are used interchangeably, but are not necessarily synonymous. In addition, the use of the concept 'religious institution' is not all together clear. The concepts 'religious institution' (2011:128; 132) and 'religion as a *social* institution' [my emphasis] (2011:122; 124) sometimes slide into each other in the analysis and make the analysis difficult (Cf. Hjarvard 2011:132 on the 'Protestant church').
 13. It should also be mentioned that Hjarvard discusses much more than religious institutions and institutional religiosity. He recognizes a diversity of religious forms. He refers to folk religion, common religion and official religion, weak and strong religion, in addition to banal and institutionalized religion. He also acknowledges the complexity of secularizing and re-sacralizing tendencies in contemporary society (2008; 2011). Still, the main discursive key to the article is the tension in the relationship between institutionalized religions (or religious institutions) and mediatized religion. Hence, the argument, and the main contribution of the thesis, is the focus on the institution level. (Cf. Hjarvard 2008:11; 2011:120-121; 129-30).
 14. Gilhus & Mikaelsson 1998, Aadnanes 2008, Amundsen *et al* 2008, Romarheim 2011, Repstad 2010, Botvar and Schmidt 2010, Selberg 2011, Kraft 2011.
 15. Repstad 2008, Aadnanes 2008, Kraft 2011, Kaufmann 2011.
 16. The choice of the concept 'banal religion' has been widely debated. Hjarvard originally borrowed the concept 'banal' from Michael Billig's thesis of 'banal nationalism'. Billig applied it in the context of a study of nationalism and cultural identity. Hjarvard underscores that 'banal' refers to the unnoticeable, less structured, not institutionalized features of this kind of religion (2011:128). 'Banal' is not meant to indicate the lesser value of the phenomenon. Yet, to the reader and to those who apply the theory, everyday connotations commonly associated with being 'banal' readily spring to mind. Hence, the concept 'banal religion' may steal the attention and direct it away from the rest of the theoretical apparatus. If the common notion of 'banal' is not implicated, then the word 'banal' should maybe not be used.
 17. I realize, of course, that 'social and cultural practices' are language formations as well, just like 'religion', and not neutral referents to any given reality.

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This book presents new research on the changing relationship between the media, religion and culture from a Nordic perspective, while engaging with the theory of the mediatization of religion. In contemporary society, news journalism, film and television series, as well as new digital media, provide critical commentary on religion while also enabling new forms of religious imagery and interaction. Religious leaders, communities and individuals reflexively negotiate their presence within this new mediatized reality. In an increasingly globalized Nordic context, the media have also come to play an important role in the performance of both individual and social identities, and in the representation and development of social and religious conflicts. Through empirical analysis and theoretical discussions, scholars from film and media studies, the sociology of religion, and theology contribute to the development of the theory of the mediatization of religion as well as to the broader research field of media, religion and culture.

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