

Pandemic funerals in Norway

Hartmut Rosa's resonance as a sensitizing concept

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During the Covid-19 pandemic, funerals have been conducted consistently in Norway, but, of course, the ceremonies were subject to rules and regulations, while digitization was on the increase. Against the background of already ongoing discussions, both in contexts related to the Church of Norway and in practical-theological discourses, this article analyses scenes and excerpts from interviews conducted in 2021 and asks: What does the sociologist Hartmut Rosa's concept of resonance convey in the pandemic situation? – This concept aims at a mode of relating that empowers fulfilling, resonant relationships between subjects and between subject and world; the aim here is to bring it into play as a sensitizing concept, in a situation of supposedly increased distance and unaffectedness between people. The article discusses where the concept conveys the need for stable frameworks, and where it conveys the need for ongoing work with an ecclesiastical-theological self-understanding in the field of church funerals.

Introduction

In Norway, funerals were conducted throughout the Covid-19 pandemic, and from the outset, care had been taken to ensure that funerals and funeral facilities were guaranteed. On 12 March 2020, civic life in Norway was shut down; on 16 March, the Norwegian Directorate for Civil Protection presented a list of professions considered fundamental to maintaining socially critical functions. They also explicitly

mentioned pastors conducting funerals. The wording presupposes a conducting of ceremonies, but, of course, this does not mean that the ceremonies were not subject to specific guidelines, and this led to changes on several levels.

Shaking hands and hugging were prohibited, and at times there was an obligation to wear a mask. Congregational singing was restricted as well as meetings between the pastors and the relatives before the funerals. Not surprisingly, these restrictions were quickly subject to negative connotations, as being deviations from the correct implementation. On the other hand, the use of streaming, for example, could also be interpreted positively as a kind of technology boost.

These changes, only hinted at here, emphasize that death and burial should always be seen as part of a death in context (Stetter 2022: 353). At this point, it is important to note that the overarching Norwegian context was already changing before the Covid-19 pandemic: both on the part of the Church of Norway and on the part of theology, the field of funerals was undergoing change. In particular, challenges in a society understood as fundamentally individualistic were highlighted (e.g. Aagedal 1994; Sommer 2021; Norheim 2021).

The restrictions introduced by the Covid-19 pandemic have influenced the field. The question is whether this has led to further changes, which I will explore in what follows, using an empirical approach in the form of analyses of interviews with pastors in the Church of Norway and with employees at various funeral homes, which I conducted in April and May 2021.

I aim to understand parts of these interviews as cases, as ‘casuelle’ miniatures in the tradition of Friedrich D. E. Schleiermacher, and reconstruct them as starting points for an inductive-abductive lead understanding of the research question at hand (Roth 2021: 163–4, 176). The sociologist Hartmut Rosa’s concept of *resonance* then guides the further interpretation, explicitly understood as a sensitizing term (Kvale and Brinkmann 2021: 268–9). The concept aims at a mode of relating that empowers fulfilling, resonant relationships between subjects and between the subject and the world.

This concept, from a kind of opposing idea, promises to provide insightful observations in a situation of supposedly increased distance/unaffectedness between people. More precisely, this concept seems fruitful because it appears to be decidedly religiously connectable, pointing to comparable and overlapping constructions of the religious (Schleiermacher, Martin Buber), both in methodological and sociological respects (Rosa 2020a: 436–9). This article, then, seeks to pursue the question: What does the concept of resonance convey and how does it work as an analytical tool in analysing the ethnographic material that reflects church life, pastoral leadership, pastoral patterns of behaviour and approaches in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic in Norway?

Previous research

In order to answer this question, the Norwegian discussions will first be shown to be characterized by a focus on an assumed societal (modern) individualism, which is perceived and reproduced as a counter-image and needs to be both challenged and negotiated (by the pastors). In this way, church and society are seen in diametric positions, which, so is the assumption, can be illuminated anew by the concept of resonance.

In the 1990s Olaf Agedal conducted the project ‘Death in Norwegian’. Because death ‘is a topic that especially mobilizes our personal and cultural value-reactions’, it was the intention of the project ‘to observe what people in fact do, and why they do it’ (Agedal 1994: 10).¹ The reactions to the death of King Olav V in 1991, namely the lighting of candles in front of the royal palace, led to the question whether this could be ‘a reaction against the tendency towards privatization and professionalization of death – a desire to take a more active role in relation to death’ (pp. 16–17).

The desire to take a more active role, an increased focus on the person of the deceased, and the emphasis on the funeral as a service represented key arguments in the Church of Norway’s discussion when it came to shaping a new order for the funeral in 2002 (KR 35/02; KM 8/02).

Some years later, Bjarte Leer-Salvesen conducted his study of ‘how 51 priests preach hope’ (Leer-Salvesen 2011: 13). Leer-Salvesen reflects on both their memorial tributes and the homilies² in the light of

1 These and all other translations from Norwegian and German are mine. All emphasis in quotations is taken from the original.

2 Since 1981, the order for a funeral in the Church of Norway has included two orations, the first a memorial tribute, the second a homily (Leer-Salvesen 2011: 69).

Jürgen Moltmann's theology of hope, and he pursues the normative goal of enhanced practice (pp. 15–18, 31–6, 287). From the beginning, Leer-Salvesen places the pastors in an intermediate position. They must meet with diverse kinds of relatives while, at the same time, they are bound by the regulations of the order of the funeral (p. 12). In conclusion, he distinguishes between a kerygmatic speech, a therapeutic speech and a blessing speech (pp. 322–6); it is this blessing speech that 'has good preconditions for coming to terms with the priest's double area of responsibility' (p. 329).

Birgitte Lerheim analyses a seemingly recent phenomenon, grief online. She explores memorial sites on the internet, and she finds a duality in her material; 'the aestheticization ... is made possible both by means of technological solutions and through the discourses and knowledge-regimes linked to grief and grief-practices that are prevalent in the church and the health service' (Lerheim 2013: 83). It seems crucial to secure that both familiar/traditional *and* personal things are to be called upon. But 'there are fewer expectations that there is only one right way to live through grief and loss' (p. 83).

The most recent Norwegian research project, a qualitative study of four funerals, was conducted by Ingeborg Sommer in the western part of Oslo diocese. She begins her discussion by marking the apparent incongruity between the relatives' expectations, 'the funeral-ceremony "dressing" the deceased' (Sommer 2021: 26), and the order for the funeral with 'an almost one-sided emphasis on the religious content' (*ibid.*). But:

The tension ... never turned into an urgent problem for the relatives. The main reason for this was that the

priests felt more committed to their ministry to them than to the instructions of the church. ... both the relatives and priests experienced the liturgy as a proper framework. (Sommer 2021: 27)

Sommer weaves this into a socio-theoretical narrative of Late Modernity characterized by social individualism and authenticity (as described, for example, in the works of Anthony Giddens and Zygmunt Bauman). The pastor's task is to 'create a room where the Late Modern human being could rest in something outside herself/himself' (Sommer 2021: 31). For this to happen, 'the world as it is in the twenty-first century must also be visible to the church' (p. 32), but even 'though we in the church can as well understand the funeral primarily as a farewell in the moment of sorrow, the whole ritual is still held together by a framework: faith in Christ' (p. 32).

Sommer notes no tension in her material. Undoubtedly, this has to do with the loyalties of the pastors. And as the pastors, Sommer also avoids possible tensions. Because of her interpretation that Late Modernity requires stability, she interprets the relatives' farewell as an outer framework depending on an inner (and incontestable) framework. The challenges of Late Modernity are to be absorbed internally, in the church – and this becomes the task of the pastors.

Sommer's study was well received. It was timely as the Church of Norway has placed the issue of funerals high on the agenda. The inward movement is frequently followed. For instance, in a themed issue of the magazine *Luthersk Kirke-tidene* (Lutheran Church Gazette), Kjersti Gautestad Norheim assumes that 'it could nonetheless be that it is precisely in the

wishes and stories of the deceased that we can also find connecting points for the dissemination of the gospel' (Norheim 2021: 59). This does not prevent the thought that the relatives represent 'an increasing degree of demand for "personalization" ... and a corresponding decrease in the general proficiency and knowledge of hymns, liturgy, and church ceremonies' (Øgaard and Buder 2021: 70). The question is 'how we possibly guide the relatives ... beyond the completely individual perspective' (p. 71). Bishop Jan Otto Myrseth is even clearer. In the funeral 'the church emerges as a sacramental sign of the nearness of God' (Myrseth 2021: 73), the funeral 'comes to be a central part of the work building and developing the congregation' (p. 73).³

These studies show that there is an awareness of individual wishes and needs, and an effort to accommodate them. Still, the pastor is responsible for a socially sensitive re-integration into the church-defined ritual.

Hartmut Rosa's concept of resonance

The concept of resonance must now be explicated. First, the outlines of the concept are named, then questions about the possible religious grounding are addressed.

Rosa asks the fundamental question 'What is a good life?', and the answer he proposes is: a life in resonance. He develops resonance as a social-theoretical category; it is about 'a mode of *being-in-the-world*, that is a specific manner of *relating* between the subject and the world' (Rosa 2020a: 285). Following this underlining of relation/relationship, resonance is interpreted as characterized by 1. affection and emotion, 2. touch/being touched, and 3. (mutual)

3 Also Ida Marie Høeg has conducted research on funerals in contemporary Norway (see Høeg in this issue for references).

transformation. Resonance 'is not an echo-relationship but a response-relationship; it presupposes that both sides speak with their own voices' (p. 298); it therefore 4. 'implies a moment of constitutive unavailability' (*ibid.*).

While the concept aims at a being in the world, which allows one 'to feel *carried* or even *held* in a responding, accommodating world' (Rosa 2020a: 59), the opposite concept to resonance is alienation, 'a mode of relating to the world ... in which the (subjective, objective, and/or social) world seems to be unconcerned to the subject (*indifference*) or even hostile towards it (*repulsion*)' (p. 306).

To take one step back: for Rosa, resonance is a 'basic human need and ability' (Rosa 2020a: 293); as such resonance is both a descriptive and a normative concept. Descriptively, intersubjectivity is based on resonance relations and humans are existentially shaped by resonance desire. In normative terms, resonance becomes the 'measure of a fulfilling life' (p. 294). This correlates with religion, for religion promises 'that the primordial and fundamental form of existence is a resonance relation' (p. 435). Moreover, exactly with the background in the concept of the rite, Rosa distinguishes 'socioculturally established resonance axes along which *vertical* ..., *horizontal* ..., and *diagonal* ... resonance relations can be experienced' (p. 297).

In this sense, resonance is an experience of being held, a fundamental longing and potential; it is a concept that contrasts well-known secularization theses (decline, withdrawal, privatization of [especially formalized] religion, dwindling influence of the churches) (Friedrichs 2018: 375). Furthermore, it shows itself, especially through the explanations of the vertical axes of resonance, to be connectable to prominent concepts of religion, such as

Schleiermacher's religious experience 'as an *affiliating* world-relationship' (Rosa 2020a: 438) or Buber's '*relatedness*' (p. 439). It is no longer about a 'critique of religion, but ... [about] a critique of religion-lessness' (Laube 2018: 358), which refers to the 'personal-communicative semantics of hearing and answering' (p. 359) and can be associated with a 'reformed version of the relationship to God' (p. 360). The foundation of religion is, in this way, decidedly anthropological and not sacramental (p. 369; Žalec 2021).⁴

With these relational aspects, the question of recognition (as coined by the philosopher Axel Honneth) becomes virulent, but goes beyond it. Resonance is about the 'in-between'; it is 'about what happens with recognition' (Friedrichs 2018: 375): '*I'm recognized*, but resonance solely occurs *between us*. ... Therefore, unlike recognition, resonance does not require an intermediary third party (such as shared norms and values)' (Rosa 2020a: 334). Resonance is dynamic; it cannot be fought for. Simultaneously, because of its uncontrollability, it involves risk-taking: 'increasing one's search for resonance might even increase the risk of it never occurring' (Christoffersen and Gregersen 2019: 25). The search and the quest for resonance can become encroaching, and 'the search for positive religious resonance entails the risk of looking for divine purpose in the world at the expense of a realistic appraisal of life's absurdities' (p. 29). One critical factor Rosa himself mentions is digitalization:

4 Furthermore, the moment of uncontrollability, the idea of God as both uncontrollable/indisposable and responsive, marks the connections between theology and the concept of resonance (Rosa 2020b: 67).

Resonant relationships tend to be rare in digital communication, according to my observations. In two lines on Twitter, it is challenging to make one's own voice audible and to get the reaction of another voice that really touches us personally ... the resonance relationship therefore fails from two sides. (Rosa 2017: 24)

Rosa elaborates on this, making observations about the impossible eye contact through the screen and about the always similar surface of the touch screen, and modifies some aspects in the first months of the Covid-19 pandemic without leaving his critical points mentioned here (Rosa 2017: 25; Rosa 2020d).

What remains crucial is that resonance aims at 'the encounter with an uncontrollable differential, with an Other to whom we relate in such a way that we transform ourselves in the encounter' (Rosa 2017: 25); 'the experience of a speaking-other' becomes the 'root-cause of sociality, self and the world' (Laube 2018: 360). As a result, to be able to experience resonance at all, *the other as the other* is demanded.

Material and methods

The material for the present research project consists of ten interviews with pastors in the Church of Norway and three interviews with employees at various funeral homes.⁵ I carried out these interviews between the end of April and the end of May 2021. The pastors belong to nine different parishes in three dioceses. I tried to address various

5 The project, as part of a broader project on the Covid-19 pandemic at the KIFO Institute for Church, Religion, and Worldview Research in Norway, was evaluated and approved by Sikt – Norwegian Agency for Shared Services in Education and Research. All names used in this text are pseudonyms.

aspects (eastern and western parts of Oslo, as well as more rural areas and areas with varied types of piety and church ideals). For the employees of the funeral homes, I combined one funeral home in a rural area and two funeral homes in bigger towns, one family-run business and one office, which is part of a chain. For all interviews, I have used an interview-guide. These interviews, except one, were conducted face to face, recorded and transcribed.⁶ In addition, I kept a field diary for observations, thoughts, ideas and first reflections.

There are some specific limitations, of course. The project focuses on funerals in the Church of Norway only, and in the pandemic situation, I could not travel far. Therefore, I was limited to three quite similarly profiled dioceses. I contacted pastors, on the basis both of my experience and my knowledge of the dioceses, but I also asked two deans for help to get in touch with people. Obviously, they were not only door-openers, but also gate-keepers. I have no information about the criteria the deans used to invite colleagues for their contribution, how and in what way the project was communicated in the deanery. Based on my encounters, I would claim both carried forward the concerns I had articulated to them. I wanted to interview as diverse a group of colleagues as possible. And, lastly, the reception level is not addressed directly in this study, I have not spoken to people who *de facto* attended a funeral, who experienced a bereavement.

In what follows, I draw on scenes from these interviews. Consideration is given to five of the interviews of particular relevance for the current theme, carried out

with the pastors, spread over the west and east of Oslo and rural areas in the other two dioceses. I also consider an additional scene in the discussion, which seems important to me in relation to the theme of resonance. This is from the interview with a funeral home representative, the funeral home being in a city that belongs to a chain.

In the tradition after Schleiermacher, these scenes are to be understood as ‘casuelle’ miniatures, as varieties of ‘moments grounded in the life-context of the community, in its “locality”’ (Roth 2021: 164). Kristian Fechtner has elaborated on the meaning of locality; in today’s situation it is no longer solely about an ecclesial understanding, but about ‘a profound understanding of religious practice’ (p. 168). Ursula Roth both takes up Fechtner’s work and goes further. Research happens ‘in the mode of “exploration”, it is “intentional and guided perception of what is”’ (p. 169). If this is to succeed, the ‘situational, the casuelle ... is obviously not only indispensable in analysis and reconstruction but must not be missed ... in representation either’ (p. 170). Specifically, according to Roth, the reference to understanding remains a guiding principle, so in what follows it cannot be a matter of selecting scenes as ‘evidential-examples’; rather it is a matter of ‘starting-examples’ (p. 176): ‘Working with the starting-example therefore corresponds to the inductively oriented profile of a casuelle theory-formation but is certainly not taken from the hermeneutic circle. Part and whole, particular and general, can thus be thought only in reciprocal presupposition’ (p. 176).

So, if the analysis of these starting examples is to bring to light church life, pastoral leadership and pastoral patterns of behaviour and approaches, and if the focus is on understanding these patterns and approaches, this requires both a reflection

6 Owing to the Covid-19 pandemic situation, one interview with an employee at a funeral home was conducted by phone and not recorded.

on one's own role and on its influence on the interpretations and 'prior knowledge of the general whole' (Roth 2021: 175–6). Therefore, it has to be noted that I have talked to the interviewees as a researcher *and* as a pastor. I have inevitably brought my own experiences into the conversations with both colleagues and employees at funeral homes. Overall, that provided me with credibility. Generally, I assume that it was a factor that moved the talks towards openness. I was not simply the researcher standing above things. We shared the experience of concrete practice. In several of the interview presentations, I have marked sympathies and reservations to keep the research process as transparent as possible. In this way, it can become clear at which points I have reflected both sympathies and reservations in my understanding before I have drawn conclusions.

Methodologically, the analysis will follow an inductive-abductive approach. Thus, the inductive intent is concerned with 'identifying patterns and formulating possible explanations' (Kvale and Brinkmann 2021: 224). At the same time, 'in the unpredictable human world' it is crucial to combine the inductive effort with a more dynamic abductive approach, which allows for 'more ad hoc techniques' (p. 225). The guiding principle here is the greatest possible openness and the interplay between the empirical and the theory. So, the empirical material is approached by using the concept of resonance as an analytical lens. At the same time, the material also sheds its light on the concept itself. The idea is to present a situation, a scene, and thereby 'bracket one's own terms' (p. 268). In doing so, the concept of resonance is brought into play as a sensitizing concept (p. 246, 268–9; Dinter *et al.* 2007), not 'tied to a more specific vocabulary' (Kvale and Brinkmann 2021: 269).

Interview section

In the following, I present excerpts and scenes from the five interviews selected for this article. To prepare and structure the later discussion I will not follow the order in which the interviews were actually conducted.

Harald

When I park the car, I spot Harald. He is on the phone, just nodding. Together, we enter the building. Harald is talking to a bride, planning and arranging. It seems to me that he had confirmed her. From this, I get an immediate first impression of Harald, a little over sixty years old, a kind-hearted type, a pastor in the countryside. In his office, I am surprised by the selection of books on his desk, a *Biblia Hebraica*, a *Novum Testamentum Graece*, and next to it a book of devotions given on the radio. The conversation gets going. Harald has been working in the churches of the region for over twenty years. He describes ordinary life as a pastor in the countryside, in a township that was dominated by agriculture, but is today part of the broader area around Oslo. The village structures exist alongside the newly established structures. I recognize my own experiences as a pastor. Harald is quick to emphasize his theological profile, conservative and influenced by a Swedish Pietist lay movement. So, we differ in our theological profile, but share a preference for being pastors in the countryside, and an interest – as becomes apparent in the course of conversation – in theology. If our age difference – Harald is about fifteen years older than me – marked the conversation, it also becomes clear that we respect each other.

Harald is interested in theological interpretations and arguments from the very beginning and explicates his practice through them. Early on, he speaks of not

approving of the song 'Imagine' by John Lennon as a solo in a funeral: 'in terms of lyrics' and 'in a worship context, I think this [song] has no place'; he gains a hearing for it with the family. He also reflects on the memorial tribute. He is explicit that he begins the conversation with the relatives by emphasizing that 'it's your funeral, if you thought or felt like contributing something, that's perfectly fine'. And 'usually, we end up at a reasonable stage, at what is recommended in the liturgy, that it be somewhat limited'. At the same instant, he asks himself whether 'such a large memorial tribute is at the expense of other [things] ... will the dissemination of the gospel just [be] a small [part]?'

These valuations do not shift during the Covid-19 pandemic, and Harald elaborates on this explicitly:

I've probably talked quite a lot about [the pandemic] in these conversations [with the relatives] ... but then ... I don't know whether I have preached something particularly different; the pandemic is serious ... but death is significantly worse, [death] ... is the big problem here, now we have lost someone ... whether it was a heart attack or the pandemic, well, it is not the same, but, well, death is the worst ... so, I don't know if the pandemic has affected the funeral act and its content to such a great extent ... it's not God giving us this ... the Bible doesn't give us an answer to the problem of suffering, but tells us about a God who suffers with us ... and therefore, in a funeral we of course preach love, but not just as well-intended care for the mind ... but as the greatest basic force in existence who will win ... that's resurrection about ... that's we want to

convey to the grieving congregation, so there's no easy fix.

In a concentrated way, Harald covers various theological loci, the power of death, theodicy, love and resurrection, a programme and preaching that also work in the pandemic's situation. And so, he finds other pragmatic solutions, for example, of greeting with the hand on the heart, that work for him. And this when he can also note that 'I don't know if it really matters, but I feel I would have liked to shake hands or given someone a hug ... been closer to [them]' and he is convinced that the handshake will return: 'Yes, I think so, I'll do it, anyway.'

Camilla

To meet Camilla, I travel by train to the western part of Oslo. The average income is highest in the parts of Oslo where Camilla works, and the population is well educated, while being relatively homogeneous in terms of ethnicity, with a relatively high percentage of the population belonging to the Church of Norway. Camilla is about thirty years old; she is very much at home in her part of Oslo, while I come from the other part of the town. This influences my perception. When meeting her I realize at once that I have to listen carefully. I need to reflect on the other context to understand her arguments and patterns of behaviour. So, it is more usual at her place that 'the ceremonies both take more time than other places ... and there are often more elements, both music and more people engaging as part of the memorial tribute'. As I understood Camilla, she has to deal with relatives who are accustomed and able to engage in others' services. So, the framework of the liturgy seems significant to her. This is evident in the situation of the pandemic, as the ritual expands:

What we may have experienced a bit differently in the coronavirus period is that there are even more who want to say something ... because there is no memorial coffee afterwards ... so we have tried to have a certain, yes, some framework around it then.

Camilla has faced quite a lot of streaming. She has experienced 'someone ... popping up on a screen, sharing some kind of memory', but that was the exception. More common was streaming:

If there were so many who would have liked to come and even if the streaming doesn't quite make up for it, it's still something that they could watch the ceremony online ... I have to approve it ... yes, but I'm wondering if I haven't been asked a few times ... and you can't say no, can you, even if you don't feel like it, you know that's the way it is ... I think it's okay, but there are some days where you think, I don't want to be filmed ... relatives have asked me to say hello specifically to those who follow online, I think it might be a bit unnatural, I do it anyway, but otherwise I have done nothing else around it.

Streaming is not a full compensation, but it is an opportunity. And Camilla isn't actively looking for a way around it. She is doing as she is asked, but no more. I understand her as securing a predictable framework, which she returns to again at the end of the interview:

Not being able to shake hands I think is very strange ... there's something about that action ... and, in a way, to open and to close what's happening ... that has to do with the names, often

when you shake hands you introduce yourself by name or they say their name, this is getting a little more mechanical right now.

Opening and closing is her responsibility, and the people need to or ought to hear their names spoken.

Anette

Anette works in a regional centre in a rural area. She is a little over thirty years old and we share the experience of joint confirmation camps. This was years ago, but we know and appreciate each other. That characterizes the conversation; I listen to a self-confident young pastor, who shows that she thinks independently and innovatively, and acts strategically towards her parish. This is not to hide the fact of differences, for example, regarding the organization of daily life as a local pastor. Anette belongs to a different generation, where separation of work and free time is to the fore; I know that this is favoured in her deanery's office, so I ask about this in the first part of the interview: how are the conversations with the relatives planned, who determines the date and time? And, as expected, this all follows a strict scheme, and seems very technical and very organized to me.

I want to bring out two passages from the interview that deal with Anette's experiences with digitization, her experiences with digital conversations with relatives, and her experience with a streamed funeral she attended herself. I cite these passages.

Anette has experiences with conversations on the phone, but also with conversations on the screen (e.g., Messenger, GoogleMeet). She reports on these:

There are a lot of things that make it demanding ... we lost ... our meeting room here in the office, here I can

assume a role of host ... that role of being host is terribly undefined in a telephone conversation ... you lose the relational you get between people who meet physically ... all the interpretation that is done without words, it disappears, and the conversation gets a big handicap, it is a different genre ... it has done what it was supposed to do in a certain sense, but having to meet people in church on the day of the funeral without having seen them before ... as I said, it becomes a different conversation ... [it] is just to a small extent about how they feel, those who are sitting opposite me ... when we don't sit down calmly and I can't take the lead ... and at the other end there's a cat that's thrown up, some neighbours ringing the bell ... it's so incredibly difficult to stay focused.

Obviously, Anette assumes that digitization makes possibilities of resonance impossible. The relational is at stake; it limits her possibilities to lead. Yet, I find another observation interesting, which Anette does not explicate further, but which reappears elsewhere, where she tells of attending a streamed funeral. The conversation is a different genre; it is a different conversation:

But I have had the benefit of watching a funeral ... I was sitting in the office doing other things that day ... I watch it and catch myself thinking it's very nice to have looked in, in a way, but I didn't feel in any way that I was present ... if this opportunity had not arisen, I would have thought, now N. N. is being buried, blessed be the memory, then I would have gone about my work ... [it's like] expecting

people to get a holy feeling when they look at a picture of Nidaros Cathedral ... but it is not the same as entering Nidaros Cathedral.

Again, it is the same point she makes. What appears is something different; like the conversation, attendance and presence are different.

Nina

Nina is about forty-five years old. She has a varied background, which has afforded professional resources that she uses deliberately. Nina has been ordained for about two years; she has no experiences from before the Covid-19 pandemic. Being new gives her the chance of a fresh look, which challenged me, as being more experienced, and which is, nevertheless, characterized by fascination for her community. 'Traditional culture' characterizes her district; 'the church is part of society'; there is a lively 'cultural history'.

As Nina explains, she takes initiatives on topics, and it is she who addresses the topic of digitization: 'my colleagues were among the very first to publish digital material ... the digital, the technical, the cultural, and for me this is all part of the local milieu'. It is this connection with the local that she seeks, even in times of the Covid-19 pandemic, 'I introduced the idea of today's service, so, I walk in the streets ... then I meet people, and suddenly, on the pavement, we talk'.

The pandemic opens the door to discover new opportunities:

I believe that the church finally has adopted what it must adopt in order to preach, you cannot leave a digital platform without utilizing it ... what coronavirus has contributed is that here and now, in the present, we see

that the church always reaches out with preaching; after all, we don't live in a safe environment – we live in insecurity ... see, you have a space between the screen and the person watching, but the preaching also happens there ... and the church has finally taken ownership of this here.

In uncertainty, she relies on the digital. Nina moves to the street, seeks contact – and contact and ownership are equally important keywords when she describes her work with funerals.

Meeting the relatives, it is important for Nina that 'people should be allowed to speak as openly as possible ... without me controlling too much ... I'm not hung up on the biographical stuff at all'. At the same time, she introduces the order for the funeral, but she maintains the same goal, 'I go through all this, so they can see it is possible for them to make it their own':

After the conversation with the family ... I write the memorial tribute ... then I deliver it to the family ... and say to them: read it, edit it ... because it's all about the family ... that's what they desire, they want to draw a picture of the deceased, it should be in the spirit of the deceased.

The pandemic presents new opportunities, but at the same time also surprises and challenges Nina:

That you may not shake hands or hug, I think it hurts, but there I was surprised because that's not what the mourners state, they say that it is really nice that it is a pandemic, because then they avoid all the hugging and all the handshaking ... they think it's much better to put your hand on your

heart; they think it's nice ... they are in mourning, and it becomes too hard to take everything in ... and as a priest I am the one who sets the limit, right.

Nina is seriously surprised, but remains true to the focus on family, which may find other forms of expression more important or appropriate, and perhaps, in restriction, even experience them as more resonant.

Kristin

For many years, Kristin has been working in a congregation in an Oslo suburb. The area is multi-faith and multi-cultural, and marked by socio-economic challenges. She lives in the area and, she relates, is well connected. In many ways, she describes a setting familiar to me; you can tell from the conversation that we seem to share a similar reflection on our pastoral practice. This is important for me to emphasize because the interview with Kristin has become significant for me. This is not about recognition in sympathy. Kristin's way of seeing and perceiving, of stressing professional interaction with the people involved, including her surprising mention of the keyword of ritualization, has helped me to reflect on and focus my perception.

I pick out two topics from the interview, the first about her experiences with conversations with relatives on the phone and on the screen, and the second about how these experiences, via an intermediate step of streaming, are explicated in terms of designing and conducting a funeral. I also understand these two themes in terms of one of Kristin's initial comments, 'so, I think in a way the pandemic has created space to be more creative, to be more generous towards each other'.

In the first place Kristin is eager to stress that she has met with people. She went to the relative's places; 'very few would take

it on screen or phone.’ That sometimes outweighs the infection-control rules, ‘because we work in an area where ... many ... struggle with psychiatry’. At the same time, the local community demands a different praxis; ‘I had conversations with relatives across national borders ... I experienced ... an openness, a vulnerability ... you have, like, little filter on the phone’. Digital conversations were also more fulfilling than expected:

It challenged me ... how close you can get, and what open questions you can ask ... when you are not sitting [together] and can intuitively capture the information that you gain face to face ... it has given me a little more courage ... because you have a bit of that filter, with that screen ... maybe we have come closer, that it has given a deeper nerve.

This is remarkable: the phone call ensures openness because of no filter; the conversation via screen ensures openness because of the filter. The other, the digital, is just not self-evident.

And another aspect has been important to Kristin. The technical solutions are important as well as egalitarian devices, Kristin maybe ‘thought that more people would switch to streaming’, but she ‘realized that it was a question of prices ... [but] everyone should get the same opportunity, [and] everyone has a smartphone ... there is a lot we can do for free’.

Again and again, Kristin returns to these starting points in her community and reflects on her practice from there:

One thing I changed, in relation to my practice, I don’t know how much we shall talk about it ... but I also thought it was extra-important to spend plenty

of time in the ceremony ... yes, spend extra time on the memorial tribute and hear if there was anyone else who wanted to say something, because when you couldn’t say anything at the memorial coffee, some would like to take this to church ... [so, I] thought it was super-important, what happened in this ceremony ... and I probably pushed a little extra too ... that they themselves should get to participate in the ritualization ... [for me] to facilitate the ritualization, if they wanted ... and especially where there are many traditions of saying goodbye ... different religions ... relatives from different backgrounds.

She mentions drawings or flowers that are laid down and candles that are lit, and she notes these aspects are not new, and yet she is the one who uses the word ritualization, which she mentions twice: it is her word, and she does not treat it lightly, ‘some also said no ... it was important to present it in such an open way that it wasn’t perceived as pressure’.

Discussion

The concept of resonance conveys, in the times of the Covid-19 pandemic, the importance of stable frameworks. Within these frames, attention is drawn to phenomena that can be interpreted and experienced as resonance experiences. This becomes explicit in the worship character of the funeral service, which provides security, and in the delimited, defined form of the memorial tribute, stressed by Harald and Camilla. In this framework, participants gain security from a self-experienced confidence in their own roles (considering choice of music, sermon concept, opening and closing, openings towards the digital). And this security leads

them to acts of recognition and maybe even resonance.

To recall some aspects: Harald's preaching could be described in terms of (vertical) resonance. God is a compassionate and loving God. Still, this does not become an easy fix. The moment of the unavailable resonates, embedded in known modes of action that offer security. Camilla addresses the social context of her community, which shapes both the funerals and her actions. In the situation of the pandemic, digitization is merely conditional compensation. At the same time, streaming marks Camilla's way of leaving her comfort zone. It is her mode of taking a risk, of expanding the framework that offers her possibilities of recognition, of resonance, by greeting those following online, in the speaking of the names, and in the handshake's familiarity, the latter also recognized and appreciated by Harald.

Anette takes up the very idea of having a role and responsibility, and, in line with the familiarity of the handshake, she emphasizes the contact between bodies, in Rosa's words to touch and being touched (Rosa 2020a: 298). She draws attention to potential threats in the pandemic situation. For her, it is the well-rehearsed form of conversation, the relational reciprocity, paying attention to others which enable experiences of resonance. The digital form of conversation remains a picture, an image, following Rosa (Rosa 2017; Rosa 2020d).⁷

In these respects, the view of the pandemic situation through the concept

7 It cannot, of course, be answered, but perhaps it would be interesting to ask whether Anette, who herself speaks of the conversation as 'other than', is not too attached to the idea of the conversation as 'less than', thereby avoiding resonances because she is trying too hard to achieve resonance (Christoffersen and Gregersen 2019: 25).

of resonance gives support to previous research: it is about negotiating expectations, resting in what is different (Sommer 2021: 26, 31), looking for possibilities of connection but relying on the individual (Norheim 2021: 59; Øgaard and Buder 2021: 71), the preaching emphasizing that 'Jesus dies *in solidarity with the mourners*' (Leer-Salvesen 2011: 327). And, as seen, the criticism of digitization that Rosa had expressed is also confirmed (Rosa 2017: 24–5; Rosa 2020d).

In the times of the Covid-19 pandemic, the concept of resonance conveys how something more fundamental is touched and questioned. This happens, for example, where new (digital and resonant) forms of communication, (self-)interpretation, professional action, and encounters emerge. And where handed-down forms of expression are no longer evaluated in a clear and unambiguously positive way and need to be reinvented.

For Nina, something new is happening; the church is changing. But this change cannot be thought of without (the ecclesiastical) traditions. If this is to succeed, close observation is required, and control must be relinquished, because it is about the family. And then it becomes clear, in the situation of the pandemic, that values shift (or have already shifted). In terms of resonance, established practices, such as the handshake, are not and cannot be defined unambiguously. In this situation, to be in touch with the community, with the local, to be affected, to be challenged, to (be) transform(ed) are decisive prerequisites; what is to happen must correlate with the people. I also found this criterion in Kristin's accounts. It is about opening self-interpretations, about seeing that things differ from the expected; conversations on the phone and on the screen are different, but still able to surprise.

Nina's and Kristin's observations on the digital clarify how Rosa's definitions and scepticism may be challenged; there are traces of digital resonance. Carl, who has worked in a funeral home for over thirty years, supports this. He explains:

We hoisted ourselves around ... got [streaming] equipment ... and it's pretty nice ... we hear people put on ties and nice clothes and meet in front of a PC or TV and attend the ceremony, rise when the priest tells us to rise.

Being sensitized to resonance, what remains decisive is the encounter, and for Kristin this is her responsibility, including reinventing familiar forms of expression; she has to include and to give the opportunity for participation, for empowering, always reflecting diversity, reflecting a ritualization that is receptive to vibrations based in the local milieu, oscillating between the local people.

Kristin confirms that resonance involves risk, 'risk involves one's personal engagement, much like resonance experiences' (Christoffersen and Gregersen 2019: 27); it is to be emphasized that there is not just one (defined) way of doing things and several kinds of inspiration can merge (Lerheim 2013: 83). The latter is important, especially in a new social situation. The resonance concept also draws attention to this. In terms of Kristin, when context-dependent factors, including religious ones, show up, when there is no longer the well-known ritual, or a set of shared norms or values, extension and common ritualization are needed, and the (transforming) other is needed.

Concluding remark

The aim of this article has been to answer the question: what does the concept of resonance convey and how does it work as a tool to analyse ethnographic material that reflects church life, pastoral leadership, pastoral patterns of behaviour and approaches in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic in Norway?

The intention was not to contrast two supposedly opposed sides in this analysis. Rather, grounded in the idea of presenting 'casuelle' miniatures and 'starting examples', the analysis has shown that in the situation of the pandemic, phenomena flash up, new answers are sought and found, and known and proven things are re-weighed. In this sense, the concept of resonance conveys that, in the times of the Covid-19 pandemic, we face a *birfurcation point*; we face a qualitative change of state, an opportunity to stop and to reflect once more (Rosa 2020c: 203). In this situation, I pass the role that Rosa ascribes to sociology to theology instead, which 'should not see itself as an agency of *authoritative* knowledge, but rather as an institution of social *self-interpretation*' (p. 205). In the sense of a 'double hermeneutics', theology 'should reinterpret a social self-interpretation that has become institutional reality using the conceptual means of the social [and theological] sciences' (p. 206).

The concept of resonance may convey how ecclesiastical-theological self-understanding, which is described by a secularized, religionless, individualized image of society, is precisely one of self-understanding, apparently interpreted as authoritative, but it is not the only possible self-understanding. As observed in the empirical material, this discovery need not merely confound; it releases creativity and reminds us of the nature of the church as *semper reformanda*, with the intention of

assessing church life, pastoral leadership, and pastoral patterns of behaviour and approaches. Therefore, this article ends not with a fixed conclusion, but rather with the idea of pursuing some of the hints found in this study. Is the (assumed) normal returning, is the field fanning out further, how and in which terms and concepts is ecclesiastical-theological self-understanding expressed *in praxi*? ■

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