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SPECIAL ISSUE:
RELIGION IN NORDIC NEWSPAPERS

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Studying Religion in Nordic Newspapers: An Introduction

TEEMU TAIRA

University of Helsinki

Abstract

This article introduces the topic of this special issue: religion in Nordic newspapers. It provides a general framework for the following four articles based on a longitudinal study of religion in Danish, Finnish, Norwegian, and Swedish newspapers by clarifying what characterizes selected 'Nordic' countries, their media spheres, and their religious landscapes. Furthermore, this article suggests that despite significant changes in the media sphere, including factual media production and consumption, there are good reasons to study religion-related media content produced by the dominant and conventional media outlets, including newspapers. However, this should not be done by isolating newspapers from society and the rest of the media. This introduction and the following articles therefore propose that the selected key concepts and debates among sociologists of religion are particularly useful in thinking about religion-related newspaper content.

Keywords: media, religion, Nordic, press, newspapers, mediatization, secularization, diversity, Christianity, Islam, digitalization

In recent decades sociologists of religion have debated whether modern societies are secularizing (Bruce 2002; 2011; Norris and Inglehart 2004; Pollock and Rosta 2017; Voas 2008; Voas and Chaves 2016; Voas and Crockett 2005; Voas and Doebler 2011), encountering return, resurgence, or increased visibility of religion (Berger 1999; Butler et al. 2011; Casanova 1994; Herbert 2011; Hjelm 2015; Kepel 1994; Micklethwait and Wooldridge 2009; Ward and Hoelzl 2008), moving towards new forms of religion beyond national churches (Hunt 2005; Lyon 2000), transforming religion into a provider of welfare services (Bäckström et al. 2010; 2011), or facing religious diversity (Martikainen 2013; Stringer 2013; Weller 2008). In some cases the role of the media has not been theorized (or even mentioned) as part of these developments, but it has become increasingly obvious that there is a need to consider how religion-related media discourses and portrayals and the almost ubiquitous media outlets are entangled with social changes in their

capacity to direct and reflect the public presence and boundaries of the groups and practices conventionally named 'religious'.

The aim of this special issue is to study the longitudinal changes and continuities in how religion and religious issues have been represented and discussed in the daily press of four Nordic countries in recent decades. The key starting point is that Nordic societies have witnessed a slight decline in religious 'practical monopolies' (Davie 2015) and increased diversity – both as an empirical fact and discursive framework. These developments have changed the conditions of the religion-related content in newspapers, and the discourses concerning how religion and its role in society is debated and negotiated in them. At the same time the Nordic countries have witnessed significant changes in the overall media sphere and in the capacity of media outlets to influence religious institutions (Hjarvard 2013; Hjarvard and Lövheim 2012; Lövheim and Lynch 2011). Thus, while the media reacts to and reflects social changes, media outlets themselves contribute to the changing conditions of religiosity in contemporary societies, as will be argued in this issue. The rise of new and digital media also has implications for religion and its change in general, and for the coverage of religion in the mainstream media in particular, but what they are remains open to empirical scrutiny. Although the Nordic countries will be the empirical focus of this issue, the articles aim to contribute to a more general theoretical understanding of the present articulations of religion, the media (especially newspapers), and society, and exploring how longitudinal newspaper religion-related material can be fruitfully studied.

How content and discourses have changed in Nordic newspapers and how they can be understood as part of more general changes in the media, religion, and society are the key questions this issue is designed to answer. While focusing on changes, it must be remembered that we cannot talk about the total decline of the 'practical monopolies' of the Nordic churches (or total deregulation and decline of the Nordic public broadcasting system); the point is rather to acknowledge that the dominant Lutheran churches have had to react to new challenges posed by migration, globalization, secularization, and the development of diversity in media environments and society more generally.

What characterizes the Nordic countries?

The 'Nordic countries' is a classification which puts Denmark, Finland, Norway, Sweden, and Iceland in the same basket. This issue focuses on four of them (omitting Iceland) and assumes that it is reasonable and fruitful

to study them together. However, the 'Nordic countries' do not constitute a homogeneous unit. This issue therefore pays careful attention to differences between each country. Nevertheless, the Nordic countries share many religious and media-related features. These will be highlighted later in this introduction, and they will also become obvious in reading this issue's country-based articles.

'Nordic' is a term that emphasizes the different countries' features. It therefore tends to bypass the differences between them. In international comparative studies especially, it is typically Denmark or Sweden that represents the rest. This issue assumes that it is relevant to compare and contrast selected countries, and at the same time consider what they have in common. All five Nordic countries have a welfare state. The model emerged properly in the 1980s, combining an efficient market economy with a social safety net, a stable labour market, a high level of social cohesion, a strong emphasis on equality, and relatively moderate gender differences (Syvertsen et al. 2014, 5). There has been a shift from the social democratic welfare state in the era of the market (Syvertsen et al. 2014, 8), but the welfare state and welfare society have been defended strongly in both public discourse and practice compared with many other countries. In three – Denmark, Norway, and Sweden – the languages are sufficiently similar for people to understand each other. Icelandic is a little different, and Finnish belongs not to the Indo-European but the Finno-Ugric language family. Nevertheless, the Nordic countries have been seen as culturally, politically, and economically similar but not homogeneous. Their active cooperation has fostered the image of the Nordic countries as a unit.

Religion¹ in the Nordic countries

Traditionally, the four Nordic countries explored here have maintained a relatively homogeneous self-image. This has included the idea that despite the freedom of religion, there is a single dominant religious institution with strong support from the state, and everything else is seen more or less as a deviation from the norm. All the Nordic countries have had a strong

1 This issue understands religion as a discursive formation whose boundaries change historically. In analysing newspapers it focuses on groups and practices that are conventionally understood as 'religious' – including boundary cases such as spirituality, psychic powers, and fortune-telling techniques if relevant in the data – in the Nordic societies, but it also explores some of the discourses in which the boundaries of what should be classified as 'religious' are publicly negotiated if they are present in the data.

protestant (Lutheran) tradition and national churches, with varying but close links with the state. The churches act as public utilities, caring for cemeteries and contributing to social work. Their pastors are educated at tax-funded public universities and have a presence in publicly funded institutions. There are army, healthcare, and prison chaplains. Schools provide religious education, which has traditionally entailed a confessional education in the dominant tradition, but its content and level of 'confessionality' differ in each country. Despite this, the Nordic countries are in many ways known as 'secular societies' in which living without religious beliefs, identity, and affiliation is not a social stigma. The details vary to some extent between Nordic countries, but in international comparison they score highly on the secular end of the scale with traditionally strong national churches (Taira, Rimmel, and Jansson forthcoming; Zuckerman 2007).

If the various parameters of religiosity in the Nordic countries are compared, it is obvious that – despite significant differences – they follow a similar pattern. Surveys of individuals confirm that the Nordic countries are all predominantly Lutheran, with a relatively large percentage of unaffiliated and/or nonbelieving people. Muslims are a small but growing minority, with a strong presence in contemporary media debates on the roles of religion and religious diversity in the Nordic countries. Weakly institutionalised forms of spirituality – including their media coverage (Døving and Kraft 2013; Kraft 2017; Petersen 2012; Utriainen 2013; Winell 2016) – have deservedly gained a fair amount of scholarly attention, because of the theorizing of religion that has followed from such an interest, but there is little numerical evidence of their social significance (Furseth 2018, 52–5).

One of the key religious trends is that the number of people identifying as protestant has decreased in the Nordic countries. In 1990 the numbers were between 76 and 89 per cent according to the European Values survey, whereas in 2008 they were between 59 and 85 per cent (Bréchon 2017, 147). A recent Pew Research Center (2018a) survey reveals that the figures for self-identifying Christians in the Nordic countries are between 51 and 77 per cent (Norway 51 per cent, Sweden 52 per cent, Denmark 65 per cent, Finland 77 per cent), whereas the Western European median is 71 per cent. The number of people who regard themselves as atheist, agnostic, or 'nothing in particular' ranges from 22 to 42 per cent (Norway 43 per cent, Sweden 42 per cent, Denmark 30 per cent, Finland 22 per cent), whereas the Western European median is 24 per cent.

The recent Pew survey focused on Western Europe, but if standard international comparative surveys, such as World Values surveys, European Values surveys, and International Social Survey Programmes are explored, the overall picture is very similar: people in the Nordic countries are less eager to identify as religious than in the rest of Europe (and the world); they do not believe in God as much as people in other countries; they are passive in participating in religious events; and they do not consider religion important for their lives (see e.g. Bréchon 2017). Which Nordic country is the most secular depends on the criteria used, but Finland tends to emerge as the most religious, and Sweden as the most secular. However, the recent Pew survey suggests that Norway is catching up with Sweden in many respects. Of these four Nordic countries only Finland appears slightly more religious than some non-Nordic Western European countries, but when the whole of Europe is researched, Finland is clearly on the 'secular side' of the picture. However, Nordic countries have high membership rates in dominant churches, though the percentage has decreased in recent decades. The figures in 2017 were: Denmark 75.9 per cent, Finland 70.7 per cent, Norway 70.6 per cent, and Sweden 59.3 per cent.² Furthermore, attendance at religious services has declined steadily in the Nordic countries (Furseth 2018, 55–56).

Another Pew survey (2018b) reveals that people in the Nordic countries consider religion a less important component of national identity than Europeans in general. Even Finland is significantly below the median, although the percentage was considerably higher in Finland than in other Nordic countries (Finland 32 per cent, Norway 21 per cent, Denmark 19 per cent, Sweden 15 per cent) – 24 countries scoring higher and nine lower than Finland. The situation changes somewhat when the possible incompatibility of Islam with national values is surveyed ('Islam is fundamentally incompatible with our country's culture and values'). The Western European median is 42 per cent; in Denmark (43 per cent) and in Finland (62 per cent) the attitude is more negative than the median, and even Norway is close to the median (40 per cent; Sweden 34 per cent) (Pew 2018a). This is interesting because the percentage of Muslims is lowest in Finland (slightly more than

2 2017 has been used here for comparison. Cases where more recent figures are available (Denmark and Finland) show a small decline. The information has been taken from Statistics Norway <https://www.ssb.no/en/kultur-og-fritid/statistikker/kirke_koetra/aar, the Finnish church statistics website <<https://www.kirkontilastot.fi/viz?id=43>>, the Church of Sweden's website <<https://www.svenskakyrkan.se/statistik>>, and the Church of Denmark's website <<http://www.km.dk/folkekirken/kirkestatistik/folkekirken-medlemstal/>>.

one per cent) and highest in Sweden (around five per cent), suggesting that an increasing proportion of Muslims in one's country appears to correlate positively with more positive attitudes to Islam.³

The statistics concerning individuals, their identifications, attitudes, and institutional affiliation are only one piece of a larger puzzle. Declining religious affiliation and trends pointing towards the increasing secularization of Nordic countries should be observed alongside increasing diversity, the continuing privileged status of the dominant churches, and the prominence of religion in the public sphere, including the media. It appears that Nordic countries share a need to renegotiate the role and location of dominant churches in society. While secularist policies have some impact on this, it is arguably the increased mobility of people and immigrants' religious identities that have played a key role. The number of immigrants varies from one Nordic country to another, and the period that is regarded as the key turning point in the emergence of discourses on diversity differs in each country. Islam plays a key role in religious diversity, despite the quantitative and qualitative differences in its presence and visibility in different Nordic countries (see Larsson 2009). There is also arguably an increased awareness of the presence of religion globally, partly because of a more global media and partly because of the role religion plays in world politics. However, none of this means the trends pointing to the decline in religious beliefs, practices, identities, and affiliation have been reversed. The overall situation has therefore recently been described as religious complexity (Furseth 2018). This resembles what Grace Davie has called a 'persistent paradox' regarding religion in the British context – that 'the process of secularization continues', and 'religion persists as a topic of discussion, indeed dispute, in the public sphere' (Davie 2015, xiii).

The media in the Nordic countries

This issue focuses primarily on (printed) newspapers, but it refers to other media outlets such as television and digital and social media when it is relevant for an understanding of newspapers and the situation in selected countries. For background it is useful to understand the peculiarities of the Nordic media, especially because public service broadcasting and news-

³ This is simply a hypothesis derived from survey results. It should be studied more comprehensively. Its further study is not part of this issue, but it challenges the stereotype sometimes heard in public discussion that negative attitudes towards Islam are directly related to the increased number of Muslims.

papers animate the current situation, despite media deregulation and the crisis faced by the print media.

In their classic, albeit widely debated and later slightly refined, study Hallin and Mancini (2004 67, see also 2016) suggested that Nordic countries had a 'corporatist democratic' media system, in contrast with 'polarized pluralist' and 'liberal' models. This is an ideal type, referring to high newspaper circulation, an historically strong political party press, a recent shift towards a neutral commercial press, strong journalistic professionalism and state intervention, but protection for press freedom, press subsidies (especially in the Nordic countries), and strong public service broadcasting. Their classification includes Austria, Belgium, Germany, the Netherlands, Switzerland, and all the Nordic countries except Iceland.⁴

Other scholars have suggested that despite the differences between the Nordic countries, there are a number of relevant similarities that justify the language about a 'Nordic media system'. One is historical. The Nordic media has been dominated by national and regional newspapers, as well as by highly regulated broadcasting systems. Their ideals have been based on equal access to information and active audience participation to enhance democratic participation. Institutionalized press freedom developed early: Nordic countries were among the first to implement laws to protect the press. Furthermore, the self-regulation of the press (i.e. the idea that journalists themselves agree on a set of rules which is controlled by the press or media councils) has been strong in the Nordic countries (Engelstad, Larsen, and Rogstad 2017, 57; Syvertsen et al. 2014, 48–52). A survey conducted in 2016 shows that the level of trust in the news media in the Nordic countries is relatively high by international comparison (Newman 2018, 16).⁵

The media has become more market-oriented and less tightly regulated since the 1980s (Hjarvard 2013, 24ff., 50f.), but the recent changes have not erased the historical traits. Newspaper readership has been – and still is – exceptionally high in Nordic countries, and few people never read newspapers. Even tabloids are relatively strong in serious news content

4 The Nordic media was used as one of the many test cases for Hallin and Mancini's classification. To put it briefly and generally, studies have argued against the predictions concerning convergence of media system towards a liberal model and added nuances (see Allern and Blach-Ørsten 2011; Engelstad, Larsen, and Rogstad 2017; Rolland 2009), but no other grand classification has replaced Hallin and Mancini's model. Despite reservations, it has at least pedagogical value for an introductory text such as this.

5 However, the differences between the Nordic countries are notable. Finland topped a list of 37 countries for the highest trust in the news media. Denmark was sixth, Norway sixteenth, and Sweden twenty-fourth (Newman 2018, 16).

compared with Great Britain, for example. According to a Nordicom study published in 2010 the Nordic countries are among the top eight in terms of newspaper reach (Facht and Leckner 2012, 233). Readership figures are above the European average and higher still than those of Asia and the United States. The role of newspapers is the more remarkable given that such activity is not reflected for all media. For example, television is less popular in the Nordic countries than elsewhere in Europe. A high level of subscriptions and home delivery – 75–90 per cent of total sales – and availability also characterizes Nordic newspapers: Norway, Finland, and Sweden were the three highest ranking in newspaper copies per thousand inhabitants in 2006. All five were high on the list of the number of existing papers per one million inhabitants (Syvertsen et al. 2014, 24ff., 56f.). It should be noted, however, that the circulation of printed newspapers per thousand inhabitants has since decreased, but this trend is by no means unique to the Nordic countries (Harrie 2018, 30; Nordicom 2019a). Moreover, decreased advertising revenue has affected the financial situation of newspapers in the Nordic countries (Engelstad, Larse, and Rogstad 2017, 55; Harrie 2018, 37), but only in Finland has the number of printed papers declined significantly since 2000 (Harrie 2018, 27).

Although this issue argues that newspapers and their news production are important for a study of religion in the media, the diversification of television from the dominance of one or two national television channels controlled by public service broadcasting in the 1980s to multiple commercial channels, and the later development of the Internet and digital media, have challenged the role of newspapers, at least in their traditional form. Similar developments have taken place in many areas, but the Nordic countries score particularly highly on the ‘network readiness’ index for digitalization: nine out of ten people use the Internet; in Europe only in the Netherlands and Luxembourg are people as active in its use (Syvertsen et al. 2014, 28f.; Nordicom 2019b). Nordic people are active in their online news consumption, and all four countries examined here are in the top six list for highest online news subscription (Newman 2017, 24). They are also active on social media networks, but less active in blogging (Syvertsen et al. 2014, 33), though blogging is relevant to some for identity construction, including religious identities (Lövheim 2013). Digitalization, combined with more market-driven practices and decreased regulation, has contributed to a general fragmentation and diversification of the media sphere and challenged the print media’s role. However, the Nordic media sphere arguably continues to have a tendency towards ‘integrated publics’ compared with other areas. One indicator of this is that governments

have shown interest in maintaining strong public broadcast services and providing newspaper subsidies, though the policy is not identical in each country and is not limited to the Nordic countries (Syvertsen et al. 2014; Engelstad, Larsen, and Rogstad 2017, 57).

One of the challenges to print media is that people increasingly follow news outlets and newspapers online. While the form is different, this extensively disseminated content is commonly produced by the most powerful and resourceful media outlets. The news content of online versions is relatively similar to printed papers, though online news is frequently updated. This does not mean that recent changes are not important, but that there are interesting continuities within significant structural changes in the media sphere. For example, when a sample of Finnish university students was asked about their media use, the majority said that they were not active subscribers to printed newspapers, and many did not own a television. The low level of newspaper subscriptions was related to students' low income, but they followed the major Finnish newspapers online, typically the biggest national and one local paper, and watched television programmes on an Internet streaming catch-up service. This habit of following major media companies is further evidenced by the statistics on the most popular websites. The Finnish websites with the most hits are the two main tabloids, the news service of a major commercial television channel, the largest daily newspaper, and the public broadcasting company. The most popular discussion forum follows these. (See Taira 2013.)

Increased immigration and social pluralization are likely to change this pattern, but only slightly. A Norwegian case study shows that people with immigrant backgrounds are less interested in the national public service media and more interested in international and commercial channels, as well as channels from other regions. The difference between immigrants and the rest diminishes the longer people live in the country, so even immigration does not revolutionize media use. The existing studies indicate that the 'digital divide' has remained moderate in the Nordic countries (Syvertsen et al. 2014, 41ff.). Syvertsen et al. conclude:

There is still a high use of a print and other traditional media, while the main television channels remain popular. Digital media are predominantly used for seeking information from trusted news sources, for buying services and goods, and for sharing information with one's own network (Syvertsen et al. 2014, 45).

This conclusion describes the Nordic countries, but it is not fully limited to them. Elsewhere, scholars also theorize about the media's convergence with digital forms, reminding us about the continuities between the 'old' and the 'new', and the continuing power of large media companies to produce topics and themes for highly publicized debate (Meikle and Young 2012).

Why is it important to study religion in the Nordic newspapers?

The decision to organize this issue according to country-specific chapters rather than thematic ones is based on the idea that it is relevant to highlight the differences and unique developments between Nordic countries and demonstrate the diversity within them. One of the main benefits of this is that studies focusing on religion in newspapers and other media have usually been limited to one religion, Islam being the most popular recent choice (Baker, Gabrielatos, and McEnery 2013; Elgamri 2011; Karis 2013; 2014; Morey and Yaqin 2011; Petley and Richardson 2011; Poole 2002; Poole and Richardson 2006; Said 1997). This issue does not focus on one tradition; it examines all established religious traditions and practices covered frequently in Nordic newspapers, including anti-religious perspectives. Furthermore, most studies dealing with many religious traditions are limited to one country, with no substantial comparative aspect between countries or areas (see Axner 2013; Døving and Kraft 2013; Knott, Poole, and Taira 2013; Sumiala et al. 2017). This issue focuses on four countries: although there is no separate comparative article, the shared key concepts provide opportunities for comparison between countries (see also the end of this article).

Of all the previous studies the most obvious point of comparison is the NOREL project, *The Role of Religion in the Public Sphere: A Comparative Study of the Five Nordic Countries* (Furseth 2018). One of its strands focused on religion in the Nordic media. The main part of the media study was a quantitative comparison of three selected years, 1988, 1998, and 2008. Three authors in this issue, Henrik Christensen (Denmark), Knut Lundby (Norway), and Mia Lövheim (Sweden), were directly involved in the project, and all the authors participated in some of its events. The authors have been able to use the data or findings of the NOREL project, and they have an opportunity to extend and supplement the understanding it affords concerning religion in the Nordic daily press.

Neither the NOREL study nor this special issue focuses on digitalization and digital media as such. Digital religion has proved a lively and important area of study (Campbell 2010; 2013), but this does not mean that studies highlighting the daily press are irrelevant. This issue's authors

argue that they are, for many reasons. Longitudinal studies would be difficult to conduct without similar data from earlier decades; they need to take (printed) newspapers into account. Much of the material uploaded to websites never becomes an issue of major public debate and influence, but newspaper items, when published in widely circulated papers, raise topics for public discussion more easily. Large media companies also produce much of the material circulating on the Internet and in social media. It is especially relevant for religion that people who are not primarily interested in it – and there are quite a number of them among the masses and leading politicians – are likely to get their information from mainstream media like newspapers (both print and digital) and television, rather than from websites specializing in religion or face-to-face settings (Hjarvard 2013, 61, 86; Lundby 2017, 252; Lövheim and Lied 2018, 70; Taira 2013). Digitalization is changing the media sphere and the traditional role of newspapers. It is also adding opportunities for religious groups to find like-minded others and achieve a wider audience. It is therefore unwise to exclude it. Instead, all results found in contemporary newspaper analysis must be interpreted and contextualized within the developing digitalization of the media sphere.

This issue makes a national, Nordic, and international contribution. First, individual country-specific articles combine an original study with the existing knowledge and studies of the topic, offering a longitudinal overview of how religion is portrayed and discussed in national newspapers and how, with other media, they play an active role in what is happening with religion and religiosity. Second, this issue highlights similarities and differences between countries, demonstrating that it is possible to discuss religion in the Nordic daily press as a (heterogeneous) unit while remaining sensitive to differences between countries. Third, as all its findings are theorized by reflecting on international studies of religion and the media, as well as selected key debates in the sociology of religion, this issue contributes to our overall understanding and the theorization of the roles and places of religion and newspapers in contemporary societies. Finally, the articles aim to contribute to the methodological discussion of the media and religion.

Key concepts

Rather than testing a single narrowly defined hypothesis, the articles in this issue operate theoretically with selected key concepts that are integral to contemporary scholarly debates in mapping the complex relations between religion, the media (especially newspapers), society, and culture. Each article, focusing on one Nordic country, highlights what is relevant for the

country and newspaper material in question, but also takes a position in relation to selected and shared key concepts that have been suggested as characterizing recent trends in the role and place of religion in an increasingly media-driven world. None of the articles deals with all the selected key concepts equally; they employ this repertoire to make clear connections between the sociology of religion and studies of religion and the media (see Granholm, Moberg, and Sjö 2015). What follows is a short introduction to the selected key concepts and debates used in each article.

One of the key debates concerning religion and the media, especially in the Nordic countries, has been the question of *mediatization* (Hjarvard 2012; 2013; 2016; Krüger 2018; Lundby (ed.) 2018; Lövheim and Lynch 2011). The mediatization of religion refers to a process in which the media – as a semi-autonomous institution – becomes increasingly intertwined with religious institutions, and influences religious institutions' capacity to act as religions become dependent on resources that the media controls (Hjarvard 2012; 2013). Stig Hjarvard (2012) names three forms of mediatized religion – journalism about religion, the religious media, and banal religion. This issue focuses almost exclusively on journalism about religion, exploring how 'secular' journalism deals with religion, and how religion may become mediatized in the process. From the perspective of institutional mediatization Hjarvard notes that the proper empirical test of mediatization should study 'whether, and to what extent, other institutions [...] stand to win or lose autonomy in their interaction with various forms of media' (Hjarvard 2013, 40). Because this issue focuses not on religious institutions but the newspaper coverage of religion, the test cannot be enacted here in its pure form. However, mediatization can and should be studied at the level of representations of religion too, examining how journalistic outcomes construct conditions for religions in the 'media age'. The dispute about the mediatization of religion forms one area of debate that informs these articles by providing insights into the overall relationship between the media and religion, and more specifically, about the location of sources, authority, and control concerning public representations of and knowledge about religion, as previous studies have suggested (see Hjarvard 2016; Hjarvard and Lundby 2018, 53–4; Hjarvard and Lövheim 2012; Lundby 2018, 5f.; Lundby (ed.) 2018).

Despite the weakened paradigmatic status of *secularization* in the sociology of religion, strong and convincing defences, as well as revised versions, of the secularization thesis remain (Brown 2009; Bruce 2011; Norris and Inglehart 2004; Pollack and Rosta 2017; Voas 2008; Voas and Crockett 2005).

While it is clear that the study of religion in the media does not solve the dilemma of secularization because the data for debating secularization is so strongly connected with statistics about beliefs, participation, identification, and affiliation, these articles shed light on the debate in at least two ways. First, as the Nordic countries are regarded as among the world's most secularized (Zuckerman 2007; 2008), the newspaper discourse and portrayals of religion tell us much about the issue's complexity: it may well be, as the selected criteria suggest, that the Nordic countries are secularized, but whether this also means that religion does not play a prominent role in the public media debate is an issue these articles address. Second, it has been suggested that the mainstream media may be a secularizing force contributing to overall secularization (Hjarvard 2012). This issue explores this question further at the level of newspaper content.

Visibility (as opposed to invisibility and absence). Visibility in this context is the presence and awareness of religion in the media. The discussion of religion's increased visibility may involve the quantitative presence of religion-related media and references, but it may also involve an increased awareness of the presence of religion and/or its increased significance in society, politics, and the media. This assumed visibility may mean religion is regarded as a resource for society, but also that religion is a source of conflict, tension, and controversy (Hjelm 2014; Lundby 2018, 4). It does not make inherent claims about how religion is visible; this must be specified in empirical research. Further, it does not necessarily mean the return of religion or its resurgence in a sense that would contribute to something like a reversal of secularization. Nor does it necessarily mean that religion is 'de-privatized' in the sense José Casanova (1994) suggests (i.e. that religions have increasingly become public conversation partners on societal norms and the common good). This is because religion – as a discourse, tradition, and practice – may be visible in the media both in 'private' and 'public' forms, where 'private' religion is understood as a form not extended or imposed on 'secular' domains of life such as economics, politics, and the state or as a form located in the 'sphere of life from which public authorities choose to exclude themselves in certain conditions' (Beckford 2003, 87). Our data can be used as a test case for the argument about the visibility of religion, and combined with previous studies, it allows us to consider both quantitative (Are there more stories about and references to religion in newspapers?) and qualitative (How is religion visible in newspapers?) questions. Whether the data supports Casanova's more specific claims about public or de-privatized religion, for example, will be of secondary importance in

the selected country-specific studies. Although this issue does not test any of the hypotheses concerning secularization and de-secularization directly, the concept of the visibility of religion and its quantitative and qualitative examination offers significant material for connecting the analysis of newspaper data with theoretical debates on secularization and de-secularization.

Diversity (as opposed to homogeneity). What happens in a period of increased immigration if the Nordic countries have maintained the image of homogeneity in general and especially in religiosity with strong national churches and a small percentage of religious minorities (Furseth 2018; Martikainen 2013)? It is likely that the diversity of conviction, religious or otherwise, becomes an issue dealt with in the media, and that religion is discussed within the framework of diversity. Does this challenge the role and status of the dominant churches in the Nordic countries (and if so, how?), and how is this diversity addressed in the media? Yet diversity is not limited to religion. The deregulation of the media system and the political challenges posed to the public broadcast system are paving the way to a more diverse media sphere. Whether this development has implications for newspapers' religious coverage is also worth considering.

Globalization (as opposed to locality). The globalization of religion (see Beyer 1994; 2006) goes hand in hand with diversity, but in the context of religion and the media this aspect highlights the global news production of religion, a possible increase in the relevance of geographically distant religion-related events and debates, and an intertwining of local issues with global elements. Again, this will be addressed in selected articles qualitatively and/or quantitatively, depending on country-specific research designs. An interesting aspect in this respect is to study whether newspaper coverage is qualitatively different in its treatment of domestic and foreign news and topics (see Hokka et al. 2013). The media studies perspective suggests that it is also relevant to consider how possible differences are related to the type of newspaper (national, regional, local), and whether different sections of the newspapers portray religion differently.

Individuality and choice (as opposed to collectivity and obligation). Sociologists have suggested for some decades that religion may be switching from being a collective to a more individual activity, and from being an obligation to a choice (see Beck 2010; Carrette and King 2005; Davie 2015; Heelas and Woodhead 2005; Hunt 2005; Luckmann 1967; Lyon 2000). What is meant by 'individual' or 'individualized' religiosity is not that people choose freely as autonomous individuals without any constraints (see Martin 2014), but that social forces present more alternatives and people are not expected

to conform as strongly as was once the case. Alternatives are on offer, and they are sometimes encouraged rather than simply tolerated options, but they are not supposed to extend their norms for others or for society as a whole. Whether the newspapers highlight such stories, and whether they assume individuality to be the new norm, is a question that will also be explored in this issue.

Religion as a public utility (as opposed to a self-enclosed institution). In recent years scholars of religion have suggested that religion may be becoming a public utility without a strong 'religious' identity (Bäckström et al. 2010; 2011; Davie 2015; Lövheim and Lied 2018; Woodhead 2012). The major religious institutions in various countries are seen as contributing to the public good by supporting the poor and marginalized, taking care of cemeteries, and advancing community cohesion. It is not that the services they offer are new, but that these activities are used to justify their public role, especially if they receive financial aid from the state or are granted tax benefits. It is possible that this justification has become more obvious during a period of increasing privatization of state-owned enterprises and the withering of the welfare state, and that religious institutions must be available for 'discursive justification' (Giddens 1994, 105) in the public sphere, especially in the media. In the context of the newspaper coverage of religion this entails a consideration of whether newspaper coverage of disputes about religious institutions deals with issues of public utility rather than, say, the churches' internal issues, and how explicit references to public utility may serve to justify the role and status of religious institutions.

Overview of the content

Each of the four articles following this introduction focuses on one Nordic country. They analyse newspapers' coverage of religion based on original data and previous studies. They address the key issues mentioned in this introduction, but at the same time they are independent explorations, in which tiny differences in the selection of data affect the emphases of the analyses and findings. The framing of the articles has been designed to provide material for a comparative analysis, without losing sight of the particularities of each country, whose history, religious landscape, and media differ from the others, despite being 'Nordic'. Each article focuses on the longitudinal developments of the newspaper coverage of religion in one Nordic country and selects some recent debates for a more detailed analysis to demonstrate how religion is currently covered and debated, primarily in the daily press.

The individual articles all make use of available quantitative content analyses or report original studies, but place equal emphasis on qualitative methods in longitudinal analysis. The timeframe of primary data depends on the country: all go back at least thirty years, but the focus is on the contemporary situation. A more detailed description of the data and methods will be provided in individual articles, and all the articles reflect on the methodological challenges posed by such an analysis.

All the articles are designed to be read independently. However, they have been carefully planned to make a contribution as a whole. *Theoretically*, they highlight the relevance of a mediatization framework in combination with the selected key concepts theorizing the relations between the media, religion, and society, though individual authors differ slightly in their applications – whether this is understood generally as claiming the increasing power of the media over religion or more specifically as furthering secularization – and interpretations of how comprehensive it is. *Methodologically*, the articles offer four ways of collecting longitudinal material and coding them, as well as four ways to combine qualitative methods with quantitative content analyses. All have strengths and weaknesses on which the authors reflect in their contributions, aiming to enrich and further the lively discussion about methodological choices in studying religion in the media. *Empirically*, they offer a detailed longitudinal analysis of religion in newspapers in the selected countries, but they also provide material for comparison.

Reading the four articles together demonstrates the differences between the Nordic countries. For example, it reveals that Swedish and Danish newspapers highlight ‘secular’ values more explicitly than Finnish or Norwegian newspapers. Here, however, I shall summarize the key similarities between the Nordic countries on the basis of the four articles.

Although the newspapers cover Islam considerably more than they used to, their values and preferences moderately support the Lutheran heritage. The dominant churches play a prominent, though increasingly contested, public role. Religion is debated and contested in relatively secular newspapers, and the media in general plays a major role in framing the debates. Newspapers may promote ‘secular’ values and views, but they are rarely anti-religious as such, though criticism of religion is slightly more visible than previously. There is no detectable increase in the value ascribed to religion in the newspapers. One development is that religious diversity has increased in newspaper coverage, and newspapers and their readers share a general awareness of it. This relates primarily to Islam, which has

increasingly become a domestic phenomenon – here rather than out there – and it is often seen as ‘problematic’.

The articles in this issue suggest that religion is typically covered in newspapers if there are conflicts or extraordinary events, but at the same time many newspapers actively use religious leaders as authoritative sources, and some give space to them as regular columnists. National and local events are more likely to be covered, but newspapers maintain a global awareness of the role of religion in world politics. Although religion is conceived of increasingly as an individual choice in Nordic societies, the newspapers mainly write about religion as an institution or collective.

The articles demonstrate that there are many different ways to measure the visibility of religion, and that such measurement is difficult. Some increase in visibility can be seen according to the measurements used here, but the development is not linear in each country. One of the methodological difficulties relates to the changing media sphere. Printed newspapers are losing ground, and many newspapers now have fewer pages. This does not mean the end of large media companies’ ability to create frames for public discussion, but it complicates the interpretation of the results of a longitudinal comparison.

The whole world is not ‘Nordic’. A substantive international comparison may be undertaken in future, but even a superficial juxtaposition of the Nordic countries and Britain reveals that the latter has a more confrontational media discussion style, and this includes religious issues. Newspapers feature religion-related stories of extremely high and low quality, whereas the Nordic newspapers tend to fall somewhere in between. Media representations of religion are dominated by Christianity and Islam, but other traditions like Sikhism, Hinduism, Judaism, Buddhism, and Paganism have a greater media presence. Even interreligious dialogue plays a more visible role in the media. Conservative Christianity features more prominently in most popular newspapers, especially in the tabloids. If a majority in the Nordic countries wonders how to live with minorities in times of diversity, in Britain multiculturalism – despite becoming a ‘dirty word’ in some political circles – is more internalised (see Knott, Poole, and Taira 2013). The authors of this issue hope that specialists in other areas and countries will continue the comparison in future by utilizing the theoretical, methodological, and empirical aspects examined in this issue.

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TEEMU TAIRA is Senior Lecturer in Study of Religion, University of Helsinki.
E-mail: teetai@utu.fi

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Continuity with the Past and Uncertainty for the Future: Religion in Danish Newspapers 1750–2018

HENRIK REINTOFT CHRISTENSEN

Aarhus University

Abstract

The article examines the newspaper constructions of religion in Danish newspapers in a quantitative longitudinal analysis from 1750 to 2000 and a more qualitative analysis of recent news production from the last forty years. For the longitudinal part, the database of the digitization of Danish newspapers project is used. Using the available tools for quantitative data analysis, the article shows that the category of religion and world religions has been visible in Danish newspapers since 1750. The coverage of world religions is often related to the coverage of international news. Overall, the article documents a remarkable continuity of the presence of religion. Examining the more recent material qualitatively, the article shows that although many religions have been historically visible in the news, they have most recently become more frequent in the debate sections than in the news sections. It is primarily Islam that is debated. This is connected with a shift from religious diversity as part of foreign news coverage to domestic news coverage, related to changes in the surrounding Danish society. Nevertheless, the coverage of Islam also displays a remarkable continuity.

Keywords: Danish newspapers, coverage of religion, secularization, religious diversity

The oriental question is one of today's most pertinent questions. While some rejoice at the possible fulfilment of the probably quite reasonable wish to see the end of Turkish barbarism in Europe, others hope that this is a confirmation of Islam's impotence and the beginning of the eradication and disappearance of Islam from this world. Nevertheless, we must remember that according to the law of history it is more difficult to remove old ways and centuries of misconceived illusions than to establish new ones. The question is whether Islam has the necessary capacity and vitality to establish an organic state and functioning society (von Mehren in *Berlingske Tidende*, June 1876).

Religion has long been a recurrent theme in Danish public debate, and a number of scholarly works have been dedicated to the study of its media representations. The debates have concerned Christianity and Islam, and based on the most recent migration history of the last four or five decades, it seems that increasing religious diversity is one of the reasons religion is represented in the news.

One of the world's oldest newspapers still in circulation is the Danish national daily *Berlingske Tidende*. The first issue of the newspaper was published in January 1749, and today, with *Jyllands-Posten* and *Politiken*, established in 1871 and 1884, it is among the newspapers with the highest circulations in Denmark. Much has changed since these newspapers were established, and today digital platforms and social media are challenging not only printed newspapers but the entire business model of the newspaper industry. Nevertheless, newspapers remain important for a study of the representations of religion in news – especially if such studies include an historical dimension. Older studies of representations of religion have criticized the media for not covering various religions in accordance with their size (Ferre 1980), and the news media because they 'are not always neutral institutions simply disseminating facts about societal events and trends' (Richardson and van Driel 1997, 116). I agree with Mark Silk here that news media are never neutral institutions, merely disseminating facts. On the contrary, 'they engage in the business of *shaping* the information at their disposal (good, bad or indifferent) into a culturally significant narrative' (Silk 1997, 137; my emphasis). Stories published in the news media are not neutral and unbiased observations of society, but culturally significant narratives, and studying the representation of religion in the media is thus an observation of the ways in which the media observes religion (Christensen 2018). In this article I examine the media construction of religion in the Danish news. News stories are shaped by a certain understanding of religion and news. This is commonly found in studies of how the media frames religion – Islam, for example (cf. Vellenga 2008; Jacobsen et al. 2013). However, such framing analyses tend to focus on the way journalism shapes or frames its input while ignoring the fact that what counts as input in the first place is also always already part of this process. Journalists only observe religion of some kind, which is then turned into news stories framed in a certain way. Examining the output in the coverage of religions across religious traditions can help us observe the kind of religion journalists can see and use as an input in the first place.

News in society and religion in the news

With regard to religion and media, Danish society has two large institutions: the *Folkekirken* (the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark), established by the democratic constitution of 1849; and the state-run public service broadcaster, *Danmarks Radio* (Denmark's broadcasting company), established in 1925. Both institutions have been *de facto* monopolies for decades. Göran Gustafsson and his colleagues examined religion in the Nordic countries during part of this monopolistic period (Gustafsson et al. 1985). They concluded that religion became less and less visible in society during this period. Both monopolies have been challenged since by increasing diversity. In a more recent work Stig Hjarvard argues that diversity erodes religious authority, and that more visible religion does not equate to more religion. He concludes that at the macro level 'mediatisation is part of the very process of secularisation' (Hjarvard 2011, 131f). The increased diversity in both fields increasingly uses digital platforms to communicate, which can be a source of conflict. Knut Lundby and Pål Repstad write that 'growing diversity in the religious field, as well as in the media landscapes, forms part of the conflicts that are arising' (Lundby and Repstad 2018, 14). Inger Furseth argues in the NOREL project that the situation is more complex today, as we can observe

seemingly contradictory trends, such as growing secularization in the Nordic populations, trends of both differentiation and de-differentiation of religion at the state level, a growing presence of religion as a topic at the political level, a greater visibility of religion in the media, and a deprivatization of religion at the level of civil society (Furseth 2018, 16).

In other words, we can simultaneously observe both decline and growth, secularization and de-secularization, and continuity and change. As Taira mentions in his introduction (Taira 2019a), it is interesting to examine what the category of religion looks like when it is observed by the news media and represented in news production.

In his book on imagined communities Benedict Anderson argues that news and newspapers were important vehicles for the shaping of a national community of citizens (Anderson 1983, 12–22). Newspapers are 'one-day bestsellers' that create a certain sense of time through 'the almost precisely simultaneous consumption ('imagining') of the newspaper as fiction' (Anderson 1983, 35). The news media thus plays an important role for society's observation of itself. Barbie Zelizer argues that the 'very essence of journal-

ism is creating an imagined engagement with events beyond the public's reach' (Zelizer 2017, 2). Journalism informs readers of events to which they have no personal access. Helle Sjøvaag argues that the press is the medium through which the governed and the government communicate about society (Sjøvaag 2010, 880). Journalism is also about the maintenance of the social order, because it informs the public of transgressions and norm violations (Sjøvaag 2010, 883).

Religion in Danish newspapers

The material for this article consists primarily of news articles collected through the *Infomedia* database, which collects articles from all newspapers. The oldest newspaper articles in this database are from the 1990s, which means that older material has been collected using the Danish Royal Library's digitization project and microfilm collection. Of the 570 million articles in the corpus, the oldest are from 1750. The corpus is only used for quantitative analyses because of its size, and because, for copyright reasons, the Royal Library only releases articles more than a hundred years old for a large-scale content analysis. Additionally, the article draws on the material collected by the group of researchers responsible for the media part of the NOREL project (Lundby et al. 2018).

Religion in Danish newspapers 1750–1960s

Although the corpus is huge, it does not contain all the newspapers or issues of a newspaper since 1750. Furthermore, it is currently impossible to filter a search, and the results are therefore based on the entire corpus. The figure below shows the use of the words 'religion' and 'religious'.

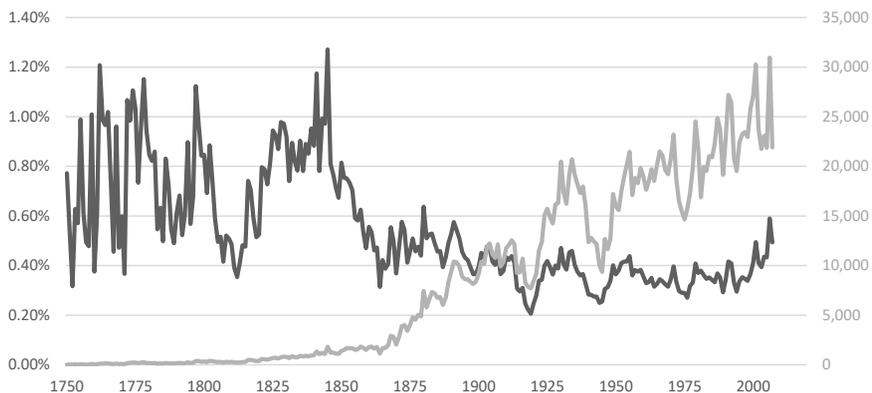


Figure 1: The use of 'religion' over time in absolute and relative numbers, 1750-2007

As Taira mentioned in the introduction, visibility can have a range of meanings, one of them being the quantitative presence of religion in the media. The dark line shows the relative share of articles using the words ‘religion’ or ‘religious’. The variation is huge in the first part of the sample, because it consists of relatively few articles per year. Religion is found in eighteen (of 2 330) articles from 1750 and in nineteen (of 3 495) articles from 1751. The relative share of articles mentioning religion continued to be large until the 1860s. Religion was therefore relatively less visible between the 1860s and 2000. The figure also includes the absolute number of articles, and here we see an increase from the mid-1860s: except for the two world wars, the general trend is to publish more articles mentioning religion. Nevertheless, the share of articles about religion has never returned to pre-1860 levels. Newspapers have therefore published more articles in general, but the share of articles using the word ‘religion’ has remained fairly constant throughout the twentieth century. It is only since the turn of the millennium that the share has begun to increase again and thus also become visible. Specifically examining world religions, the next figure shows the use of Hinduism and Buddhism.

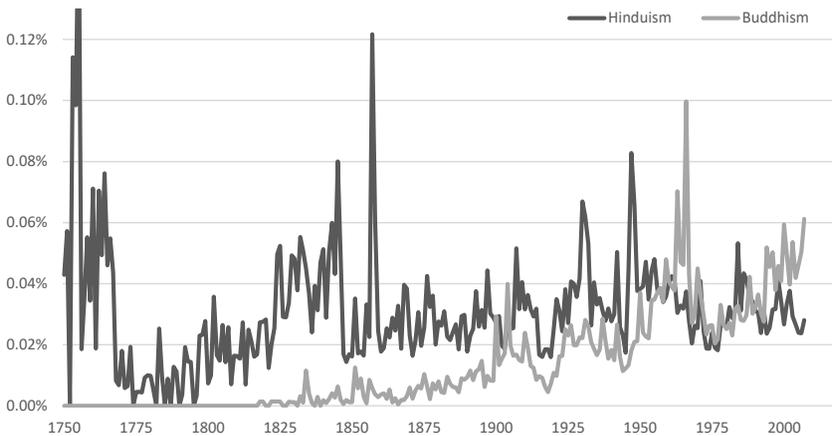


Figure 2: The use of ‘Hinduism’ and ‘Buddhism’, 1750–2007

The figure shows that Hinduism features more often than Buddhism. From a news reporting perspective some obvious events explain this. In 1845 the only Danish colony in India was sold to the British East India Company, and in 1857 there are newspapers reports from the Sepoy Mutiny and In-

dian Insurrection. The peaks of 1930 and 1947 are connected to the road to independence. Gandhi had visited London in 1930 and negotiated a pact with the Viceroy of India that year, and the 1947 peak is connected with the independence of India. Danish newspapers therefore have a long history of global news production. The press history of Buddhism is shorter. There are some articles before the twentieth century, but the first peak is associated with the British invasion of Tibet, which reached the capital, Lhasa, in August 1904. That campaign may explain the numerous articles in the press on the Dalai Lama, Tibet, and Buddhism. Indeed, much of the early coverage concerns Tibet. The 1950 peak is connected with the Chinese invasion of Tibet, and the 1959 peak with the Dalai Lama's flight to India. However, this changes during the 1960s. The 1966 peak consists of 6,200 articles. As we cannot access the articles, we can perhaps assume that the newspapers were beginning to report on young westerners' encounter with Buddhism during the 1960s. Using a combination of search words ('Tibet' or 'Buddhism'; 'Dalai' or 'Buddhism'), it is evident that they co-occur until the peak in the 1960s. Furthermore, the Danish Buddhism researcher Jørn Borup writes that after the late 1960s the young generation behind the civil rights movements, student protests, and the counter-cultural movement transformed Danish Buddhism from an elite literary kind into a practising Buddhism (Borup 2005, 37f.). The coverage of Buddhism shifts from the foreign (non-western) news pages to more local (western) or even domestic pages. It also shifts from a political focus on international relations to one on more individualized forms of religion, following the counter-cultural break with the establishment. Neither religion is mentioned to the same extent as Christianity, Judaism, or Islam, though the number of references to Islam and Hinduism is remarkably similar until 1979.

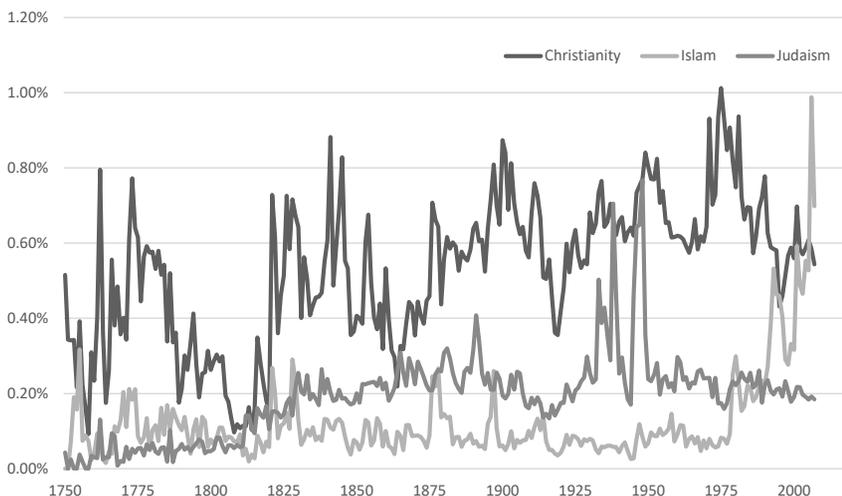


Figure 3: The share of articles using 'Christianity', 'Judaism', and 'Islam', 1750–2007

The figure shows the relative development in the use of the words ‘Christianity’, ‘Judaism’, and ‘Islam’ with different spellings, including nouns and adjectives for both religion and adherents. Christianity is mentioned in five out of every 1,000 articles on average; Judaism and Islam are mentioned in fewer than two out of every 1,000 articles. Historically, it is worth noting that both Judaism and Islam have always been visible in the Danish news. Judaism is mentioned more often than Islam. The difference between the averages of 1.9 and 1.2 articles out of every 1 000 amounts to almost 500 000 more articles mentioning Judaism. Concerning Judaism, there are obvious peaks related to the Holocaust and the establishment of the state of Israel. Concerning Islam, the arrival of guest workers in the late 1960s and the 1970s does not seem to trigger the use of the term ‘Islam’. Indeed, it does not seem the use of ‘Islam’ increased dramatically until the Islamic Revolution in Iran, with the exception of a few peaks during the nineteenth century. After the late 1970s ‘Islam’ occurs increasingly frequently in the newspapers and surpasses ‘Christianity’ in 1995, 2006, and 2007.

However, this data is affected by some methodological problems. Some of the oldest newspaper articles refer to Iceland rather than Islam, because the software has some difficulty in recognizing Gothic lettering.¹ I have included different spellings, but over a 250-year period terms other than the present ones may have been used. Islam was long called the religion of Muhammad, *Muhammadanism*. And Muhammad has also been spelled differently: for example, as ‘Mahomet’ (and his religion as ‘Mahometism’). I have combined ‘Islam’ and ‘Muslim’, which results in more hits and less variation. This shows they are not used interchangeably, evening out some of the peaks found when only searching for one word. The Crimean War of 1853–4 is less visible if ‘Islam’ is the only search term used. However, there is a visible peak surrounding the uprising in the Balkans, the dethroning of Sultan Abdülaziz, and the war against Russia in the late 1870s. Indeed, it is of the same relative magnitude as the Islamic Revolution in Iran a hundred years later. The quotation opening this article is from an introduction to Islam published in *Berlingske Tidende* by a professor of Semitic languages at the University of Copenhagen in June 1876. It is a 3 500-word introduction to the history of Islam, aiming to demonstrate why a Muslim state is unsustainable.

1 This corresponds roughly to *Islam* vs *Island*, but we need also to consider the effect of time on a 175-year-old newspaper page. The letters may not even have been clearly set when they were printed, but over time they have become even more blurred.

I will sum up this part of the study by examining the difference between the coverage before and after the Second World War.

Table 1: Number of articles before and after the Second World War

	1750–1945			1946–2007		
	Mean ^a	SD	n= ^b	Mean ^a	SD	n= ^b
Atheism	0.5	0.4	10.7	1.0	0.4	35.2
Buddhism	0.6	0.8	33.5	3.7	1.4	130.3
Christianity	48.0	18.3	1 329.0	68.3	12.4	2 353.0
Hinduism	3.0	2.1	69.4	3.4	1.1	115.2
Islam	9.3	5.2	166.5	21.6	19.2	773.9
Judaism	17.0	10.8	563.1	24.6	10.6	830.5
Religion	59.6	23.5	870.2	36.4	5.5	1 265.0
Secular	0.5	0.4	5.0	1.0	0.4	21.6

^a Number of articles using keyword per 10 000 articles.

^b Total number of articles including religious keywords in 1 000s.

All differences are statistically significant at the $p < .001$ level

The table shows how many articles mention a specific keyword. For every 10,000 articles published forty-eight mention Christianity in the first period, and sixty-eight in the second. This is not the only interesting thing about the number of articles published. First, the table also shows that all keywords except the word 'religion' itself have increased. 'Religion' was the most used word in the first period, with 'Christianity' a close second. In the most recent period they have switched places. 'Religion' is the only word that has decreased in use. It is possible that 'religion' was used interchangeably with 'Christianity', or that all other religions were more often described simply as religions in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, while the twentieth-century news media became more specific. Yet the expectation that increased religious diversity would make the use of a generic term such as 'religion' occur more frequently is not met. Second, 'Judaism' is the third most used term in the newspapers in the corpus. Third, 'Hinduism' has received almost the same amount of coverage throughout both periods, while 'Buddhism' has shown an increase in the most recent. The second column shows the standard deviation. 'Christianity' has increased in use and decreased in variation, revealing that it has fluctuated less from year to year. However, 'Islam' has increased both in use and in variation, which means that the coverage of Islam has fluctuated more from year to

year in the most recent period. The last column shows the total number of articles using a keyword. There are 8.5 million newspaper articles in the above table, with 5.5 million published since 1946. In the period between 1750 and 1945 the keywords were mentioned in 1.38 per cent of the total corpus, increasing to 1.58 per cent in the most recent period.² In summary, religion has been a stable presence in Danish news production for centuries. In raw numbers all these terms are only mentioned in two more articles out of every 1,000 articles in the post-war period compared to the two hundred years prior to this. However, the content may very well have changed. The following sections examine studies of religion in the news and news articles in the last fifty years.

Religion in Danish newspapers, 1970s–1990s

With the arrival of migrant guest workers from southern Europe, Turkey, and Pakistan newspapers began to cover immigration rather than religion. There are some studies of the coverage of religion and religious diversity before the 1980s, but many more studies of guest workers (Würtz-Sørensen 1988a; Madsen 2000; Andreassen 2007). During the 1980s researchers began to focus on religion just as the newspapers were beginning to. This probably reflects events such as the election of a new pope and the Jonestown massacre in 1978, the Islamic Revolution in 1979, and the arrival of refugees from the Iran-Iraq War between 1980 and 1988. Ole Riis (1985), who wrote the chapter on Denmark in Gustafsson's book about religion in the Nordic countries, concludes that the number of articles covering religion has increased. He collected articles from the Easter and Christmas editions of four newspapers: *Socialdemokraten*, and the papers already mentioned, *Berlingske Tidende*, *Jyllands-Posten*, and *Politiken*. In 1938 there was almost no coverage of religion in *Jyllands-Posten*, and only sporadic coverage in *Politiken* and *Socialdemokraten*. However, the conservative newspaper, *Berlingske Tidende*, published some articles about the national church. In 1958 *Politiken* and *Socialdemokraten* covered religion broadly, while the nature of *Berlingske Tidende's* coverage had not changed. Even the Sunday column had the same title as in 1938. Riis found an increase in *Jyllands-Posten* in the broad coverage of religion, church-related news, and reflections from the perspective of the philosophy of religion. In 1978 the coverage of religion had

² Scanning mistakes may have inflated the share in the oldest part of the material. Similarly, the share in the recent period may also be inflated, because more articles mention more than one religion today than previously.

increased in *Jyllands-Posten* and *Politiken*, and articles in the latter were often critical of religion. The coverage in *Berlingske Tidende* had still not changed greatly and focused mainly on the national church. Unfortunately, there is little detailed analysis of the newspaper material. He provides no statistics to illustrate what 'almost no coverage' and 'several articles' mean. Indeed, this is a common feature of most of these early studies. His findings are at odds with the findings from the corpus analysis mentioned above. This may result from two factors: first, Riis bases his findings on a few select weeks that may in some ways be biased; second, the corpus search engine is blind to context: it counts a keyword if it is used, regardless of whether the article actually focuses on religion.

In the late 1980s the historian Jørgen Würtz-Sørensen started documenting the newspaper account of the immigration resulting from the economic boom in the late 1960s. He published a series of working papers describing the coverage decade by decade and concluded that religion was absent in the representation of migrants. This group includes all 'southerners': people from Spain, Italy, Greece, Yugoslavia, Turkey, and later Pakistan, Iran, and Iraq. The entire group is represented negatively as men 'stealing' jobs and women from Danish men, but this image does not include references to Islam. Only a few articles mention Islam indirectly – for example, when employers praise guest workers for not drinking alcohol (on the job) (cf. Würtz-Sørensen 1988a, 1988b, 1990). This corroborates the quantitative analysis above. The use of 'Islam' does not increase with the first guest workers, but with the revolution in Iran.

One of the few who have quantified the coverage is Jacob Gaarde Madsen, who published a book in the Danish Democracy Project (*Magtudredningen*) in 2000. He examined the coverage of refugees and immigrants in 1970, 1984, 1993, and 1998 in *Jyllands-Posten*, *Politiken*, and one of the tabloids, *BT*. He does not mention religion in his treatment of the 1970 material (Madsen 2000).

In the 1980s the newspapers started to devote more attention to migration based on the war between Iran and Iraq, and the increased national focus created by the right-wing populist Progress Party. A study by Øystein Gaasholt and Lise Tøgeby suggests 'the Muhammadan threat' was first mentioned in 1985, when the Progress Party replaced their economic argument against migrants with a cultural one (Gaasholt and Tøgeby 1996, 29). This is not to suggest that other critics abandoned the economic argument, but that by the late 1980s Islam and Muslims had emerged as a category of their own. In 1988 the first edited volume on Islam and Muslims in the

Danish media was published (Olesen 1988). One of the chapters examined the representation of Islam over twenty-one months between 1986 and 1987 in the small left-wing newspaper *Information* (Pedersen 1988). The study concluded that Islam was always connected with fundamentalism, fanaticism, crime, or terror, and explained every conflict, from wars to domestic disturbances. In another contribution Hussain argued that time constraints especially make journalists buy into already established but false truths concerning Islam (Hussain 1988).

In the NOREL material from 1988 Lundby et al. showed that newspapers gave most coverage to Christianity. *Jyllands-Posten* still had a theological column every Sunday, and it was prominently placed on the same page as the editorial. Apart from this column written by a group of pastors, the newspapers did not cover events and development within the church unless they had a clear potential for conflict. One such case focused on one of the bishops, who encouraged pastors and parish councils to boycott Shell as providers of oil for heating churches and vicarages because they supported the apartheid regime in South Africa. This initiated a debate on the politicization of the church. Similarly, coverage focused on the inherent or potential conflict in other cases – for example, when a group of pastors started a petition encouraging politicians not to allow same-sex marriage. There were a few articles on the Catholic Church in *Jyllands-Posten* and *Politiken* about the anniversary of the election of John Paul II. Both newspapers also mentioned the speech the pope gave to the European Parliament, and the events in Poland when the Solidarity movement organized strikes against the communist regime were also covered.

There was little coverage of other religions or spirituality. Both *Jyllands-Posten* and *Ekstra Bladet* wrote about astrology as a new form of alternative spirituality. *Jyllands-Posten* wrote that it had gone from being ‘an occult speciality for weirdoes’ to something everyone knew about, and it thus hinted at the increasing acceptance of individual choice in matters related to religion. Other religions were scarcely mentioned, though an important exception was in *Ekstra Bladet*, which featured a series of articles on Jehovah’s Witnesses called ‘Jehovah’s Hell’, focusing on the conditions under which the children and young people lived. Finally, Scientology was also covered in a few articles. The coverage focused on the economic exploitation of people: we are told that ‘the sect is notorious for its greed’. Other articles covered some of the lawsuits Scientology had lost. The only article that mentioned an Eastern religion was in *Jyllands-Posten*’s religious-philosophical column ‘The Man in the Forest Cabin’, where the author had heard a radio broad-

cast about people and faith. 'The other day there was a conversation with a Danish Buddhist about soul travel, reincarnation, and the belief in the immortality so many people want. There is no end to what people demand these days' (*Jyllands-Posten* 16 October 1988).

The war in Yugoslavia in the 1990s saw Denmark receiving many Bosnian refugees. The coverage of these Muslims was largely positive, because the population could identify with them (Jensen 2000, 484ff). As already mentioned, Madsen showed that the 1970s material did not refer to Islam. In his content analysis of the 1990s, however, he argues that after 1998 the cultural argument became more dominant than the economic one (Madsen 2000). Similarly, Tim O'Connor examined the coverage of ethnic minorities and Islam in six daily newspapers and the evening news on the two television channels in September, October, and November 1996. He concluded that the coverage of Islam was based on conflict. Very few articles focused on Islam only as a religion: they combined Islam with politics and tradition (O'Connor 1997, 143). In 1999 Peter Hervik edited a book on the Danish reaction to increased multiculturalism (Hervik 1999). Three of the book's seven chapters examined the media coverage of Muslims. The book's general argument concerned the clash between an imagined public tolerance and anti-racist attitude in Denmark on the one hand and how physical and cultural boundaries on the other told another story (cf. Fadel et al. 1999; Jørgensen and Bülow 1999; Toft 1999).

The material from the NOREL project shows that *Jyllands-Posten* was still publishing its theological columns every Sunday, and that Christianity, especially the national church, was not always covered negatively. There were stories on the renovation of the Cathedral in Aarhus, the new chasubles made by the Queen, the reopening of the Danish church in Paris, and the publication of a new hymnal. There was little news about Christianity in *Politiken*, but there was some on the church's dire economic situation, the declining attendance rate at Sunday services, and a few articles about a pastor who had hidden refugees who had been sent back to Serbia. One story featured in all three newspapers, both in news articles and letters to the editor. This concerned the publication of a textbook on minorities by the author Kåre Bluitgen. The chairman of the Council for Ethnic Equality advised the author to retract it or be charged with discrimination. Because the chairman was one of the bishops in the national church, the church was also dragged into the debate. *Jyllands-Posten* defended Bluitgen's freedom of speech, and accused the chairman of authoritarianism and censorship, while *Politiken* criticized the project. It was 'as well intentioned as it [was]

dangerous' because he was so set on 'provoking a debate that he [forgot about] promoting enlightenment'. Although the Muhammad caricature crisis was still seven years away, it is interesting to see the positions and read the arguments in this debate, because they can be seen as a rehearsal for a much larger debate to come. As it turns out, the Muhammad caricatures were a project initiated by Bluitgen.

In 1998 *Jyllands-Posten* launched an expedition called 'JP Explorer', featuring reports from wherever the newspaper's 4WD jeep went. In the NOREL material there were a few articles from Burkina Faso and Zambia which mentioned religion. In one article, entitled 'Sacrificing to the Sacred Fish of the Bush', the journalists discover that 'the most sacred beings according to the Bobo people are some cat-like fish far out in the bush. JP Explorer sacrificed a chicken, but was not convinced.' Later they report from their stay 'at the end of the world'. 'Where else would the new religious movement Raëlism meet? We freely admit that this sounds like a malaria-induced fantasy, but it isn't.' At Christmas the JP Explorer team met a Danish missionary couple in Zambia. They had sold their house and firm in Denmark because the husband had received a calling eight years previously. The explorers found this quite natural and did not exoticize them as they had the Bobo people or Raëlists. These stories show that the media was aware of religious diversity, but it is difficult to treat the diverse range of religious expression equally.

Religion in Danish newspapers, 2000s–2010s

One of the few other quantitative studies of the coverage of Islam and Christianity has been undertaken by Mathias Rosenfeldt. He examined the number of daily articles about these religions in *Jyllands-Posten*, *Politiken*, and *BT* in 1985, 1990, 1995, 2000, and 2005. He was only interested in the number of articles, not the actual content.

He found that Islam was mentioned in more articles in 2005 than in the other years in his sample, which is similar to the corpus data results shown above (Rosenfeldt 2007, 35). Part of this may be explained by the caricature crisis, but that debate was in itself a debate in the media (and eventually also the rest of society) on the way religious diversity could be addressed by the media in a setting where religious sensibilities might clash with secular freedoms. It is also noteworthy that the number of articles mentioning Christianity also increased in 2005.

Before the 2001 terror attacks the Council for Ethnic Equality decided to repeat the 1997 study of media representations. On this occasion Peter

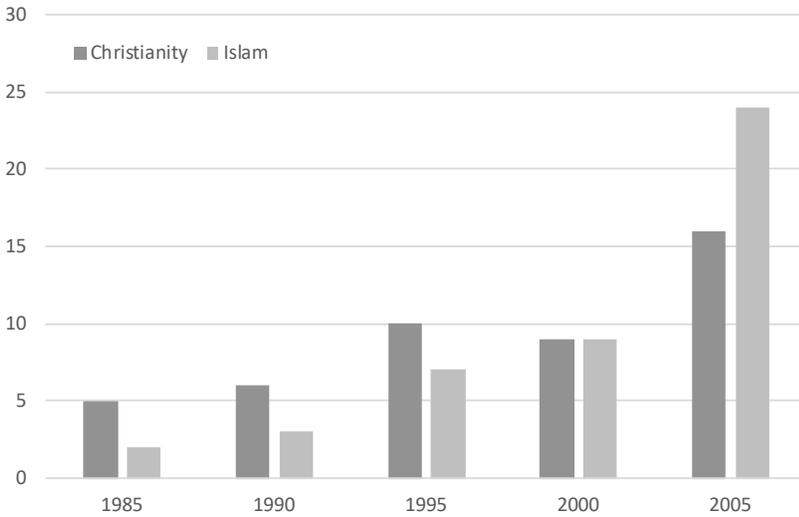


Figure 4: Daily articles about Islam and Christianity in selected years (Rosenfeldt 2007)

Hervik was responsible for the study. He wished to examine religion in the news. He writes that the preliminary title was *The Media's Religion*, because he wanted to examine the kind of religion the media covered. However, he discovered that the media only covered Islam, and settled on another title: *The Media's Muslims* (2002). Like previous studies, he concluded that Muslims were represented as supporters of an archaic, anti-humanist, totalitarian, violent, and ignorant religion (Hervik 2002, 127). Rikke Andreassen examined the construction of migrants in television news, and in her chapter on the veil she reached the same conclusion – that is, that the news portrayed Islam as repressive and intolerant (Andreassen 2007). Christensen (2007) examined the coverage of Islam in a representative sample of all the seven national dailies' articles on Islam and Muslims in 2001. He concluded that although 2001 was a special case because of the terror attacks, the nature of the coverage did not differ substantially from that found by Hussain and Larsen in the 1980s (Hussain 1988; Larsen 1988), or Madsen, and Gaasholt and Togeby in the 1990s. What had changed was not the coverage's actual content but the extent to and intensity with which the issue was discussed. This was a general pattern through the first part of the 2000s, but the Muhammad caricatures changed this. There was a natural division of labour in the coverage of Islam until 2005: the foreign news section covered Islam as a military and security threat in relation to military campaigns, the war on terror, and contemporary terror attacks around the world; the domestic

news section covered Islam first as an economic burden and later as a cultural threat against Danish values – for example, when Muslim’s demands were accepted in the school or health systems (cf. Sløk 2006). With the Muhammad caricatures and the terrorist attacks in Madrid in 2004 and London in 2005 the focus shifts to the new threat from homegrown terrorists. In 2005 the first group planning to carry out a terrorist attack was arrested, and two other groups followed in 2007. The security dimension thus also entered the domestic news. The caricature crisis saw the Danish news media publishing more articles on Islam than ever before. *Jyllands-Posten*, *Politiken*, and *Ekstra Bladet* published 8,378 articles the first year after the 2001 terrorist attacks; they published 13,243 articles the first year after the publication of the caricatures. Hervik published a qualitative and longitudinal study of the coverage of Islam in the press, with case studies from 1997 (an *Ekstra Bladet* campaign), 2001 (on young Muslims seeking influence in political parties), and 2006 (the Muhammad caricature crisis) arguing, as in the 1977 Danish book, that the news media supported and reproduced a neo-racist discourse (Hervik 2011).

Since 2010 the coverage has focused on terrorist attacks on European soil: Norway 2011; Paris and Copenhagen 2015; Berlin, Brussels, and Nice 2016; and London and Stockholm 2017. Asta Andersen argues that journalists presuppose that terrorism is committed by Muslims. Examining the coverage of Breivik’s attacks in Norway, she argues that ‘the expectation that terrorist attacks are Islamic is not immediately correlated with the probability that it is Muslims who have carried them out. Rather, journalists have been so accustomed to the fact that Islamic terrorism happens that this is how they understand and interpret reality’ (Andersen 2014, 252). This is more than probability; it is the lens through which reality is seen.

The coverage of radicalization is amplified by the civil war in Syria and the war against ISIS, because part of the coverage focuses not only on the risk of homegrown terrorists, but on how young Muslims born and raised in western societies join ISIS. As Taira mentions in the introduction, any differences between foreign and domestic news are interesting. There are some, but concerning Islamic terrorism the two types of news converge in the coverage of the security risks associated with the return of foreign fighters. In other words, coverage before 2001 placed the security threat in distant lands, while coverage after 2001 also focused on domestic security threats. The latest development is the homegrown terrorists who leave the country only to return more dangerous than they were before. The issue of Islam as a cultural threat and the silent Islamization of society also continues to

be of interest. After long preparation a new law against face covering came into effect in 2018, which was inevitably seen as targeting Muslim women wearing the burka or niqab. At the same time the government decided applicants for Danish citizenship should shake hands with a civil servant. In these debates both gender and lack of respect for Danish society and its values became important. And in both issues Islam (or some versions) has been seen as incompatible with Danish values.

Christianity has also been more visible in recent decades, but this does not extend to the Catholic Church. Benedict XVI was elected in 2005, but there was no anniversary coverage in 2008 or 2018. Although the Catholic Church has been covered intensely since the turn of the millennium because of sexual abuse, this does not appear in any of the material we have collected, and I have found no studies of the Danish media coverage of sexual abuse cases. Hjarvard uses this case as an example of how journalism investigates transgression and refers to *Berlingske Tidende*, where one hundred articles on sexual abuse were compiled and given a dedicated 'news theme' on their website (Hjarvard 2012, 33f). Meanwhile, Buddhism is covered in more articles than in 1988 and 1998. In 2008 the Olympic Games in China triggered a number of articles on human rights, the invasion of Tibet, and Buddhism in all three newspapers. Buddhism received other positive coverage. A curious example is an article in *Ekstra Bladet* about a Chinese construction worker who was buried alive by accident but survived, because he meditated and thereby decreased his oxygen consumption. In *Jyllands-Posten* and *Politiken* there are two articles on meditation practices: *Jyllands-Posten* published an article on meditation at the 'Institute of Depth Therapy', which offered free meditation classes to help all to achieve greater awareness and self-realization. Subscribers to *Politiken* were invited to a workshop on 'the five Tibetans' – meditation practices originally developed by Buddhist monks. In the 2018 material all three newspapers begin to discuss Buddhism negatively in their coverage of the conflict between the Buddhist regime in Myanmar and the attack on and eventual ethnic cleansing of the Muslim Rohingya ethnic group, who were being forced out of Myanmar into neighbouring countries.

Coverage of the majority church has become more visible in recent decades. After almost seventy years of coverage, *Jyllands-Posten* published the last of its Sunday theological columns in March 2009. Nevertheless, church issues has become more visible because of greater contestation. There have been several public debates on religion. In 2006 the cathedral in Copenhagen exhibited a statue depicting a crucified and pregnant African woman,

intended to criticize American and Vatican development aid organizations and their attitude to contraception. Another intense debate followed COP15 in Copenhagen in 2009. Some pastors suggested that churches should toll their bells three hundred and fifty times (to reflect the amount of CO₂ in the atmosphere if global warming were to be avoided). Like the statue in front of the cathedral, this led to an intense debate on the politicization of religion. Another debate in 2009 arose when a pastor (and his parish council) decided to grant asylum seekers sanctuary in their church. After months of tension, and in front of several hundred demonstrators, the police raided the church and arrested the people inside. The pastor was accused in the debate of taking the church hostage for political reasons. There have also been public debates on theology. Since the millennium, the newspapers have been arenas for the theological conflicts within the church. In 2003 a pastor wrote a book in which he denied the existence of a creator, but it was not until he was interviewed by a newspaper that it became a national public debate. The issue was debated for years, because the church (and the political system) did not know what to do. Some wanted him tried in an ecclesiastical court, but his parish supported him. This sparked a debate on the articles of faith. The pastor was under the supervision of various bishops until he retired. During the Christmas of 2014 *Jyllands-Posten* sent a questionnaire to all pastors, asking if they believed in the literal resurrection of Christ. Although the survey was anonymous, the pastor who had offered sanctuary in 2009 gave an interview in which he argued that he did not believe in the literal resurrection. He was placed under supervision for most of 2015, and the ending of this supervision was reported in the news. A few weeks later, in November 2015, another pastor announced in a television show that she believed in reincarnation and had no problems reconciling this with being a pastor. She was suspended but reinstated in early 2016 after a theological examination by her bishop. In all these cases the media played a pivotal role. These notwithstanding, one of the most important sources of debate in all newspapers is the 2012 law on same-sex marriage. The Labour government and the minister of ecclesiastical affairs agreed a new marriage law and charged the bishops with the task of producing an appropriate marriage ritual for same-sex couples. From the day of the government's announcement of its intentions to the day the new law was implemented, the matter was debated in the newspapers, and on radio and television (Christensen 2013). Finally, there have been debates on the relationship between Christianity and Danishness. Marie Vejrup Nielsen has examined the use of Luther in the debate section in *Jyllands-Posten* and

Politiken in 2000 and 2001. She argues that Luther is used as a rhetorical strategy for debating the role of Islam in Danish society and concludes the debates are political rather than theological debates on Denmark's national identity (Nielsen 2011, 317). Henrik Reintoft Christensen has examined the news in *Politiken*, *Jyllands-Posten*, and *Ekstra Bladet* in 2006 and finds a similar use of Christianity, which he argues is an indication of its culturalization (Christensen 2010). This was also evident in the debate following the 2016 Atheist Society bus campaign that encouraged people to leave the church (Thyssen 2018).

The category of religion in the news

This article has primarily focused on the coverage of national dailies in the last thirty years, though the first part of the analysis examined a much wider timeframe. The analysis has identified a number of continuities and discontinuities. From a purely quantitative perspective the total number of articles on religion has increased, but so has the total number of articles in general, and in the last two hundred and fifty years the share of articles on religion is smaller today than it was in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. However, we do not know the exact content of the material. Nevertheless, we can say that as with Lundby's analysis of documents concerning the Norwegian case (Lundby 2019), Lövheim's of the Swedish case (Lövheim 2019), and Taira's of the Finnish cases (Taira 2019b), Islam has also become more visible in the Danish news. Supplementing this, the longer historical timeframe of this study shows that the coverage is quite similar over time. Islam's representation as a religion in the 1876 introduction resembles much of the contemporary coverage, with a single great exception. Today, the Islam that is covered is itself in Denmark.

The journalist finds sources to contribute to a story and decides how it is framed, and in this sense most news organizations will not treat religious sources differently from nonreligious ones. The religious authorities have little involvement in the actual *production* of the news, but they may be used as sources, examined for transgressions, and made the *content* of the news. Such news can be differently framed, intentionally or unintentionally, based on the story, the newspaper/journalist, and general societal values. One of the core values in Danish society seems to be that religion is a private matter and should not be part of the public sphere. Much of the content about religion reveals that when religion is a major issue in an article, not merely an adjective about a person (being a cultural Christian), a group (Iran's

Islamic clergy), or a country (describing Israel as a Jewish state), it often revolves around transgressions or boundary disputes. The distinction between public and private is important in one set of boundary disputes. This is a primary distinction when pastors get involved in public life: boycotting Shell; harbouring deportees; or criticizing American development aid. This is also found in all the debates on the Islamization of society. In his focus on journalism about religion Hjarvard (2012, 32) argues that journalism brings religion into public and political life. This is also a general conclusion of the analyses of the coverage of religion in the news in this article.

However, it is worth emphasizing the irony in the widespread public discussion of a matter that is nonetheless suggested should remain private. The second boundary dispute focuses on the distinction between true and false Christianity. There are several examples of the coverage of theological disputes in the press, and they have become more frequent, with increasing diversity and individualization (cf. Taira in this issue). Must pastors believe in a creator or in the resurrection? Can pastors believe in reincarnation, or in clairvoyance and telepathy? These are debates in the national secular newspapers in Denmark, and in none are there voices arguing that religion is a private matter. These conflicts bear no relation to politics, education, or the public space, and it is apparently unproblematic to discuss religion in public. The third boundary dispute focuses on national identity, and the role religion plays in this. It examines whether you have to be Christian to be Danish, or if you can be Muslim. Very little attention is paid to religion as a public utility, but Christianity might be seen from this perspective as a narrative that strengthened national unity and cohesion. However, this is a more abstract idea of utility than Taira mentions in the introduction, which focuses more on welfare services.

It is clear that journalists observe religion according to the general criteria for newsworthiness. In this sense news production and its mediatization of religion is a secularizing force, as Hjarvard argues. But it is more than this. It is important to note that not all religions and not everything religious make the news. Some religions are more exotic, and some stories are more easily picked up as news than others. What do the stories of sacred fish in Burkina Faso, of attitudes to blood transfusions among the Jehovah's Witnesses, and the participation of pastors in public debates on climate change, the apartheid regime, same-sex marriages, and the use of Luther tell us about religion in the news? Despite their differences, they have at least one thing in common: they have been identified as newsworthy by journalists and their editors. Many stories never become news stories, and the media

representation of religion fails to reflect the multitude of religious expressions. News criteria often involve drama, conflict, and surprise, which are not necessarily features most religious people associate with their religious identity. The religion found in the media often irritates religious individuals precisely because the coverage is based on criteria which they do not think are very important. We see this in the coverage of Scientology, the Jehovah's Witnesses, and Islam in what Ali Hussain calls the clash of misconception (Hussain 2007). Hussain studies the caricature crisis, but this is relevant for how religion is represented in the news in general: the journalistic religious semantic is one of a kind. First, our observations of the media observations of religion reveal that norm violation and contestation – not merely secularization – is integral to them. Second, and more importantly, our observations reveal that there is a paradoxical continuity in the journalists' observations of discontinuities. Their existence depends on convincing readers that tomorrow will be different from today. However, today is often remarkably like yesterday.

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HENRIK REINTOFT CHRISTENSEN is Associate Professor in the Sociology of Religion, Aarhus University. E-mail: hc@cas.au.dk

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From Lutheran Dominance to Diversity: Religion in Finnish Newspapers 1946–2018¹

TEEMU TAIRA

University of Helsinki

Abstract

This article examines religion in Finnish newspapers, arguing that religion-related discourses have changed from one of Lutheran dominance to one of diversity. The main data consists of a longitudinal sample (1946–2016) of the most popular Finnish newspaper, *Helsingin Sanomat*, and especially of its editorials and readers' letters. Additional data covers a wider variety of newspapers from the 1990s to 2018. The data is analysed using quantitative content analysis and a discursive approach. It will be suggested that it is possible to discuss diversity both as an emergent discourse and a theme in the Finnish media since the mid-1990s, thereby overcoming earlier frameworks that took Lutheranism for granted or gave it a special role in the private sphere. The analysis shows that these shifts do not provide clear support for the idea that newspapers and journalism are anti-religious; rather, it suggests that they may be understood as having a 'liberalizing' effect, especially when religious values are not seen as compatible with those of journalists and newspapers.

Keywords: religion, newspaper, media, Helsingin Sanomat, Finland, the Lutheran Church, diversity, secularism, quantitative content analysis

Finland has long been one of the most homogeneous societies in Europe (Eurostat 2011). To be a member of the Lutheran Church has often been considered part of what it is to be an ordinary Finn. However, membership has declined from 95 per cent in 1970 to less than 70 per cent in 2018. Currently, religious groups other than Lutheran constitute a total of less than 3 per cent. The rest – around 26 per cent – is unaffiliated. These membership figures tell a story of secularization with slightly increased diversity. Another

1 This article is based on the material collected in the author's research project *Discourse on Religion and the Secular in the Finnish Media: Longitudinal and Comparative Study (1946-2010)*, funded by the Academy of Finland. The author would like to thank Research Assistant Katariina Björkman (University of Helsinki) for her help in collecting and coding the most recent data (2012, 2014, 2016).

more complex story emerges when public discourse is studied, though it is not completely different. This article offers a (new) narrative about religious change by studying Finnish newspaper discourse. By focusing on the most important Finnish newspaper, *Helsingin Sanomat*, it examines how discursive frameworks – established meaning-systems that provide a partial view concerning the topic or theme at hand – and religion-related themes have changed in Finnish newspapers since the end of the Second World War. With the aid of previous studies and one contemporary case, the material studied covers a much larger spectrum of Finnish newspapers and media outlets.

Having introduced the data and methods, *Helsingin Sanomat's* religious coverage will be explored. The analysis proceeds from the question of the visibility of religion to the argument about the main discursive shifts in its coverage. It will be suggested that it has been possible to speak of diversity both as an emergent discourse and a theme in the Finnish media since the mid-1990s, thereby overcoming earlier frameworks that took Lutheranism for granted or gave it a special role in the private sphere. The analysis shows that these shifts do not provide clear support for the idea that newspapers and journalism are anti-religious, but rather suggests that they may be understood as having a 'liberalizing' effect, especially when religious values are seen as incompatible with those of journalists and newspapers. The initial findings are based on one newspaper, but they will be contextualized in the Finnish media more generally with the aid of previous studies. The argument about the current importance of diversity will be further demonstrated by analysing the media debate concerning the singing of the Summer Hymn at school celebrations. Before concluding, this article offers an interpretation of continuities and changes in religion in Finnish newspapers by discussing the findings in relation to recent debates concerning the changing trends in the relations between the media (especially newspapers), religion, and society (Taira 2019).

Data and methods

The main data consists of editorials and readers' letters from the most influential Finnish newspaper, *Helsingin Sanomat*, between 1946 and 2016. In addition to the longitudinal material from *Helsingin Sanomat*, consisting of approximately 7 000 pieces, this article utilizes a variety of Finnish newspapers – national and regional papers, broadsheets, and tabloids – to highlight the more recent developments. These include one week's sample of three newspapers from 2014 (*Helsingin Sanomat*, *Turun Sanomat*, *Ilta-Sanomat* – a

national paper, a regional paper, and the most popular tabloid), and several newspapers (from the 1990s to 2018) and digital media platforms which discuss the Summer Hymn.

Soon after the Second World War *Helsingin Sanomat* grew from being a local newspaper to the biggest in Finland. In 2017 it had more than 300 000 subscribers and almost 700 000 readers daily (in a country with 5.5 million inhabitants).² It is the most powerful, serious, and most widely read newspaper in Finland. It has been nominally independent since 1932, but not always in practice. It is regarded as more liberal, right-of-centre, urban, ‘westward-looking’, and ‘modernizing’ than the Finnish media and the general population. Data has been collected from every second year between 1946 and 2016. The years have been collected in full. Although sampling in this manner may leave some topics unaddressed if they appear only in the years falling outside the sample, this sample covers the large-scale discursive shifts from the end of WWII to the present day.

Special emphasis will be placed on editorials and readers’ letters, because both have a more argumentative and persuasive function than (ideally) more descriptive news material. Furthermore, the editorials and readers’ letters complement each other: the editorials are not the most widely read part of newspapers, but they explicate the position of the paper in their authoritative, argumentative, and often anonymous style, construct the collective ‘we’, and raise topics for (other) people in power (Fowler 1991, 208–221), whereas the letters are one of the most widely read parts of the paper, addressing readers’ concerns to the general public. Indeed, the letters section of the newspapers have been – and still are, even in the age of the Internet and digital media – important public arenas where ordinary people as well as experts may have their opinions and ideas heard (Richardson 2007, 149; Taira 2013). Despite the development of comment sections on newspaper websites, 2010 was the record year for the number of submitted opinion letters to *Helsingin Sanomat*. What makes this observation more relevant in relation to religion is that the most popular topic – both in the number of letters sent and opinions published – concerned the Lutheran Church and same-sex relations.

Although editorials and published letters in newspapers cannot represent the public discourse, public opinion, or even the newspaper as a whole, these sections have been important arenas for public discussion in Finland. The letter selection process includes many typical traits and criteria: letters are usually written by readers; they are often written as a response to published articles and news; they must pass the editor’s selection process; they are edited in accordance with the paper’s style; and they are often placed next

2 Levikkitilasto LT2017 <http://mediaauditfinland.fi/levikit/tilastot/>

to opposing opinion on the same topic (Richardson 2007, 151). The selection criteria include newsworthiness, entertainment value, brevity, and authority (both in textual competence and personal character) (Wahl-Jorgensen 2002).

The analysis of primary material is based on mixed methods and broadly follows a combination of quantitative content analysis (QCA) (Bryman 2004) and the discursive approach utilized in Knott, Poole, and Taira (2013). QCA has been performed for the editorials and readers' letters, including coding based on several variables, such as date, genre, the author's religious affiliation, the author's gender, the religious tradition covered in the story, primary and secondary themes, attitude and use of certain keywords ('religion', 'secular', 'atheism', 'faith'), depending on applicability. All 1 448 religion-related editorials were coded; reader's letters were coded for every ten-year period (1946, 1956, 1966, 1976, 1986, 1996, 2006, 2016), but collected and manually counted from every second year. Only some variables will be analysed in detail in this article, but QCA provides numerical evidence and patterns for an analysis of discursive shifts.

The visibility of religion in *Helsingin Sanomat*

One of the current issues in scholarly debates is the question of the visibility of religion (Taira 2019). Although visibility can mean many things, this analysis pays attention first to the quantitative dimension. The result of QCA supports the idea of the increased visibility of religion. This is especially the case with editorials. The increase has been clear since the mid-1990s (Table 1). In the years analysed there was a total of 1 448 religion-related editorials. The annual average was 40.2, and there has been no year below the annual average since 1992.

Table 1: Religion-related editorials in *Helsingin Sanomat* (1946–2016)

Years	Religion-related editorials, annual average (and highest annual)	Editorials with words 'religion', 'faith', 'atheism', 'secular', or 'sacred', annual average
2012–2016	80 (2014 & 2016: 82)	9
2010–2004	82 (2004: 92)	25.5
2002–1996	86 (2000: 100)	23
1994–1988	31 (1994: 45)	7.5
1986–1980	27 (1986: 33)	8.75
1978–1972	27 (1974: 39)	7.5
1970–1964	31 (1966: 42)	12
1962–1956	21 (1962: 41)	6.25
1954–1946	11 (1948: 17)	4.6

The fact that the number of religion-related editorials has increased suggests that religion has become a topic that is considered worth discussing. Furthermore, as editorials often focus on world politics, the quantitative change demonstrates that religion and Islam in particular have become part of the global political debate. When editorials are coded according to whether they see religion gaining or declining in significance, and whether this is a positive or negative development, there is a major change in the mid-1990s. Since 1996 religion has been seen to gain significance, and the editorials have understood this as a somewhat negative development. This relates primarily to how the role of Islam is seen in conflicts. It is not only established religious traditions that have become more visible. Terms such as ‘religion’, ‘faith’, ‘atheism’, ‘secular’, and ‘sacred’ – arguably key terms in the discourse on religion – have been used much more frequently since the mid-1990s (Table 1).

The visibility of religion is also seen in published opinion letters, but the increase is not as obvious as in the editorials, and there are annual increases and declines (Table 2). The numbers between 1980 and 1986 are very high, peaking in 1982 with 328 letters, partly because the debate concerning Israel and Palestine was then extremely heated. Only in 2010 are there more published opinion letters (390), with the relationship between the Lutheran Church and homosexuality being the most popular among topics that extended to the Finnish church-state model and church resignations. However, it should be remembered that the overall space provided for readers’ letters has changed many times over seventy years, meaning that years are not fully comparable.

Table 2: Religion-related opinion letters in *Helsingin Sanomat* (1946–2016)

Years	Religion-related opinion letters in <i>Helsingin Sanomat</i> , annual average
2012–2016	122
2010–2004	227
2002–1996	166
1994–1988	169
1986–1980	217
1978–1972	117
1970–1964	138
1962–1956	140
1954–1948	63

If the increased significance of religion was seen negatively in the editorials (especially after the mid-1990s), the reverse is true for opinion letters. While the peak in imagined growth and significance was in 2006, what emerges overall is that religion is in decline, and that this is a negative phenomenon. Eighty per cent of the editorials saw religion as gaining in significance; only 25 per cent of the opinions shared this view. This complicates the task of interpretation, but two aspects should be highlighted. First, it reveals a general difference between the newspaper's editorial stance and readers' views. The editorial stance has been slightly more critical of religion than those who write opinion letters. Second, it stresses the difference between the themes in editorials and opinions. The former often deals with world politics and writes critically of the rise of 'political Islam', whereas the latter includes plenty of letters in which the declining and challenged role and status of the Finnish Lutheran Church is seen as an unfortunate development. Both developments contribute to the overall visibility of religion, but in different ways.

When the opinion letters are divided by the author's gender, it is clear that men's voices dominate the visibility of religion. In 1946 and 1956 most opinions were unsigned, meaning that the gender of the writers is unknown. Later years give a more precise result: women's opinions cover 23–48 per cent of the signed religion-related letters every year between 1966 and 2016. The overall gender division is 70 to 30 per cent in favour of men, though the share of women writing readers' letters has increased. The women's share is highest in 2016. What also characterizes this increased visibility is that the percentage of religiously identified people in opinions has increased. In 1996 the percentage of Lutherans was 17, and in 2006 it was 21; previously, the percentage was less than 10. Furthermore, religiously identified non-Christian authors have written more letters in recent decades: there is only one in the sample before 1986 (in 1966), but there have since been twenty-seven in the remaining four years (1986, 1996, 2006, 2016). This is not a big number, but it marks another small change in the visibility and diversity of religious voices.

Overall, QCA suggests that the visibility of religion has increased, but how exactly religion and its role have been understood in the newspaper requires a more detailed reading of the material.

Lutheran dominance and secularism before the 1990s

The history of the newspaper discourse on religion in Finland since the end of WWII can be divided into three main phases. According to the data collected from *Helsingin Sanomat* the role and location of religion in the first

phase, which continues until the mid-1960s, can be described as public, even though religion features rarely in the editorials. Lutheranism was a normal, mainly taken-for-granted part of Finnish society, and the Lutheran Church was seen as one of its moral backbones. This is exemplified in the fact that *Helsingin Sanomat* used to offer the writing of one of its editorials to church people during Easter and Christmas. This tradition continued until 1964. On Good Friday 1962 Bishop Olavi Kares signed the paper's only editorial, which suggested that even in good economic times it was important to remember 'the ultimate values of life':

The word of Christ, according to which one does not live on bread alone, refers to a fact whose value remains the same at all times. [...] In this great day of Christendom we are reminded of the deepest values of life that hold no less in recession, in troubled times, and when facing death (20 April 1962).

From today's perspective such an editorial is inconceivable. It is a manifestation of the then strong presence of Christianity in Finnish society as a whole. When I mentioned at a conference that church leaders had written and signed the main editorials in *Helsingin Sanomat*, a person who had worked for the paper for years was astonished. She later told me that she had not at first believed it, because she had started working at the newspaper during the second phase, when attitudes were already different.

Something changed in the mid-1960s. It is possible to say that the role and location of religion was now seen as private by *Helsingin Sanomat*, or at least more private than before. The Lutheran authorities were less visible in the newspaper, and the paper itself introduced a new hierarchy. Secular modernization was seen as leading the country to success, and the Lutheran Church was accepted and even valued if it did not prevent this more urgent and important process from happening. The paper supported clear and further separation of the church and state, but it cannot be said to have been anti-religious or anti-Lutheran as such. Religion was conceived as something that does not really belong to the public life of the modern world, but it could have many positive functions in its own differentiated sphere.

As early as 1962 a *Helsingin Sanomat* editorial declared that we had moved to the age of science, suggesting that the results of scientific research were a precondition for progress in our culture (23 February 1962), but the implications for religion and the Lutheran Church were made explicit later. An example of a 1972 editorial illustrates the official stance of *Helsingin Sanomat* regarding the changed church-state relationship:

In principle there is a consensus in Finland that the church should be autonomous and independent of the secular power, and that the state should be religiously neutral. In practice, the rethinking of the relationship between the church and state comes down to money: the church does not want to give up its right to tax. This is why the separation between the church and state requires an even longer process here than in Sweden (8 March 1972).

QCA identified the same shift. When editorials' views of the relationship between religion and the secular as conflictual or compatible were coded, the result was striking: between 1946 and 1966 there were more editorials about compatibility, but this trend has since reversed. As more than half the editorials were coded as 'undecided' (56 per cent), this result is not entirely trustworthy, but the reverse in the balance is so clear that it supports the argument that a discursive shift occurred in the latter part of the 1960s.

The main discursive shift is from taken-for-granted Lutheranism to the emergence of secularism. Two qualifications, however, are important here: first, secularism did not mean an anti-Lutheran stance but a 'moderate secularism' (Modood 2010); and second, the secularist discourse was limited to the educated elite and entailed no serious decline in people's general religiosity. Indeed, church membership fell only 8 per cent between the 1940s and 1990s (from 96 to 88 per cent). What was significant was the new hierarchy between Lutheran religion and secular modernity. Religion-wise, the norm was still that one size fitted all, as there was as yet no serious debate on religious diversity.

The emergence of diversity

The newspaper discourse changed again in the mid-1990s to one of 'diversity'. In this phase the role and location of religion becomes floating and contested as the Evangelical Lutheran Church has to justify itself against secularist voices and in relation to other religions. Almost all conversation partners agree that Finland is a country where people have different convictions, though they differ concerning the extent and type of diversity they support. This can be detected by looking at the debates where the agreed principles can be studied (as in the Summer Hymn case, analysed later in this article) or by looking at the newspaper content. In this shift towards diversity *Helsingin Sanomat* does not fully reject its previous position, but several pro-Lutheran views can be identified in the editorials, even when diversity is emphasized.

There was a large increase in the number of immigrants in the 1990s (Martikainen 2013). It is therefore unsurprising that the media discourse on religious diversity emerges gradually at the same time. In *Helsingin Sanomat* the debate concerning the recognition of various minorities begins in the 1980s, but religion was not then a dominant theme. It was rather indigenous minorities and refugees who became the topic of public debate.

The increasing religious diversity as it pertains to Islam can be demonstrated quantitatively. The most commonly mentioned religious traditions in editorials are Islam (42 per cent) and Lutheranism (20 per cent). Christianity combined is mentioned in 37 per cent of editorials. The changing balance is interesting: in 1986 there were eight editorials about Islam and sixteen about Lutheranism, but in 1992 the respective numbers were fifteen and five.³ Every year since then Islam has received more editorial coverage than Lutheranism. The two dominant themes in the coverage of Islam are terrorism and the clash of cultures, both of which were practically non-existent themes in this data before the mid-1990s. However, editorials are quite a specific genre, often focusing on world politics. In this material, 74 per cent of the editorials dealt with foreign issues. The percentage has increased since 1988, and this suggests that awareness of the role of religion has become more global and consequently more diverse (as in Sweden, see Lövheim 2019).

Table 3: Increasing diversity in *Helsingin Sanomat* editorials

Editorials, <i>HS</i>	Before 1990 (21 years)	After 1990 (14 years)
Lutheranism	206	90
Islam	76	524
Catholicism	49	53
Judaism	62	78
Buddhism	5	10
Hinduism	7	21
New Religious Movements	1	9

The increase in diversity can be demonstrated by counting the number of editorials focusing on a particular religious tradition before and after 1990. Table 3 draws attention to the fact that the overall increase in diversity is led by Islam but not limited to it. Editorials dealing with the Lutheran Church have become rarer, but this is partly explained by its assumed diminished importance in Finnish society. Fewer editorials address the internal issues

³ For a similar development in Norway see Lundby 2019.

of the church, the role and place of Christian holidays, and the church's public role in Finland and abroad.

Increasing diversity can also be detected in readers' letters, though the number of letters focusing primarily on non-Lutheran religious traditions is relatively low. There is a clear increase in opinion letters dealing with Islam since the mid-1990s (0–1 letter per year 1946–1986, 10–27 1996–2016) and some increase in those dealing with Catholicism and Judaism. This does not mean that other traditions are not dealt with at all, but that they are not often the main tradition mentioned in the letter. Overall, the Lutheran Church dominates the topic of religion-related opinion letters, partly because opinion letters focus on local issues, but the material supports the idea that the emergence of diversity as a discourse and theme in Finnish newspapers should be located in the mid-1990s.⁴

Changes in opinion letters' themes over time offer further support for the argument about diversity. In 1956 and 1966 letters addressing the internal decisions of the Lutheran Church were popular, but this theme later loses its urgency. When this is contrasted with the increase in letters about the clash of cultures and religions in 1996 and 2006, the big picture emerges: the Lutheran Church's internal issues are rarely discussed – and the clash (and also cooperation) between different values and convictions is more emphasized.

The analysis of *Helsingin Sanomat* demonstrates the emergence of diversity in Finland's most influential newspaper, but it also reveals the continuing dominance of the Lutheran Church. Other studies largely confirm the increase in diversity, especially in relation to Islam. According to the sample of Finnish newspapers from 1988, 1998, and 2008, Islam's annual percentage in all religion-related articles has increased (4, 5, and 6 per cent respectively), whereas the percentage of Lutheran Church coverage – while clearly dominant – has decreased (56, 52, and 46 per cent respectively). There is no detectable proportional increase in non-Christian 'world religions' or non-institutional religions, but there is a clear increase in newspaper stories dealing with religion-critical groups (1, 2, and 6 per cent respectively) (Niemi 2013, 61–62; for Norway see Lundby 2019). A general rise of atheistic voices in the Finnish media since the mid-2000s has been noted in previous studies (Taira 2012).

4 Although the coverage of Islam is dominated by foreign news, there has been a significant increase in the coverage of Islam in Finland (as for local Islam in the Danish media, see Christensen 2019).

Liberal diversity: three observations on how the Finnish media currently deals with religion

The emergence of diversity as a discourse and theme represents a significant shift, but it does not tell us about (1) the media attitude to any particular religion. It focuses mainly on established and institutional religious traditions (i.e. ‘conventional religion’, see Towler 1974; Knott, Poole, and Taira 2013), but says little about (2) ‘popular’ religiosity and spiritualities. In addition, editorials and readers’ letters in *Helsingin Sanomat* tell us little about (3) the variety of newspapers and their religious coverage in Finland. These issues will be addressed briefly by focusing on the current situation.

(1) It is a common conception that the media is anti-religious, and there are often good reasons to think this. In Finland *Helsingin Sanomat* is considered to be especially critical of religion. However, the situation is more complex. Although the perception of the paper’s anti-religious flavour is strengthened by editorials that view religion and the secular as in conflict more often than compatible (83 and 17 per cent respectively), the reverse is the case for opinion letters (31 and 69 per cent respectively). Furthermore, when three Finnish newspapers were analysed – *Helsingin Sanomat*, *Ilta-Sanomat* (the biggest tabloid), and *Turun Sanomat* (the third biggest morning paper, based in the city of Turku) – from one week in early 2014, it was found that 20 per cent of all stories were positive, and only 9 per cent were negative (71 per cent resisted easy classification on the positive/negative story axis) (Taira 2014). These results resemble those of previous studies. Niemelä (2013, 63) found that only 3 per cent of the stories about religion in Finnish newspapers from 1988, 1998, and 2008 were clearly negative; 11 per cent were clearly positive. Rahkonen (2007, 36) concluded his study of newspaper coverage of the Lutheran Church by arguing that the mainstream media’s attitude to Christianity and church issues was positive and respectful, though sometimes distant. These results reflect interviews with twelve Finnish journalists who frequently write about religion: none identified as atheist; nine were members of the Lutheran Church; and four identified themselves as believers (Mutanen 2009, 44).

The analysis of newspapers suggests that negative coverage typically concerns value-conservative Christian revival movements, Islam, the Catholic Church, and New Religious Movements (Taira 2014). In the age of diversity, Lutheranism receives more positive coverage than other religions. The notion of the secularizing effects of the media’s increasing power (Hjarvard 2012; 2013) does not therefore find unambiguous support in Finland, especially when tested against the newspaper coverage of the Lutheran Church. It can therefore be suggested that the Finnish newspapers are ‘liberalizing’

rather than 'secularizing' (i.e. they are against religion only when there is a clear clash of values).

(2) Topics such as yoga and angelic healing are relatively popular in Finnish women's magazines (Puustinen, Rautaniemi, and Lauha 2013; Utriainen 2013), but they are not the only media forms which cover such non-institutionalized religiosity. In a case study dealing with references in Finnish newspapers during one week in 2014 it was found that 32 per cent of all stories were about weakly institutionalized popular religiosity and spiritualities (Taira 2014) (or what is sometimes called 'common religion' as opposed to 'conventional religion'). This large percentage is partly due to the fact that it covered a wide area from spiritualities to mythologies, and supernatural beings to magic and clairvoyance. Many of the references were short and not intended to be taken seriously, but as a whole they contributed to thematic diversity. Furthermore, a few stories suggested that popular religiosity outside institutional settings was a common element in Finnish newspapers, especially outside hard news stories.

(3) In the same study it was found that *Helsingin Sanomat* contained more references to religious issues than other papers. This was mainly because it has more pages than the other papers. A more significant difference in their profile was that the biggest tabloid, *Ilta-Sanomat*, contained only 45 per cent of conventional religious references, whereas in *Helsingin Sanomat* and *Turun Sanomat* such references comprised 72 and 84 per cent respectively (a similar pattern has been found in the British media, see Knott, Poole, and Taira 2013). Where conventional references were concerned, *Helsingin Sanomat* was more diverse and contained more articles about Islam and other non-Christian established religions than other papers (Taira 2014). This was also found in another study focusing on three regional newspapers – *Ilkka*, *Kaleva*, and *Karjalainen* – in addition to *Helsingin Sanomat* (Hokka et al. 2013; Sumiala et al. 2017). Another significant difference was that *Helsingin Sanomat* contained slightly more articles featuring 'outsider' commentators (such as experts, researchers, officials working for the government or in public institutions) than articles with religious commentators. Outsider commentators were rarely used in *Ilta-Sanomat* and *Turun Sanomat* (Taira 2014). As some of the findings are based on a small sample, we should be cautious about drawing conclusions, but it can be suggested that this at least does not offer evidence for the argument for an anti-religious media, because religious people are often the only ones who get to speak in religion-related news articles in addition to the journalists themselves. In a sample of thirty-five stories about religion, twenty-two used only religious commentators, while only

six excluded religious voices altogether. Seven stories used both religious representatives and other experts (Taira 2014).

These observations add to the emerging discourse and theme of diversity. They show that even when the idea of diversity is shared, (1) newspapers are quite supportive of the social and cultural role of the Lutheran Church. (2) Relatively positive content is sometimes extended to non-institutionalized 'spiritual' expressions in newspapers, though this is more common in tabloids, and (3) other Finnish newspapers tend to be even more approving of religion than *Helsingin Sanomat* in their highlighting of 'insider' religious voices.

Debated diversity: the case of the summer hymn

One of the best examples of recent developments in newspapers' conceptions of diversity is the continuing controversy about the singing of the Summer Hymn (*Suvivirsi*) in schools. This is an old song that is sung at spring celebrations in schools before the summer holiday. The lyrics deal with the blossoming of nature and refer to God (second verse), the Lord (third verse), the Creator (third verse), and Jesus (fourth verse). It is included in the Lutheran hymnal and is typically part of the Sunday service at Midsummer. The general attitude to singing the song in schools is very positive. According to Gallup *Ecclesiastica* surveys conducted in 2011 and 2015 84–85 per cent had a positive or very positive attitude to the practice. Only 4–5 per cent opposed it (Sorsa 2016, 184). Despite the popularity, there has been an ongoing debate in the media since the mid-1990s about whether its singing should be allowed.

The Summer Hymn has been sung in most Finnish schools since the end of WWII. It has been part of an upbringing in a 'homogeneous culture' with strong ties to the Lutheran Church. There were some debates at the beginning of the 1970s (Lehtonen 2012, 225), but the contemporary debate is of a larger scale, and there have been more cases of principals deciding to drop the hymn from schools. I have studied the debate based on material collected from several newspapers and interest group publications such as teachers' and freethinkers' journals from 1990 to 2018.

The media debate about the Summer Hymn intensified in the mid-1990s, coinciding with increasing diversity in Finland. The debate has continued in the twenty-first century, as Table 4, which includes information about the number of articles with references to the Summer Hymn in two of the biggest Finnish newspapers, shows. The debate underlines that the public discourse has shifted since the time when the role and status of practices

related to and associated with the Lutheran Church were not continuously questioned. It is framed according to the understanding of Finland as a diverse society including a variety of religious and nonreligious convictions.

Table 4: Articles referring to the Summer Hymn in *Helsingin Sanomat* (*HS*) and *Ilta-Sanomat* (*IS*).

Years	Annual average of Summer Hymn articles in <i>HS</i> and <i>IS</i>
2015–2018	22
2010–2014	38
2005–2009	23
2000–2004	21
1995–1999	22
1990–1994	5

The main issue in the debate is whether it is appropriate to sing a ‘religious’ song in a public, ostensibly ‘secular’, school. Various solutions are offered – to drop the song altogether, to continue to sing it, to sing it but offer an opportunity to opt out of such events, or to include songs and celebrations based on other convictions. There are two key positions in the debate concerning the classification of the hymn. First, that the song is part of Finnish tradition, not an example of religious practice, and it is therefore reasonable to continue the practice without a special requirement to integrate the practices of other religions and convictions at school events. This is the dominant and most popular position – and the position of the public voices of the Lutheran Church. An example of this is a column written by Ulla Appelsin, the editor-in-chief of *Ilta-Sanomat* since 2010:

However you twist the issue, it is difficult to regard the Summer Hymn as anything other than a song that celebrates life and symbolizes the ending of school. It is a beautiful tradition which brings tears to the eyes of many mothers and fathers. A single song cannot be a big problem. It just cannot be (Ulla Appelsin, 25 March 2014, *IS*, column).

The second position argues that the song is religious. It privileges one religion, and it may offend nonreligious and non-Christian people. It should not therefore be sung in schools. This is the minority position of campaigning atheists, secularists, and freethinkers – some of whom are also teachers.

Here is an example written by a teacher of philosophy, Juha Eerolainen, published in two opinion letters in *Helsingin Sanomat*:

Is the Summer Hymn religious? According to the church, hymns are sung prayers, and this includes the Summer Hymn.

Freedom of religion is part of human rights, and Finland has committed itself to follow them. [...] It is part of schools' educational task to guide pupils to be sensitive to various minorities. We should allow all pupils, independent of their convictions, the opportunity to participate in the spring celebration of their own school (Juha Eerolainen, 12 June and 2 July 1996, *HS*, opinion letter).

The examples clarify how the hymn is classified differently, but they also reflect other tendencies. The first is a column written by an editor-in-chief, while the second is a reader's letter. Critical and secularist views are more likely to be found in letters than in editorials or news stories. The first example highlights emotions; the latter focuses on rights. This reveals how the debate is framed: supporting the singing of the hymn is assumed to be a sentimental and sensitive issue for many; its classification as 'religious' must be stated within the rhetoric of rights to be taken seriously.

It is revealing that representatives of other religions are rarely heard in the debate, but both key positions share the idea that the issue must be justified against the presence of a diversity of convictions. In the first position diversity is neutralized by claiming that singing is part of tradition and therefore neither religious nor in violation of anyone's belief or conviction. In the second position diversity is seen equally as a fact to be taken into account, but the solution is to drop the song entirely from schools on the basis of equality and freedom *from* religion.⁵

It is perhaps most surprising that it is difficult to find opinions from non-Christian religious voices in the media, and even more difficult to find any non-Christian religious voice opposing the singing. In other words, immigrants and adherents of non-Christian religions are not heard, but they provide a framework for the discussion. This is further evidence of the discursive shift previously sketched in this article. Thus, the discussion

⁵ The first position is also an example of the 'culturalization' of Christian symbols and practices that have typically been classified as 'religious'. Christian Joppke (2018) sees this as an example of secularism, whereas I follow Lori Beaman (2012; Beaman et al. 2018), who sees it as a strategy by which Christian hegemony is re-established in times of diversity.

of the justification of singing the Summer Hymn is itself an example of the changing discourse: without a shared understanding of the 'fact' of diversity, the entire debate would make little sense.

The newspapers have been very supportive of singing the hymn. The editor-in-chief of the biggest conservative tabloid even initiated a petition in 2011 for maintaining school celebrations, including the singing of the Summer Hymn. Diversity is something that can be accepted and taken into account, as long as it does not require the dominant culture to change too much. This is the position the newspapers defend, though the opportunity to opt out from participating in the singing event is also considered necessary.

Interpreting continuities and changes

It is difficult to determine precisely the extent to which social, political, and economic changes have affected how newspapers portray and understand religion. Finland has undergone rapid modernization since the Second World War. In the late 1940s and 1950s the Finnish economy was still strongly based on agriculture. The newspaper discourse labels this period the time of the 'moral economy', in which a presumed homogeneous and unanimous Finnish society felt it was its moral task to construct an affluent society after the war (Alasuutari 1996). My analysis suggests that religion played the role of a social glue that reminded people of the existence of a moral community, symbolized by the Lutheran Church and its largely unquestioned role in society. Newspapers for the most part contributed to the construction, maintenance, and dissemination of this discourse.

In the mid-1960s the 'planning economy' discourse was formed. It suggested that society and the economy blossomed best when rational organization and state-led planning were taken as the leading principle and combined with a belief in economic progress and democratic values (Alasuutari 1996). This was the period of further industrialization, when the factory became the bedrock of the economy. Religion – still referring mainly to Christianity and the Lutheran Church – was subjected to these ideals. It also indicated the development of a religious-secular binary in the media, and in the official stance of *Helsingin Sanomat* especially, it crystallized in the demand for the further separation of the church and state.

The shift from a 'planning economy' to a 'competition economy' occurred in the 1980s. The new discourse emphasized free market competition rather than state-led planning. People were conceptualized as individual customers with individual desires rather than, say, healthcare patients, social welfare

clients, and members of religious communities. This can be seen as a shift from the industrial to post-industrial mode of production, in which the locus of production was not the factory but the company. If the earlier dominant newspaper discourses on the economy are easily matched with the changes analysed here, the competition economy is visible in the context of religion a little later. It was especially in the mid-1990s that growing diversity started to play a role in the newspaper discourse. Diversity placed pressure on the previous ‘partial monopoly’ (Davie 2015, 97) of the Lutheran Church and enhanced competition. However, this did not entail the end of the Lutheran Church’s privileges. It is rather the case that the Lutheran Church was required to justify its role in public discourse, and this justification was not made by defending the religious nature of practices, but increasingly by referring to tradition, cultural heritage, and public utility. The media maintained this framework for public discussion, but within it they tended moderately to support the ‘liberal’ sections of the Lutheran Church.

The recent developments analysed here go hand in hand with the gradual dismantling of the traditional state-church model in Finland. Changes in legislation concerning religion can be seen as attempts to accommodate diversity (Kääriäinen 2011), but it would be too simple to call this a dis-establishment process. On the contrary, it appears the ‘weak established church’ – referring to the idea that other religious communities are given support or certain privileges, bringing them closer to the established church (Davie 2015, 95–8) – is the strategy by which the Lutheran Church can best guarantee its own privileged position when diversity has become a shared principle in the media discourse on religion.

Religion has become a more visible topic in the Finnish newspapers, but this does not mean that people have become more religious or that religion is more appreciated than before. The ‘resurgence’ of religion (see Taira 2019) is not therefore the best term to describe the situation: it does not describe Christianity in the Finnish media and society accurately, and although the discussion of Islamic fundamentalism plays a prominent role in the media, it is debated primarily in the context of world politics rather than that of local and national issues. Moreover, while Lutheran leaders especially are valued public voices in the media, visibility is not the same as ‘public religion’ (Casanova 1994). Religious voices may be rational conversation partners and remain acknowledged resources in times of crisis, and they can enliven the debate concerning the public good, but such cases are exceptions and such voices are limited to liberal Lutheran leaders. Casanova’s argument about the de-privatization of religion and the formation of public religion

since the 1980s therefore applies to a very narrow section of society. It is also clear that religious voices have existed as rational conversation partners in the media throughout the studied period.

The emergence of diversity is connected to a parallel development in which religion changes from being based on collective obligation to individual choice. It is almost a trivial observation that there is no duty to believe, to participate in religious events, or to be a member of a religious group. However, two qualifications should be made – both relevant to the newspaper coverage of religion. First, being a member of the Lutheran Church or having a relatively positive attitude towards the role of the church in society is still the preferred option, and this is reflected in moderately positive newspaper coverage of liberal Lutheranism and in somewhat critical coverage of anti-religious voices (Taira 2012; 2015). Second, religion is typically presented as a collective activity. There is an increasing number of stories about individual paths, but for the most part religious people do not have an individual voice in the newspapers – they are taken as representatives of a particular community independently of their actual position within it.

Religion is often covered as part of conflict, but religion is also covered, understood, and largely accepted as a public utility (see Taira 2019). This is mainly the case with the mainstream Lutheran Church, and much less when the focus is on minority religions. Everyday newspaper coverage of the Lutheran Church often concerns rites of passage such as marriage ceremonies and funerals. The tabloids are particularly keen on publishing stories about celebrity weddings and funerals that take place in churches, whereas civil marriages and nonreligious funerals are rarely used as material, though civil marriage is now more popular than church marriage.

Another aspect of religion as a public utility is the enhanced role of religious institutions in providing welfare services (in the Finnish and Lutheran context see Kallunki 2010; Yeung 2003). The crisis of the welfare state is a popular topic in newspapers, and religious institutions are increasingly part of this debate. Some media stories accept the idea that the Lutheran Church is a force for good, because it has taken on some of the welfare roles the state no longer supports as strongly as it once did. However, this discourse is mainly generated by theologians and bishops, who are given space in the newspapers as guest columnists and opinion writers. The professional journalists themselves, at least in the context of *Helsingin Sanomat*, play a less significant role.

The statistics show that secularization is underway in Finland. This is crucial for the legitimacy of the church, because one of the key justifications of its role has been that the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland is the church of the majority of Finns. There was a peak in church resignations

during the recession in the early 1990s, but this was otherwise a period of slow decline. A new crisis began in the 2000s, especially after 2003. The recent resignation peaks in 2010 and 2014 were related to the church's allegedly conservative nature, which has been highlighted in media debates. The peaks clearly demonstrate how influential the media can be, supporting the idea of the mediatization of religion (see Taira 2019), but this does not mean that the media or newspapers are unambiguously a secularizing force, as previously suggested. The media has considerable power over religious institutions, but at least in the Finnish context it is by no means clear that the media, or newspapers more specifically, uses its power to spread anti-religious ideas.

Conclusion

This article has offered an analysis of religion-related discursive change in Finnish newspapers and suggested that a shared discourse about living in a diverse society has become a dominant framework for religion-related media debates since the mid-1990s. Diversity is not embraced by all, but it is a starting point for both the newspaper coverage of religion and the subsequent debates. None of this has entailed the end of the privileged position of the Lutheran Church, but its privilege must be justified in public discourse within the frame of diversity. This discursive change in Finnish newspapers aptly echoes what Anthony Giddens (1994) has called a 'post-traditional situation', in which all traditions lose their taken-for-granted status and must be justified in public discourse. In the diversity framework Lutheran Church practices are often justified by reference to tradition, culture, or heritage. The most influential media outlets defend Lutheran 'tradition' in general and the singing of the Summer Hymn in schools in particular. This means that a certain kind of religiosity is seen as compatible with the current mode of modernity – especially liberal, moderate Lutheranism – while the privileges of the Lutheran Church are publicly negotiated and challenged at the same time.

A significant element of this discursive change is the increased media awareness and visibility of religion. This article has offered quantitative evidence and qualitative analysis of that development. This visibility does not indicate a rise in religiosity as such; it testifies to religion being seen as both a problem and a resource (as in Sweden, see Lövheim 2019). In its capacity to direct people's understanding of religion the media is a powerful institution, but on the basis of this study Finnish newspaper coverage is not

anti-religious as such. Although papers publish stories that are critical of religion, especially when journalists and readers who write opinion letters consider themselves more liberal than religious communities, they usually write favourably about the Finnish Lutheran Church while maintaining that the diversity of conviction is important.

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TEEMU TAIRA is Senior Lecturer in Study of Religion, University of Helsinki.
E-mail: teetai@utu.fi

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Conflictual Diversity and Contested Cultural Heritage: Newspaper Coverage of Religion in Norway 1938–2018

KNUT LUNDBY

University of Oslo

Abstract

The visibility and diversity of religion in selected Norwegian newspapers published in the capital of Oslo is studied in a quantitative analysis at ten-year intervals from 1938 to 2018, with an emphasis on the last forty years. Recent structural transformations in the newspaper industry and editorial choices cut the number of articles on religion considerably in 2018 compared to earlier years. However, the relative visibility of religion in the share of the total editorial output is fairly stable, at about 1.5 per cent of the content. Rather, the changes have been with the diversity and criticism of religion. The representation of Islam has strongly increased, while the newspapers have played down the coverage of the Lutheran majority church. The conflictual diversity and contested cultural heritage in the newspaper material are partly shaped by the media dynamics in the mediatization of religion.

Keywords: Norway, newspapers, visibility of religion, mediatization, diversity

This article aims to trace and discuss changes in the coverage of religion in the main Norwegian newspapers at selected intervals from 1938 to 2018. Changing newspaper coverage is studied especially in terms of the visibility and diversity of religion, with an eye on its contestation.

The ‘visibility of religion’ is simply taken as the presence of religion in the media and other public arenas, as opposed to invisibility and absence. Diversity in the study is opposed to homogeneity (Taira 2019a).

This is not an historical account. Rather, the approach is one of media sociology, highlighting changes in newspaper tone and topics within the transformations of the media structure and the religious landscape in Norway.

Following brief outlines of how the media landscape and the religious landscape in Norway have evolved, the article sketches the newspaper coverage of religion from 1938 to 1978. The main part, however, concentrates on the forty years from 1978 to 2018.

The changing media landscape in Norway

In the context of the similarities of the Nordic media system (Taira 2019a; Lundby et al. 2018; Syvertsen et al. 2014) Norway has a decentralized newspaper structure. The focus on the daily press in this study means that many papers have not been considered. Of the 223 titles listed in 2017 in Norway, fifty-one newspapers were published six or seven days a week (Høst 2018).

Unlike radio and TV, newspapers in Norway have always had private or political party owners. They have reflected class and regional distinctions, and opposing political views. Until the 1970s most cities – even smaller ones – had at least two newspapers, related to different political camps, each arguing for its view, even in the choice of topics and perspectives in news coverage. From the end of the 1970s this ‘party press’ evolved into a more independent press engaged in market competition. Although they preserved a political-ideological stand for their editorial opinions, most papers covered different and opposing views in their journalism. The introduction of television forced newspapers to take a broader, non-partisan perspective (Bastiansen 2006; 2009). Television came late to Norway, being introduced as a regular public service in 1960.

The Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation, NRK, is expected by parliament to cover religious life in the country. However, this was not stated explicitly until the first ‘NRK placard’ was issued by Stortinget in 2007. Previous Director Generals of NRK had themselves found reasons to transmit worship from churches and allow Christian preachers to deliver devotions, primarily on the main radio channel and sometimes on television (Lundby 2016).

From the 1980s the newspaper industry was consolidated in a series of mergers and new constellations as part of the transformation of the Norwegian media system. This was further ignited by digitalization from the latter half of the 1990s (Bastiansen and Dahl 2019, Ch. 8). The first newspaper in Norway to offer an online version was a local up-North paper in 1995. This was only two years after the launch of the first web browser made the internet available for information searches. Despite the changes in the newspaper industry, there has been remarkable stability in the number of papers, largely due to the Norwegian press subsidy system, which has operated since 1969. The share of newspaper readers has declined and has only partly been reflected in the rise of digital forms (Høst 2018). Digital news distribution has developed on the basis of the established print media, with publishing houses developing diversified online strategies (Slaatta 2015).

Especially during the last decade the newspaper industry in Norway, as

elsewhere, has endured drastic downscaling. Journalists have been laid off, and newspapers are slimmer. Global players in the new ‘platform society’ (van Dijck et al. 2018) like Facebook and Google have taken the steam out of the advertising economy of the national and local press. Furthermore, subscription income has declined because of the switch to digital news coverage and changing user habits, especially among younger generations. As will be shown, this transformation of the Norwegian newspaper industry has affected the coverage of religion.

The changing religious landscape in Norway

The search for ‘religion’ in the daily press allows us to observe how private and institutional forms and expressions of faith and spirituality appear in writing and images in newspapers as public arenas. The newspaper coverage shows only fragments of religious life and power structures. The press must select what to represent. Through framing (Entmann 1993) and formatting (Lundby 2019) editors and journalists shape a particular public perspective on religion. In its exposure over time to media dynamics, religion as a social and cultural phenomenon may itself change. This is accounted for in theories on the mediatization of religion (Taira 2019a; Hjarvard and Lundby 2018; Lundby 2018b; Lövheim and Lied 2018; Hjarvard and Lövheim 2012).

In parallel with the breaking of the monopoly and intensified market competition in the media sphere since the early 1980s, the diversity of the religious landscape has increased. At the end of the 1970s Norway experienced the first widely organized public initiatives to encourage people to leave the dominant Lutheran state church, and the first influx of Muslim immigrants. There had been a plurality of Christian denominations before, but diversity slowly became more visible with the growth of Islamic congregations and the secular humanist association.

No single theory of the sociology of religion – whether it concerns secularization, de-secularization, or post-secularity – has catered for the transformations of the religious landscape in the Nordic countries in recent decades. Rather, changes should be understood through the meta-theoretical concept of religious complexity, in which multiple religious trends that may even seem inconsistent simultaneously coexist. The concept implies relationships between different levels in empirical analyses, reciprocity between modernization and secularization, and openings for sudden and non-linear social change (Furseth 2018). A study of religion in the Nordic

media sphere reveals religious complexity since the 1980s, to which various media have contributed (Furseth et al. 2019).

Religion has always been contested, but alternative minority voices have not easily been heard in the public sphere. A study of religious change in the Nordic region from 1930 to 1980 (Gustafsson 1985; 1987) found it possible to 'speak of a common religious culture in the five Nordic countries' centred on the similar 'folk churches', i.e. Lutheran majority churches (Gustafsson 1987, 180). However, the forms of state church differ. Norway changed its constitution in 2012, with a further dissolution of the link between church and state in 2017.

In summarizing the 1930–1980 project, Göran Gustafsson indicated that 'factors external to the religious culture and the churches' organizational forms' were as 'important in determining religious activity' (Gustafsson 1987, 180). He pointed to the position of religion in the mass media as the crucial factor (Gustafsson 1985, 263).

The first forty years (1938–1978)

The forty years from 1938 to 1978 must be mentioned briefly because of the limited empirical studies of religion-related media content in Norwegian newspapers. This period was dominated by the party press and the Lutheran state church, with the exception of the Second World War years.

The political tension before the war was between a liberal-conservative base, the rise of agrarian fascism, and emerging social democracy. The church tended to be conservative. Its opposition to the Nazi government and occupation strengthened its position in the years immediately after the war. The social democrats took the political lead in a period of political stability and toned down their previously critical stance towards the church and religion, finding the control afforded by the state church useful. Religious controversies received more attention in the press from the end of the 1970s. The party press structure was by then also beginning to loosen.

The study of religious change in the Nordic countries applied indicators for the selected years 1938, 1958, and 1978 (Gustafsson 1985; 1987), summarizing tendencies in 'Religion in mass media' in Norway (Lundby 1985, 188–189). Religion-related media content in four newspapers before Easter and Christmas was studied: the conservative *Aftenposten*, the social democratic *Arbeiderbladet*, the cultural-liberal *Dagbladet* – all published in the capital – and the regional paper *Stavanger Aftenblad*, with a liberal-conservative base.

There were more marked differences *between* the papers than between the selected years regarding the extent and content of the coverage of religion. The conservative paper from the capital and the regional paper both presented religion on the terms set by the dominant Lutheran state church, with respect for the authority of the church. The cultural-liberal paper was characterized primarily by the paucity of its pieces on religion or in its interpreting of religion in accordance with its own set of cultural codes. Its representation of Christianity was largely critical of the church or in connection with the arts. The social democratic paper lacked any considerable coverage of religion (but there was more in 1958 and in 1978 than in 1938). This paper emphasized the social and political aspects of Christianity, partly in a rewriting of church tradition as concurrent with its own.

Despite the differences, all four newspapers focused considerably more on Christianity in all three periods. In 1958 there was no coverage of other religions at all in the papers published in the capital. In 1938 and 1978 there was some, but more by chance and usually considered on the terms set by the dominant church. Material on other spiritual issues attracted little interest in all four papers. The differences between them stemmed rather from the angle they applied to Christianity.

The three papers from the capital were close in the profile they gave to religion from 1938 through 1958 to 1978, with Christianity becoming a more controversial topic in *Aftenposten* in 1978. *Aftenposten* still then treated Christianity institutionally, but placed more emphasis on private and individual religious expression. Compared with 1958, by 1978 *Aftenposten* was also moving from an unambiguously conservative to a liberal position in its coverage of the church and religion. The convergence on religion between the capital's papers also appeared to shift in the opposite direction, with *Arbeiderbladet* and *Dagbladet* being more institutional in their treatment of Christianity in 1978. Their criticism of Christianity was directed more than it had been towards the church rather than individuals or on the basis of theology.

The *visibility* of religion in columns was lower in *Arbeiderbladet* and *Dagbladet* than in *Aftenposten* and *Stavanger Aftenblad*. We have no figures to compare visibility across the selected years. The *diversity* of religion-related material was certainly limited in all four papers during this period. Despite the emerging controversies and critical tendencies in the representation of religion, the frame was still set by Christianity and the state church.

Media dynamics with contested religion

Religious diversity in society and in press coverage increased during the following forty years. This was researched by another group of Nordic scholars in the NOREL project on 'The role of religion in the public sphere' (Furseth 2018). Immigration 'changed the Nordic ethnic and religious landscapes and especially transformed Sweden, Norway, and Denmark into relatively diverse nations' (Furseth 2018, 3). With the social and political tensions associated with multiculturalism and immigration religion was more contested, which the press covered according to the dominant news values, with controversy and conflict being prominent news criteria (Harcup and O'Neill 2017).

Paradoxically in Norway, as in the other Nordic countries, widely held secular attitudes in the population and shifts towards a more secular state are combined with a persistence in membership of the majority church and its position in society (Taira 2019a). Christianity, especially as represented by the Church of Norway, appears as part of the country's cultural heritage. Until 2012 the constitution stated that 'the Evangelical Lutheran religion shall remain the official religion of the State'. The new formulation said that 'Our values will remain our Christian and humanist heritage'. Use of the term 'our' denotes a national imagined community (Anderson 1991), which may be in tension with a diverse and secular society.

The two scholars of religion, Cora Alexa Døving and Siv Ellen Kraft, observed new usages of 'the Christian cultural heritage' from the later 1990s, linked to being Norwegian and with an edge towards immigrant cultures. Similar changes took place in the Danish and Finnish media (Christensen 2019; Taira 2019b). In Norway Christianity began to be connected with nationality in political debate, and this was often played out in the news media, online commentary fields, and in social media. Being Christian was now related to culture instead of religion. 'Christian heritage' began to be argued from a different political position – most recently, prominent in the populist right-wing discourse (Døving and Kraft 2013, 75–99). The 'Christian heritage' discourse was intended to be inclusive but came to be exclusive of minorities. It was intended to encompass different positions and identities, but became contentious.

Religion has become contested. A range of case studies of such cultural tensions in Scandinavia points to the media dynamics involved in the contestation (Lundby 2018a). Mass media and social media make 'a communicative environment providing a horizon of orientation for citizens about conflicts relating to religion, and provide social actors with the tools to engage in such conflicts' (Hjarvard and Lundby 2018, 51). Three differ-

ent media dynamics operate. First, the media has an ability to *amplify* an event or a comment. Second, it *frames* the part of the world it represents and gives space to the *performative agency* of involved actors. Third, the media *co-structure* communication and action through the social and communicative environment of which they are part (Hjarvard et al. 2015). These are dynamics in the mediatization processes, in this case on contested religion, thereby partly shaping the aspects of religion at issue.

The last forty years (1978–2018): data and methods

The remaining part of the article focuses on the period since 1978, mainly with reference to the NOREL newspaper data from 1988, 1998, and 2008 (Furseth 2018, 327ff.; Lundby et al. 2018). A similar dataset on Norwegian newspapers in 2018 is added as an update. The actual data for empirical study has had to be selected and is thus limited. The conclusions are primarily based on quantitative content analyses of a few significant weeks throughout the year. Within the decentralized Norwegian newspaper structure this article confines itself to daily papers published in the capital. They are in part nationally distributed but naturally do not afford a full picture of the Norwegian daily press. To make comparisons across time, the article confines its focus to the print media. The reading undertaken digitally for this research is from the classical print media. This study does not, therefore, tackle the new digital newspaper forms. Despite these limitations, the study still offers a systematic analysis of newspaper coverage of religion in Norway.

The criterion to be regarded as an article on 'religion' is the explicit use of this term or the prominent expression in the article of the name of a world religion (e.g. Islam, Buddhism), a confession within a specific tradition (e.g. Lutheran, Catholic), a religious authority role (e.g. bishop, imam), a religious building (e.g. church, synagogue), other religious symbols (e.g. cross, hijab), and religious or spiritual practice. Thus, New Age and other new religious movements are included, as are atheism and life-view organizations when they appear as anti-religion. Articles may take a positive as well as a critical approach to religion and its role in society.

The NOREL study continues the content analyses of *Aftenposten* and *Stavanger Aftenblad* from the 1930–1980 research. The same applies to *Arbeiderbladet*, which changed its name to *Dagsavisen* in 1997. Instead of *Dagbladet* another tabloid, *VG*, was included. The methodology and results of the Norwegian part of the NOREL newspaper study has been reported elsewhere (Lundby et al. 2018; Lundby and Gresaker 2015; Lövheim and Lundby 2013).

This article presents a further comparison with the new data from 2018. As for the previous years, four two-week periods are selected: before Easter and before Christmas; before the end of Ramadan; and two weeks from a non-festive period in October. The coding is based on reading full-page newspapers, thus avoiding pitfalls with database searches for keywords (Linderman and Lövheim 2016).

The comparison focuses on the three newspapers published in the capital of Oslo whose journalism is of a secular nature (Døving and Kraft 2013). The selected papers are located in different ownership structures and cultivate different readership cultures (de Cheveigné and Veron 1997; Lövheim and Lundby 2013). *Aftenposten* and *VG* are both owned by Schibsted Media Group. The former relates to a middle-class readership in the wider Oslo area, while *VG* is a popular nationally distributed tabloid. *Arbeiderbladet* was owned by the Labour Party until 1991. Under its new name, *Dagsavisen*, the paper became an independent business, still cultivating a working-class and social democratic readership.

The quantitative content analyses distinguish between large and smaller articles, religion as a dominant and less central theme, religion represented in different genres, and reference to various religious traditions. A further more qualitative reading of selected articles is undertaken on large or medium-sized news pieces and features on religion from each of the two regular October weeks of the selected four years. These 140 articles are examined in terms of visibility and diversity of religion, and also of globality, individuality, public utility, and dominant voice (Taira 2019a).

The analyses of the Norwegian newspapers by Lövheim and Lundby (2013) recalculated the number of articles into indices, where those with religion as the main topic were given twice the value of articles in which religion was a less significant theme. This method emphasized visibility in terms of the prominence of religion in the article, whether it was a sizeable entry or a small paragraph. However, the use of such indices would complicate the argument here. The unit of analyses in the following is therefore the actual number of articles.

Decreased visibility?

The term 'visibility of religion' contains many theoretical features, especially in connection with propositions of a 'resurgence' of religion (Furseth et al. 2019; Taira 2019a; Hjelm 2015a), to be discussed in the concluding parts of this article.

At first glance there is a radical downturn in 2018 in the number of religion-related articles in the three Norwegian newspapers compared to the previous ten, twenty, and thirty years (see Table 1). There thus seems to be a sharp decrease in the visibility of religion.

Table 1. Visibility: Number of articles on religion in the four two-week periods each year

	1988	1998	2008	2018	All
<i>Aftenposten</i>	123	163	130	74	490
<i>Arb.bl./Dagsavisen</i>	62	95	90	28	275
VG	65	136	91	62	354
All	250	394	311	164	1119

Table 2. Absolute and relative visibility of religion in paper editions during the four researched two-week periods 1988, 1998, 2008, and 2018. Number of articles with percentages.

	1988	1998	2008	2018	All
<i>Aftenposten</i>					
–total editorial output	9 659	11 908	12 284	4 246	38 097
–articles on religion	123	163	130	74	490
–percentage on religion	1.3%	1.4%	1.1%	1.7%	1.3%
<i>Dagsavisen</i>					
–total editorial output	NA	NA	2 115	5 353	7 468
–articles on religion	[62]	[95]	90	28	118
–percentage on religion	--	--	4.3%	0.5%	1.6%
VG					
–total editorial output	3 684	3 917	9 254	3 699	20 554
–articles on religion	65	136	91	62	354
–percentage on religion	1.8%	3.5%	1.0%	1.7%	1.7%
All papers					
–total editorial output	13 343	15 825	23 653	13 298	66 119
–articles on religion	188	299	311	164	962
–percentage on religion	1.4%	1.9%	1.3%	1.2%	1.5%

Note: The total editorial output is calculated by searching the Retriever (Atekst) database, searching for the common terms, in translation: ‘and’ or ‘a’ or ‘on’, because one of these words is expected to appear in almost all articles. Compared to Lundby and Gresaker (2015; Table 3.6), there must have been a previous miscalculation of the total output in VG in 2008. The present table is based on a new, updated search. NA = data not available.

However, the picture changes when the restructuring of the newspaper industry is taken into account. The reductions in pages and journalistic staff caused by the rise of online news and the loss of advertising revenue to global platform companies have influenced the number of articles on religion, as on other topics. Estimating the total paper output of editorial material in each publication during the four researched periods each year allowed the share of articles on religion to be identified. There is thus an *absolute visibility* concerning the number of actual articles on religion and a *relative visibility* concerning the percentage of articles on religion of the total output. The totality of editorial material in a period was found by a search for one or more of the words 'and' or 'a' or 'on', assuming this would catch almost every article, regardless of topic.

The picture is not uniform. While the two Schibsted-owned papers, *Aftenposten* and *VG*, had severely cut their editorial staff by 2018 compared to 2008, *Dagsavisen* had doubled its number of editorial pieces. Their share of articles on religion, however, was much higher in 2008 than ten years later, despite the lower editorial total, an indication of editorial choice. Absolute visibility fell from ninety to twenty-eight articles on religion, while the relative visibility in *Dagsavisen* fell from 4.3 per cent to 0.5 per cent. This is the lowest share in Table 2. Regardless of the much lower absolute visibility of religion in *Aftenposten* and *VG* between 2008 and 2018, the relative visibility in these two Schibsted papers actually rose to 1.7 percent of the total output.

Across the four selected years, *VG* has the highest relative visibility of religion, with 1.7 per cent of its total editorial output. For the three papers together, 1998 was the peak, with 1.9 per cent of all articles on religion. The share went down to 1.3 per cent in 2008 and to 1.2 per cent in 2018. On average, 1.5 per cent of the editorial material was on religion, which is similar to the share for NRK, the public service broadcaster (Lundby and Gresaker 2015, note 5).

The cutbacks in journalistic resources and new layout norms may result in articles that take up more space, usually with larger photographs. This seems to be the case with *Aftenposten*. In 1988 nearly a third of the entries on religion in this paper were large articles over three or more columns. In 2008 and 2018 this was the case with two-thirds of such articles. *Dagsavisen* and *VG* has had a more stable share of large articles, with about half the entries in all four selected years. In 2018 *Dagsavisen* had more medium-sized articles on religion than before, while the portion of medium-sized entries went down in *Aftenposten* and *VG*.

The other side of this coin is the share of small pieces or paragraphs. Of the small total of 164 articles on religion in 2018, more than a quarter were this size. When papers are short of their own resources, they may also turn to condensed messages from the national news agency, NTB. Forty-three of the 164 articles in 2018 originated at NTB (27 per cent), appearing in the papers either as medium-sized or small pieces.

The changes in visibility thus reveal another aspect of the complexity of religion: in relative terms, the share of articles on religion may even be higher than before. But the absolute number of such articles is shrinking, primarily due to cuts in the newspaper houses. Religion as a topic is thus less visible in the paper versions of newspapers. Is the diminished presence of religion in the traditional print media countered by its visibility in online news, in social media, and in public service and commercial broadcast media, with their linear and streaming output in radio, television, and online services? Possibly not – but we do not know.

In which newspaper genres is religion visible?

Religious columns, i.e. articles of Christian proclamation or reflections by invited writers under separate headings, have disappeared over the years. Until the turn of the millennium many main newspapers carried daily or weekly Christian reflections in special columns. These comprised 5 per cent of all articles on religion in the three capital newspapers in 1988. Ten years later the share was down to 3 per cent, and in 2008 it was 2 per cent. In 2018 none of the three papers carried such columns.

The average share of editorials has been under 3 per cent of the articles on religion. Of the five registered editorials in 2018, only one was of a significant nature: *VG* going against the ban on face-coverings. The other four were merely very short, ironic ‘second-editorials’, a tendency also noted by Lövheim and Linderman (2015) in their study of Swedish editorials. In the Norwegian papers the editors today do not readily adopt an open position on religious issues. This seems not to be the case in Finland and Sweden (Taira 2019b; Lövheim 2019). Are the Norwegian editors avoiding conflict with their readership, or do they think religion has become irrelevant? Neither seems to be the case where news and debate pieces on Islam are concerned, as shown below.

While the papers avoid taking a stand on religion in editorials, the share of debate pieces on these issues is growing, as in Denmark (Christensen 2019). The growth in the Norwegian papers was from 8 per cent in 1988

to 23 per cent in 2018. In this sense, religious controversies have become more visible in the columns. News makes up the biggest share of articles on religion, but this is still down from 67 per cent in 1988 to 61 per cent in 2018. Larger features on religion were stable at 18 per cent in the three first selected years, dropping to 13 per cent in 2018.

In the second coding of the main and medium-sized Norwegian news articles and features from the two October weeks, religion tends to be presented as public (61 per cent of the 140 articles across the four selected years) rather than private (39 per cent, including internal church issues). The tabloid *VG*, however, has a fifty-fifty split between the public and private aspects of religion in its articles.

Increased diversity

The increased diversity in the coverage of religion in the selected newspapers reflects to some extent the increased diversity of Norwegian society, though the diversity of the coverage may not entirely reflect the societal trend. News is always edited.

The most remarkable trend is the increasing attention paid to Islam and the declining coverage of the Lutheran majority church, as in the other Nordic countries (Christensen 2019; Lövheim 2019; Taira 2019b). In Norway in 1988 the Lutheran majority tradition was covered in 62 per cent of the articles, while Islam accounted for 3 per cent. In 2018 Islam was the subject of 27 per cent of the articles, while the majority Lutheran church accounted for no more than 21 per cent. In 2018 the three capital papers evinced an interest in other forms of Christianity, which was a new trend (see Table 3).

Table 3. Diversity: Articles on religious traditions in the four two-week periods in percentages.

	1988	1998	2008	2018	All
Lutheran majority	61.6	57.4	33.1	20.7	46.2
Other Christianity	22.4	20.6	19.9	34.8	22.9
Islam	2.8	11.4	19.6	27.4	14.1
Other world religions	1.6	2.8	8.0	5.5	4.4
Non-institutional	4.0	4.6	5.1	6.1	4.8
Religious criticism	0	0.3	2.6	3.7	1.3
Unclassifiable	7.6	3.0	11.6	1.8	6.3
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
(N)	(250)	(394)	(311)	(164)	(1 119)

The coding for the other categories may be less certain because of the small numbers and the less clear criteria for catching them. World religions other than Islam and Christianity show a slight increase. As with non-institutional forms of religion, the average is just under 5 per cent of the articles. Religious criticism has become more visible but still constitutes only a small portion of the articles. However, such entries may easily have been overlooked. Unclassifiable articles had a much larger share (12 per cent) in 2008 compared to the other selected years, which may in part be due to coding uncertainty.

The media observer Retriever found that Islam was mentioned in *VG* ten times as often as Christianity in 2015. Islam did not become a topic in the Norwegian media until after the 1979 revolution in Iran (Michelsen 2016). A study across all Norwegian editorial media in 2016 showed that Islam and Muslims were mentioned more times than any crisis or debate that year (Retriever 2017).

One might expect that newspaper articles on religion before the great religious festivals would at least to some extent be related to the upcoming holidays: Easter, Christmas, and Ramadan before the breaking of the fast at Eid. However, this is only true to a limited extent. Although there is a larger share of religion-related articles before Easter and Christmas than before Eid or in the two October weeks, only a few relate to the Christian celebration. In 2018 this was the case with only four of the thirty-six articles; two were columns by bishops. Before Christmas seven of the thirty-nine articles were related to the specific Christian tradition. More articles were published in the two weeks before Eid than before Easter or Christmas, but only two concerned Ramadan: a photo in *VG* of Muslims in Malaysia 'looking forward to eating', and a debate piece in *Aftenposten* arguing against the irrational nature of Ramadan by a leading politician. (During and after the celebration of Eid there were three further articles).

The more detailed coding of large and medium-sized news and feature articles in the regular October weeks sought to identify whether religion was represented as part of a diverse and pluralist society or as a continuation of a dominant tradition. The outcome was mixed. Through the four time-cuts *Aftenposten* and *VG* carried as many articles about the Lutheran former state church as they did about a pluralist society. *Arbeiderbladet/Dagsavisen* leant more towards diversity.

The other key variables

The other key variables presented by Taira (2019a) were included in the second coding of the October weeks in 2018. These aspects tend towards a domestic, institutional, and collective perspective of religion in the three newspapers, which are also considered to a large extent a public utility. These variables are:

Globality as opposed to locality: All three papers tended to pay more attention to religion in the national, regional, or local contexts than to religion at the global or international level.

Individuality and choice as opposed to collectivity: As one would expect, all three papers clearly tended to represent religion as a collective and under a wider obligation, and less as individual expressions. Newspapers tend to focus on the institutional settings where power lies, but non-institutional religion has become somewhat more visible (cf. Table 3).

Public utility: Is religion considered useful for society and the public good, or is it represented as a self-enclosed institution, something in itself? In most articles this was not touched on, but when visible the coverage leaned towards religion as a public good. This included implied public utility (e.g. in relation to the royal family). Religion as something in itself includes the church's internal issues.

Voice: Which voice(s) on religion is/are prominent in the articles? Over the years *Aftenposten* has tended towards institutional voices, while *Arbeiderbladet/Dagsavisen* has included a greater number of other voices, including those of journalists.

Two discursive shifts

The coding categories do not grasp all the nuances, but some key discursive shifts emerge. Two trends stand out.

First, over the selected years from 1988 to 2018 the part of Norwegian cultural heritage related to the majority Lutheran church tradition has become visibly contested, and this is reflected in the three capital newspapers. Limited open conflict and criticism, with secularist or anti-religious voices, are present. Identified religious criticism increased to about 4 per cent of the articles in 2018. Most concerned the institutional aspects of religion, but the Lutheran majority tradition has become considerably less visible. The newspapers rarely contest the church in their editorials, as in Finland (Taira 2019b) but contrary to Sweden (Lövheim 2019). The Norwegian capital

newspapers simply leave the old church behind, by discontinuing religious columns, and providing more modest news coverage of the majority tradition (down from 61 per cent in 1988 to 21 per cent in 2018 of all the collected news articles) and less debate on the Church of Norway (down from 53 per cent in 1988 to 19 per cent in 2018 of all debate entries). Other forms of Christianity, however, were made more visible in the news and less controversial in debate articles than the share of articles on Christian communities outside the former state church. To the extent that the Lutheran majority tradition is contested in the three newspapers, this is primarily by making it less visible than its share of the population (still 70 per cent in 2018). A closer textual analysis might confirm the discursive shift to a nationalist agenda in the use of the 'Christian cultural heritage' that Døving and Kraft (2013) identified. A clear voice on behalf of Christian communities must to a great extent be given by representatives of these churches themselves, and thus mostly in columns or debate pieces. This resembles what Norwegian news editors told Anders Firing Lunde in his study of their preparedness to cover Islamic practice: 'It's up to the Muslims to take initiatives' (Lunde 2013).

Second, Norway's increasing cultural and religious diversity has become visible in newspaper coverage. The main trend is in the growth in news and commentaries concerning Islam and the presence of Muslims in society. Unlike its coverage of the Church of Norway, the newspaper's focus on Islam and Muslims goes well beyond the proportion of Muslims in Norway. While Norway's population may have been 4 per cent Muslim in 2016 (Østby and Dalgard 2017), the share of articles on Islam and Muslims in the three selected newspapers was five to seven times higher (see Table 3). Much of the coverage was about jihadist movements in other parts of the world, comprising half the articles on Islam and Muslims in all main newspapers in Norway in 2016. Sixty per cent of this foreign news was about Islamic terrorism, IS, foreign fighters, or radical Islam (Retriever 2017). The increased coverage of Islam and Muslims in the three capital papers leans towards debate pieces rather than news, as in Denmark (Christensen 2019). In 1988 this was the case with 5 per cent of all debate pieces in the three Oslo papers, while the share had risen to 38 per cent in 2018. This was in line with Retriever's study of all editorial media, showing that domestic features on Islam and Muslims tended to be debate pieces; the foreign material referred rather to what happened. In sixteen per cent of all articles on Islam and Muslims in a Norwegian context the most prominent theme was criticism of Islam. However, there were as many debate pieces countering criticism of Islam as there were articles contesting it (Retriever 2017). In the three capital newspapers few editorials addressed

Islam, but in general the representations of Islam and Muslims were more openly conflictual than they were in their representations of Christianity.

Religion in political conflict

Two conflicts were prominent in the daily press in Norway during the two surveyed weeks in October 2018, one international and one national. The former was the Khashoggi case, when a dissident Saudi Arabian journalist was murdered in the Saudi embassy in Istanbul. The latter was the conflict in the Christian Democratic Party in Norway concerning whether to join a 'red' or 'blue' government.

None of these conflicts was grasped by this study's coding instrument, except when contenders in the Norwegian case were characterized by their Christian faith. Both cases afford good examples of deeper religious controversies or conflicts lying behind the political surface. In international diplomacy and media coverage the Khashoggi case was fed by the underlying conflict between Sunnis in Turkey and Salafists in Saudi Arabia. Behind the media reports on *Kristelig Folkeparti's* choice of political alliance lies a deeper understanding of how 'Christian values' can be realized in society. This conflict is connected with the debate about the 'Christian cultural heritage', but it is not fully reflected in the data because of the study's coding criteria. Cultural contestations covered by the media as political conflicts may often have their roots in contested religion.

The present quest for visibility fails to capture such deeper references to religion in the political realm. The same concerns the use of metaphor with reference to contested religion in the editorial material. This is not included in the coding, because the articles here should be explicitly connected with religion. Indeed, Lövheim and Linderman included such metaphors in their study of Swedish editorials. They concluded 'that these references to religion through mediatization are used in a way where their meaning becomes detached from institutional or dogmatic religious authority' (Lövheim and Linderman 2015, 43).

How to interpret the visibility of religion

A critical discourse analysis such as the one concerning editorial material in Swedish newspapers (Lövheim 2017) would have afforded a much richer base for the interpretation of the visibility of religion. However, what can be learnt from the available quantitative material?

First, visibility as the presence of religion in the media should not be confused with the influence of religion in society (Hjelm 2015a). We 'cannot assume a direct relation between changes in the visibility of religion in the media and changes in the role of religion in public discourse' or in the public sphere (Lövheim and Linderman 2015, 32, 44). It may in fact be that an increase in references in the daily press is the result of religion becoming more controversial than it previously was (Lundby 2018a). Neither can one draw any conclusion on people's religious life and practice from the coverage of religion in the newspapers. 'The complexity frame of reference reminds us that one cannot reduce from a public presence to individual religiosity. The latter points to the significance of religion for individuals, while the former shows the public presence of religion as a topic, either in a descriptive way or because it is valued or contested' (Furseth et al. 2019, 76).

Second, the interpretation is based on theories in the sociology of religion concerning the changing religious landscape. Titus Hjelm (2015b) suggests that religion could be used by governments or public authorities as a resource for policies to combat social problems and to support the welfare state. However, in secular newspapers with conflict-oriented news criteria the opposite approach, which regards religion as a social problem, may dominate, as diversity increases with immigration, and the coverage of traditional church institutions becomes more critical over time. In any case, Hjelm argues, it is the social contribution of religions rather than faith that is being valorized. There is an 'internal secularization of discourse' at work in the new visibility of religion (Hjelm 2015b, 15). To grasp the changes behind the visibility, one needs insights into the complexity of religion.

Third, changes in the visibility or presence of religion in the daily press depends largely on structural changes in the newspaper industry. The distinction between the absolute and relative visibility of religion testifies to this. Changes in newspapers occur within a larger transformation of the media landscape. The party press in Norway dissolved towards the end of the 1970s, largely because of the encroaching power of television. The print media is challenged by online forms. The editorial media today must relate to the debates in social media, and in general to audiences and users who themselves produce content. The viability of national, regional, and local newspapers is threatened by the loss of revenue to global network giants like Facebook and Google. The relationship between all these transformations in the media landscape and social and cultural change is captured by the concept of mediatization (Hepp et al. 2010). The representation of religion in the media depends on the structural changes in the media industry and

thus on the general processes of mediatization. In the day-to-day newspaper business the mediatization of religion is shaped over time by editorial formatting and media dynamics.

Conclusion

When structural change in the newspapers is taken into account by looking at the visibility relative to the total output of editorial material, the presence of religion is relatively constant between 1988, 1998, 2008, and 2018. There has been some variation between the three Oslo-based newspapers over the years, but overall there is stability, with about 1.5 per cent of the total output. However, the mediatization of religion remains effective: the downsizing of newspapers combined with editorial choice results in media users finding less to read about religion than previously. Editorial gatekeeping and formatting become even more important. However, with less to read about religion in the newspapers, a larger share of the media's religious coverage may be found in social media echo chambers, contributing to a transformed societal religious horizon.

The secular newspapers' coverage exaggerates the extended or increased diversity of religion and criticism of religion in the eighty-year period, and in particular during the last twenty to thirty years. The growing Muslim presence in Norway, and terrorism and violence in other parts of the world connected with forms of Islam, is certainly of news interest, but its coverage is out of proportion with the country's Muslim minority. In contrast, the Church of Norway, which remains a majority religious institution, is covered with considerably less interest than previously, and less than its recent share of the population might suggest is warranted. Editors are not obliged to adjust the coverage to the various groups in Norway, but with their skewed coverage the newspapers contribute to a general mediatization of the perceived role of religion in society. Conflictual aspects of increased diversity – and especially of Islam – are placed to the fore, while the print media downplays the more contested cultural heritage of the majority church.

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KNUT LUNDBY is Professor Emeritus of Media and Communication, University of Oslo. E-mail: knut.lundby@media.uio.no

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'The Swedish Condition': Representations of Religion in the Swedish Press 1988–2018

MIA LÖVHEIM

Uppsala University

Abstract

The aim of this article is to examine changes and continuities in the coverage of religion in Swedish daily newspapers between 1988 and 2018. Previous research has shown that Sweden in comparison with other Nordic countries is more secular in terms of its population's religious belief and practice, and more tolerant of immigration and religious diversity. Against this background the article discusses whether the representation of religion in four selected newspapers during 2018 reveals a change with regard to trends identified in previous studies, covering the period between 1988 and 2008. It especially asks if such changes indicate the continuity of the 'Swedish condition', meaning a more tolerant approach to religious diversity as expressed in the daily press. The analysis shows that the coverage of religion in the Swedish press during the period between 2008 and 2018 develops through parallel trends of the continued acknowledgement of religious diversity, a heightened focus on Islam and the public presence of religion, and more contestation with regard to the political and social implications of this situation. In assessing these trends further study is needed concerning the interrelations between media representations of religious diversity and changes in other institutions in Swedish society such as politics, law, and education.

Keywords: *Sweden, newspapers, mediatization, religious diversity, Islam*

In 2017 the main Swedish daily newspaper *Dagens Nyheter* published an article by Norwegian crime author Anne Holt concerning the frequent references to 'the Swedish condition' in Norwegian political discussion (Holt 2017). This 'condition' did not concern Sweden's position as one of the highest ranking countries in the world with regard to secularity, welfare supply, or gender equality. It was used as an abusive term, referring to uncontrolled immigration with the subsequent ruin of Swedish society and the censorship of 'political correctness' in the dominant media, suppressing critical opinions about the dangers of religious and cultural diversity which, as a consequence, had established its presence on social media.

The image of Sweden as different from the other Nordic countries in terms of attitudes to religion and immigrants is also visible in the findings of two recently concluded research projects: *The Role of Religion in the Public Sphere: A Comparative Study* (NOREL 2009–2014, see Furseth 2018)¹ and *Engaging with Conflicts in Mediatized Religious Environments*, CoMReL 2014–2018, see Lundby 2018).² As is pointed out in the introduction to this special issue, several international surveys reveal that Sweden stands out from the other Nordic countries as being more secular in terms of religious belief and practice in the population, and having a less pronounced connection between religion and national identity, and a higher tolerance of immigration and religious diversity. A survey undertaken in 2015 by the CoMReL project revealed that although Sweden had the highest number of immigrants from Muslim majority countries, Swedish respondents were less concerned about the display of religious symbols, and especially Islamic ones, in public settings and less prone to see Islam as a threat to national culture than Danish and Norwegian respondents (Lövheim et al. 2018a). As will be discussed further below, references to religion in the Swedish daily press also differ in several ways from the trends in Denmark, Norway, and Finland reported in previous research.

The article aims to examine representations of religion in four of the largest Swedish daily newspapers during four selected periods in 2018. It also discusses changes and continuities in this coverage of religion in comparison to the findings of previous research in the period between 1988 and 2008. This research was conducted in two projects. The first, the NOREL project, compared representations of religion in the daily press in Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden in 1988, 1998, and 2008 (Lundby et al. 2018; Niemelä and Christensen 2013). The second project, *The resurgence of religion?! A Study of religion and modernity in Sweden with the daily press as case study*³ (henceforth the Swedish editorial study), focused on representations of religion in Swedish editorials between 1976 and 2010 (Lövheim and Linderman 2015; Linderman and Lövheim 2016; Lövheim 2017).

Against this background the main question the article addresses is: Does the representation of religion in the selected newspapers from 2018 reveal a change with regard to the trends identified in previous studies? In

1 NOREL was funded by the Nordic Research Councils for the Humanities and the Social Sciences (NOS-HS), 2009–2014.

2 CoMReL was financed by the Norwegian Research Council, 2015–2018.

3 *The resurgence of religion? Religion and modernity in Sweden with the daily press as case study* was funded by the National Research Council of Sweden, 2010–2014.

particular, do such changes indicate a continuity of the 'Swedish condition', meaning the trend towards a more tolerant approach to religious diversity as expressed in the daily press?

Theoretical starting points: visibility, complexity, and co-structuring

As the introduction outlines (Taira 2019), the articles in this special issue share a theoretical framework of selected key concepts drawn from contemporary scholarly debates regarding relations between religion, media, society, and culture in Nordic societies. This debate addresses a situation of continuous secularization in the sense of the status of religious organizations in Nordic societies and beliefs among the population, and the increased visibility of religion in political debates and the media, for example. In summarizing the findings of the NOREL project Inger Furseth (2018) suggests the concept of 'religious complexity' as a frame of reference in accounting for the multiple, parallel, and seemingly contradictory trends of religious change. The core argument in this approach, which draws on complexity theory as a framework (Furseth 2018; see also Walby 2007), is that changes within different institutions in society are interrelated, but that neither a linear direction over time nor parallel tendencies of increase or decline between different levels of analysis should be assumed. Religious complexity thus offers a frame for studying religious change that shifts from predictions of single and coherent patterns to a more contextual approach in which variation, the reciprocal influence between various levels, and uneven patterns of change over time are the focus. Starting from this perspective, I will analyse changes in the representation of religion in the daily press by highlighting concurrent trends, as well as contradictions and variations. Concerning key concepts for discussing changes, the article will focus on *visibility* in the quantitative presence of religion-related articles and references in the daily press, and as a qualitative measure for *how* religion is visible in these texts. Against the background of recent discussions of secularization theory it is relevant to focus on how religion comes to be represented as a *personal* or a *public* phenomenon in the newspapers. To take this analysis further, the concepts of *individuality* and *public utility* will be used to discuss whether the media coverage assumes individuality as the norm with regard to religious beliefs and practices, or whether religion is represented in terms of its contribution to society's common good. As *religious diversity* has become a principal issue of debate, a final category of analysis will be whether religion is represented from the viewpoint that

Sweden is or should be a secular or a religiously diverse society. In such representations religion can be depicted as a resource for or source of societal conflict (see Hjelm 2015; Beckford 2015).

This perspective aligns with new developments of mediatization theory in studies of the media and religion in Scandinavia. These studies discuss change as an outcome of how various social institutions, such as religion and the media, overlap or intersect with each other, as well as with other institutions. Hjarvard and Lundby (2018) argue that neither the affordances of particular media nor the overall media system determines processes of mediation, but they influence the scope and forms of communicative agency in various ways by framing events in particular ways, or provide stages upon which conflicts are performed. The media may thus co-structure developments by setting the conditions for access to and the voice of political actors, for example (Hjarvard, Mortensen, and Eskjær 2015). Thus, possible changes in Swedish media coverage's trend towards tolerance of religious diversity will be analysed by highlighting connections between other social events (political and legal) during the period of study as indications of the media co-structuring changes within Swedish society.

Overview of longitudinal changes in previous research 1988–2008

In the NOREL project four newspapers in Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden were selected, representing two of the largest morning papers with different political profiles, the largest tabloid paper, and one larger regional paper. The Swedish national papers were the daily morning papers *Dagens Nyheter*, which is independent/liberal, and *Svenska Dagbladet*, which is liberal/conservative. The chosen tabloid was *Aftonbladet*, which is social democratic, and the regional paper was *Göteborgs-Posten*, which is liberal. The analysed media texts were published over four two-week periods in 2018: before Easter (15–28 March), before Eid (1–14 June), a regular period in the autumn (8–21 October), and before Christmas (11–24 December). The sampling included different genres of newspaper material: opinion texts (editorials, op-eds), news articles, features, and cultural reviews. The Swedish editorial study used a different form of sampling strategy, with a randomized selection of editorial pages from the largest newspapers in Sweden, published between 1976 and 2010 (Linderman and Lövheim 2016).⁴

4 The newspapers analysed were *Aftonbladet*, *Arbetet*, *Expressen*, *Dagens Nyheter*, *Dagens Industri*, *Göteborgs-Posten*, *Göteborgs-Tidningen*, *Kvällsposten*, *Svenska Dagbladet*, *Sydsvenska Dagbladet* and *Helsingborgs Dagblad*.

Thus, this study was limited to editorial pages, but based on continuous data from the period. The NOREL project and the Swedish editorial study used a similar set of search words to identify references to religion in the media texts, covering a broad spectrum of expressions: 'Religion', 'Islam', 'Christianity', 'Judaism', 'Hinduism', 'Buddhism', 'new forms of spirituality', 'secularity', and 'religious metaphor'.

The NOREL project showed an increase in main articles referring to religion between 1988, 1998, and 2008 (Niemelä and Christensen 2013, 14).⁵ However, this was not a linear and general trend over the period, because the frequency of the coverage differed between the Nordic countries and between regions and article genres (see Lundby et al. 2018; Lövheim and Lundby 2013). In the case of Sweden the number of articles covering religion was notably lower (736) than in Norway (1,740) and Finland (1,603, see further Niemelä and Christensen 2013, 11). There was an increase in the main articles about religion in Sweden, from 24 per cent in 1988 to 38 per cent in 2008, but no significant differences between the four periods. These changes in the coverage of religion are confirmed by the longitudinal study of references to religion on editorial pages in the larger Swedish newspapers. While 22 per cent of the editorial pages referred to religion in the first five-year interval between 1976 and 1980, this increased to 31 per cent in the final interval between 2006 and 2010. There was a peak between 1996 and 2005, where 40 per cent of the editorial pages referred to religion (Linderman and Lövheim 2016, 106).

Both studies also show an increased diversity with regard to the representation of religion. The NOREL project reveals that compared with the other Nordic countries, coverage of the Lutheran majority church declined most in Sweden, from 57 per cent in 1988 to 15 per cent in 2008. The coverage of Islam increased more in Sweden, from 2 per cent in 1988 to 21 per cent in 2008, than in Finland and Norway, though not as much as in Denmark. The Swedish editorial study shows a similar trend, with references to Islam, Christianity, and religious metaphors increasing over the period. References to Islam showed the most drastic development, increasing from 3 per cent between 1976 and 1980 to 9 per cent between 2005 and 2010.

It is important not to overestimate the significance of religion in public debate based on the frequency of references to it in the daily press. The Swedish editorial study clearly shows that more visibility in terms of more references to religion does not imply that religion plays a more significant

5 Following Niemelä and Christensen, the main articles are frontpage articles of any size (except teasers), as well as articles of three or more columns (2013, 22).

role in political discourse (Lövheim and Linderman 2015). Editorials mentioning religion descriptively or metaphorically, often in connection with international conflicts, were more common than editorials discussing religion as a political issue of national concern. This editorial category increased over the period, but still did not comprise more than 20 per cent of the total number of articles analysed. Further analysis of editorials where religion was the main topic revealed a trend towards less discussion of the status and role of the Church of Sweden in society and more focus on religious diversity in Sweden, human rights, gender equality, and the freedom of religion (Lövheim and Linderman 2015, 38). In a study of coverage of Islam in the Swedish news media 2015, Axner (2015, 47) found that the majority of the articles appeared in foreign news coverage, and generally represented Islam in connection with the themes of terrorism, violence, and extremism. In news articles with a national or local scope the coverage focused more on individuals. The majority of articles focused on problems with integration, but there were also some examples of the contribution Islam makes to Swedish society and culture.

In conclusion, previous research covering the period between 1988 and 2008 reveals an increased visibility of religion in the Swedish press, in particular in references to Islam. Furthermore, religion was increasingly covered as part of national political debates concerning integration, human rights, and democracy (Lövheim and Linderman 2015, 46). This development shows that the visibility of religion in the Swedish press challenges a radical secularist position in which religion is separated from debates concerning public issues in Swedish society. In the period from 2000 debates about religion in editorial pages and opinion articles increasingly focused on accommodating different ways of expressing religion in a pluralistic democratic society (*ibid.*). This representation focuses mainly on tensions between religious diversity and the perceived core values of Swedish society, such as gender equality and individual freedom (Lövheim 2017). This affects the possibilities of various actors to participate in the debate. As Axner (2013) found in a study of opinion pieces signed by religious actors, minority religions are more limited in terms of the issues that can be addressed than representatives of the majority Lutheran Church of Sweden.

General trends in newspaper coverage, 2008–2018

The empirical material used for this article is derived from a search conducted through the National Library of Sweden's database of digitalized daily

newspapers (*Svenska dagstidningar*) for 2018. The search parameters were limited to the word 'religion' for time reasons. The analysis of the material was conducted in three steps. First, there was an overview of quantitative changes in references in the daily press from 2008. Second, the material was categorized based on the main categories used in the NOREL project (Niemelä and Christensen 2013) and one of the key concepts presented above:

- Main article or minor reference?
- What kind of religion is covered?
- Does the coverage focus on national or international issues?
- Is religion represented as a personal or public issue?

The third step used a content analysis to reveal the main themes in the material. These themes, which will be presented below, were then analysed following the key concepts of religion represented as an individual choice or as a public utility, secularity, or religious diversity as the assumed starting point, and religion presented as a resource or a problem for society.

A search for 'religion' among all the newspapers indexed in the National Library of Sweden's database shows a strong increase in references to religion among Swedish newspapers. In 2008 there were 1 879 hits, increasing to 14 833 in 2018, with a peak in 2014 of 28 553 articles. This increase can partly be explained by the larger number of newspapers indexed for 2014 and 2018 than 2008.⁶ Furthermore, as the database is not limited to the four papers on which the NOREL project focused, no direct comparisons of frequencies can be made.⁷ Despite this caveat, it is noteworthy that the general trends of previous research regarding greater religious diversity in the coverage seems to be supported. A search for 'Christianity' shows an increase from 124 hits in 2008 to 871 in 2018, while the number of hits for 'Islam' increases from 955 to 9 434 over the same period. Freedom of religion (*'religionsfrihet'*) increases from 92 hits in 2008 to 1 809 in 2018.

Specific searches in the NOREL study's four focus newspapers improve the potential for comparison. References to 'religion' in *Dagens Nyheter* (DN) increased from 512 in 2008 to 922 in 2018. The years between confirm this trend: in 2015, 2016, and 2017 there were more than 1,000 hits. The second morning paper, *Svenska Dagbladet* (SvD), shows a declining trend, from 493

⁶ In 2008 only five large and nationwide newspapers were indexed; from 2014 another five medium-sized and regional papers were included.

⁷ *Dagens Nyheter*, *Expressen*, *Aftonbladet*, *Svenska Dagbladet*, *Sydsvenskan*, *Dagen*, *Göteborgsposten*, *Helsingborgsposten* as the largest papers, plus a number of smaller papers.

references in 2008 to 295 in 2018. This is also supported by examining the years between, with the exception of 2014 (489 hits). The tabloid *Aftonbladet* (AB) also shows a declining trend, from 543 hits for 'religion' in 2008 to 219 in 2018, which is supported over time. Finally, data for the regional daily newspaper *Göteborgs-Posten* (GP) is only provided from 2013, where the search word 'religion' generates 266 hits. The trend is fairly stable, with 213 hits in 2018, peaking at 418 in 2015.

A more detailed analysis shows further differences between the newspapers. The first table shows the number of references in each two-week period per newspaper.

Table 1: References to 'religion' in four Swedish newspapers in 2018

Period	March 15–28	June 1–14	October 8–21	December 11–24	Total
<i>DN</i>	59	39	33	36	167
<i>SvD</i>	11	14	8	6	39
<i>AB</i>	13	10	6	5	34
<i>GP</i>	5	18	9	9	41

As this table shows, references to religion in *Dagens Nyheter*, which is also the largest daily newspaper in Sweden, greatly dominate.⁸ As there is no clear trend in hits for a certain period, the following analysis will be based on the whole of 2018. Since one article may contain several references to 'religion', this is a more relevant unit of analysis. The next table shows the number of articles per newspaper categorized by size (main topic/reference), religious tradition (religion in general/Christianity/Islam/other), personal faith or public role in society, and national or international scope.

Table 2: Categories of references to religion in all articles 2018⁹

Paper	Size	Tradition	Personal/Public	National/International	Total
<i>DN</i>	18/18	20/6/9/1	4/32	24/12	36
<i>SvD</i>	8/17	15/2/4/1	3/22	12/4	25
<i>AB</i>	6/12	9/3/5/1	5/13	12/4	18
<i>GP</i>	17/13	10/2/10/4	5/16	18/2	30

⁸ In February 2018 *DN* was estimated to reach 596 000 people, *SvD* 377 000, *AB* 540 000, and *GP* 281 000 (Orvesto Konsument 2018).

⁹ It was impossible to classify all minor articles under the categories of 'Tradition' and 'National/International'.

Main themes in the 2018 coverage

On the basis of this overview we can turn to the first part of the research question in this article, which concerns *visibility*, in the sense of changes in the quantitative presence of religion-related articles in the daily press between 2008 and 2018. The clearest example of an increase is in the largest paper *Dagens Nyheter*, while the other papers show a declining or stable trend. Furthermore, in the two morning papers there seem to be no large differences in the number of main articles and smaller pieces referring to religion, while shorter references are more common in the tabloid, and the regional paper has more main articles, often in local news. In all the papers 'religion' as a general term and 'Islam' are more frequently covered than Christianity. Other religious traditions are almost absent. Remembering the caveats concerning methodological differences in data collection, this accords with the trends reported in the NOREL and Swedish editorial studies. Following Lundby (2019) and Christensen (2019), there is a similar growth trend in debate and commentaries primarily on Islam and the Muslim presence in the Danish and Norwegian daily press. Furthermore, articles focusing on religion in society or its public expression occur more frequently than articles about religion as personal faith. The majority of articles focus on national events and issues, while most of the articles with an international scope can be found in *Dagens Nyheter*. The main themes taken up in the 2018 articles are presented below. This presentation departs from the articles where religion is the main theme and which refer to events within Sweden, i.e. with a local and national scope. As the majority of the articles focus on religion as a public phenomenon, themes related to this category will be presented first.

Religious schools

Discussions of what are referred to in Sweden as 'religious free schools' are the most prominent among articles focusing on the public role of religion (14 articles). In the Swedish education system some eighty-two percent of all pupils attend schools that are organized and funded by the state (municipalities). 'Free schools' are schools organized by a non-governmental organization or private company but still primarily funded by the state. All schools are governed by the same law, the School Act, and a national syllabus and curriculum decided by the Swedish National Agency for Education. During the studied period *Dagens Nyheter* (14 March) and *Göteborgs-Posten* (4–5 June) both published a series of feature articles examining schools

established by religious, primarily Muslim, organizations. The focus of the articles, which will be presented in more detail below, was on revealing control by the schools over children's dress, and interaction between boys and girls in various activities. Following these articles, a number of letters to the editor (*DN* 15 and 23 March, *GP* 8 June), columns (24 March) and editorials (10 June) addressed this issue. In the other two papers the issue is also discussed in op-eds and columns (*SvD* 20 and 28 March), and letters to the editor (*AB* 21 and 22 March). Connected to this topic, there are also a news article, letters to the editors, and reports concerning halal food in Swedish schools (*AB*, *GP* 13 and 14 June).

Harassment and violence in the name of religion

The second largest theme (12 articles) concerns violence against or harassment of (primarily) women on the basis of religion. The most conspicuous event is a number of articles in *Aftonbladet* about 'moral policing' in the suburbs of Gothenburg and Stockholm (12 and 14 June). The articles followed an op-ed written by representatives of the conservative party *Moderaterna* in *Göteborgs-Posten* on 5 June arguing for a national investigation of this issue to ensure that 'Swedish law is applicable everywhere and for everyone' so young people and women were not limited in their right to freely choose their lifestyle and partner. Islam was not singled out in this article, but people interviewed in the follow-up articles argued that it was wrong to scapegoat fundamentalist Muslims, as this was an issue which concerned the use of 'culture, norms, or religion' as a motivation and legitimation for controlling individual behaviour. This issue was also the topic of a debate article criticizing the exclusion of a politician from the leftist party *Vänsterpartiet* for being too outspoken on issues of religious fundamentalism and honour crimes in the suburbs (*AB*, 9 October).

Public expressions of freedom of religion

The third largest theme (9 articles) raises different aspects of the freedom of religion as expressed in the public sphere. The most prominent issue is a debate about whether or not calls for prayer from a Muslim minaret should be tolerated, initiated by an op-ed from a representative of the Conservative party *Moderaterna* in *Svenska Dagbladet* on 1 March. The debate continued in the printed version (19 and 20 March) but mainly in the digital edition, and surfaced in *Dagens Nyheter* in letters to the editor (21 March). The second

larger event reported under this theme concerned *state support for religious organizations*. On 13 March 2018 a new Swedish commission on state support for faith communities in a religiously diverse society was presented. This generated editorial comment (*DN*, 17 March) and op-ed articles (*SvD*, 27 March) concerning whether the state should support religious organizations. During the period there were also a couple of articles about the freedom to leave a religion, connected to decisions by the Swedish immigration agency concerning conversion (*DN*, 7 June, 16 December).

Religion as individual faith

Articles presenting religion as individual faith can largely be found in the culture pages (reviews of books, music, art), interviews with individuals, quizzes, and the comic pages. Several of these articles portray religion as a source of peace, meaning, and moral guidance for individuals. A three-page article on 24 December in *Göteborgs-Posten*, portraying football player and practising Muslim Nasiru Mohammed, serves as an example. The title of the article read 'Nasiru trusts that prayer will make him ready to play' and was illustrated by a picture of Nasiru Mohammad praying in a mosque in Gothenburg. In the main text Nasiru described the significance of faith for attaining his life goals and his experiences of religious faith as a successful football player in a secular country like Sweden.

Changes in coverage: trends

The second research question for this study concerned changes in *how* religion was visible in the daily press in 2018 compared with 2008. As the previous section shows, the majority of the articles focused on the role of religion in society, especially on Islam in Swedish society. Turning to the analytical category of secularity or religious diversity as the assumed starting point for representation, the articles reveal a both-and situation rather than an either-or one. However, religious diversity is the premise of the coverage in the dominant themes, which focus on religion in schools and in the use of public space. Yet, as we shall see, the notion of secularity as central for organizing public space and for individual and collective rights is clearly present in how the articles characterize religion. This tension overlaps with the question of whether religious diversity is presented as a resource or problem for society. The presentation of the main themes in the previous section shows that very few articles approach religion and

religious diversity as a resource for society. There is a clear tendency for articles (news and editorials, debate, and letters to the editor) to focus on religious diversity as a problem with regard to integration, and the use of public space and public funding. Articles focusing on the public role of religion frequently adopt a more critical stance regarding religious diversity than articles focusing on religion as a personal choice. This focus on transgressions or boundary disputes with regard to religion as a public or private issue concurs with trends in the Danish press, as Christensen (2019) discusses. However, these patterns are not clear-cut. Religion is predominantly portrayed as a problem with regard to human rights, in particular the rights of women and children, but this is often connected to fundamentalist, violent, and controlling forms of religious authority. Articles about ‘moral policing’ in the suburbs, however, include different voices/opinions about whether and what kind of religion is the problem. This signals an awareness in the media of religious diversity, which introduces variation in terms of the role religion can play in society and for individuals. Representations of how religious diversity can be fruitfully handled, however, are predominantly to be found in articles focusing on personal faith. In the next section we will explore how these tensions between secularity and religious diversity as a problem or a resource find expression in selected examples from 2018.

Religious free schools: diversity, individual rights and public utility

The thematic analysis shows the most salient issue in the period on which this article focuses concerns religious schools. The Swedish education system, based on state funding and regulation, makes schools a key element in the discussion of religion as a public utility in terms of its relationship to the state and its contribution to the common good of society. This issue was actualized by the impending election of September 2018, in which the Social Democratic Party, *Socialdemokraterna*, the largest and then governing party, presented a proposal to forbid schools organized by religious groups.¹⁰ The question of religious schools also highlights the issues concerning whether Sweden is or should be a secular or religiously diverse society, including individuality as a norm for expressions of religion in the public space.

An article in *Dagens Nyheter* on 14 March headlined ‘Extremism in schools’ was divided into two sections. The first was a news report about

¹⁰ The original proposal included existing and newly established schools. During the autumn of 2018 this has been amended to include only new establishments.

the Social Democrats' proposal to ban religious schools. The article described the background of the proposal and explained that it did not ban individual religious practice but such practice in an organized form during the school day. The article included two quotations from the minister for public administration Ardalan Shakarabi expressing the reasons for the ban: 'We have seen a development where religious schools in several cases have supported religious oppression. If we are to overcome segregation, we must totally forbid religious schools.' The quotation continued: 'The Swedish school should be directed by teachers and pedagogues, not priests and imams. At present we cannot guarantee this, and it presents a serious problem if we are to hold Sweden together.'

As this short summary demonstrates, the news article focused on the balance between the individual's rights to practise religion and the school as a state-funded public space. The minister's quotations reveal two other salient points: the risk of religious schools contributing to segregation; and the question of control of schools by teachers employed and educated by the state or by religious leaders. As the first quotation shows, this control was depicted as 'oppression'. The focus on the risks of extremism and oppression was also salient in the second article, which reported from a school in Gothenburg where the principal and staff had been accused of connections with Islamic extremism. It was a school in an area with high levels of socioeconomic exclusion, but which had been able to show good results in its students' learning outcomes. The principal of the school was interviewed. He denied contacts with extremist and violent Muslims. When asked about his own opinions he said: 'I have five children who were born in Sweden, and I want to protect this society that has protected my children.' The article thus depicted the Muslim principal as caring for Swedish society.

On the same day the main editorial in *Dagens Nyheter* commented on the proposal to ban religious schools and the commission report on changes in state support for religious organizations (DN 14 March). The editorial pointed out that only seventy schools, representing one in a thousand of all Swedish schools, were religious. Most were Christian and had never been criticized. The proposal was thus 'unfair', and a better solution would be to reform the bad schools. The editorial pointed out that it was no coincidence that these two events were contemporary. The critique of religion was advancing following a long period of more tolerance of faith communities and organizations which had had positive and negative implications. The editorial argued that practices such as polygamy, female circumcision, op-

pression of LGBTQ people, the gender segregation of pupils, and 'suburban caliphates' enforcing conservative religious values were all a 'phenomenon that cannot be allowed in Sweden'. However,

the state must guarantee freedom of religion. It is dangerous when loud opinions turn against religious minorities and expressions of religious faith are increasingly presented as unnatural and obsolete. Political decisions in the direction of secularity are not by definition wise and do not contribute to the good of society.

The editorial placed the debate in the context of changing social and political opinions regarding religion: from more tolerance of to resistance against religious minorities. The editorial clearly labelled some 'conservative religious' practices as unwelcome in Sweden. However, this differentiation between the 'positive and negative implications' of a more tolerant attitude was also one part of the argument in this editorial for religious diversity as the premise for the state's handling of religion. This was made even clearer by the emphasis on the state's duty to guarantee the freedom of religion and fair treatment of religious organizations, and by the questioning of secularity as a political solution. The editorial's approach was mirrored in an article by Niklas Orrenius, a reporter at *Dagens Nyheter*, commenting on the newspaper's exposure of problems within Muslim groups in Sweden (9 June). The reason, he argued, was not 'because I am against the religion – but because I see Islam as a Swedish religion, as part of our society'.

The articles in *Göteborgs-Posten* were published as a series between 4 and 5 June under the headline 'In the name of religion'. The frontpage of the paper announced the articles with the headline 'Schools pressured by religious demands' and the caption 'GP's examination shows that several Swedish schools give in to demands from parents connected with honour and religion'. The focus on the oppression and control of pupils in the name of religion was noticeable in the newspaper's examination: in the first article a journalist rang Muslim pre-schools in Gothenburg, Malmö, and Stockholm pretending to be the father of a five-year-old girl and asking whether they were prepared to control her wearing of the hijab during school days. Twenty-seven out of forty schools were prepared to meet such demands (*GP* 5 June). Further examples in the article concerned teachers ensuring that boys and girls did not mix during swimming lessons or break the Ramadan fast.

The second article featured interviews with 'secular Muslims', who reported that 'moral policing and a religious culture of honour are destroying their lives' (*GP* 4 June). This clash between religious and secular values also feature prominently in the follow-up article to the examination of control in pre-schools (*GP* 4 June). The articles contained interviews with school staff in areas with large groups of practising Muslims. The principal of one of the schools referred to the schools' policy and the School Act as sufficient for handling these situations, but the interviewed teachers were quoted as being afraid of being accused of intolerance or xenophobia when rejecting the demands of parents to adjust school activities in accordance with religious values and practice. A politician responsible for school issues in Gothenburg was quoted as saying 'according to my opinion this is against the School Act' (*GP* 5 June). The chairperson of one of the targeted municipalities was quoted as saying that schools should 'not expose them (children) to religious or political persuasion. But I understand that this is a dilemma, where the value policy of schools sometimes clashes with the right to religion' (5 June). In a final follow-up article on 8 June an imam and board member of the Gothenburg interreligious council responds to the articles, saying that 'children do not have religious duties', which meant controlling their dress or behaviour in schools was not supported by Islam.

The editor-in-chief of *Göteborgs-Posten* explained in an article 'why *GP* is investigating religious oppression' (4 June). The introduction read: 'Freedom of religion does not only concern the right to practise one's religion but also the right to not practise any religion at all. For some people this is sadly not self-evident. *Göteborgs-Posten* has therefore chosen to investigate religious oppression in Gothenburg.' Referring to a 2015 police report declaring fourteen areas in Sweden to be in need of additional resources to handle criminality and segregation, of which seven could be found in Gothenburg, the editor argued 'it is our duty as the largest paper in the region to look more deeply into these problems'.

The core tension on which *Göteborgs-Posten's* articles focused was religion, especially Islam, as a threat to individual freedom, in particular the freedom not to follow religious rules. As the editor-in-chief argued, the paper had a duty to its readers to expose the problem of religious oppression to safeguard this constitutional right in Swedish society. In these articles religious diversity was clearly seen as a problem, while secularity – in the form of secular laws and the experience of secular Muslims – was implicitly portrayed as a guarantee against religious oppression. The themes of religious schools as oppressive, and the division between schools as secular public space

and religion as individual practice, were also expressed in a letter to the editor on 15 March: 'It would be great to ban all religious schools. Practising religion is something people can do in their free time.' Nevertheless, ambiguity regarding secularity as a norm in Swedish society is also present in *Göteborgs-Posten's* articles. This was expressed, for example, in the teachers' fears of being intolerant or xenophobic in disregarding the demands of religious parents, and the recognition of local politicians of the dilemma between the value policy of schools and the right to practise religion in public. This tension between values was expressed in an interview in one of the articles with a lawyer at the Swedish National Agency for education. She explained that controlling children's dress in school was difficult to handle because the protection of individual freedom and integrity in the School Act was based on the UN's Declaration of the Rights of the Child, which also granted children the right to practise their religion and parents the responsibility for their children's upbringing (*GP* 5 June).

These two examples of the newspaper coverage of the issue of religious schools show the complexity of media representations of religion in 2018. The main angle of the articles in *Dagens Nyheter* and *Göteborgs-Posten* is to portray religious authorities and regulations as a problem for individuals (oppression and control) and society (segregation). Nevertheless, the articles also reflect various opinions and dilemmas, which shows an awareness that diverging religious opinions and practices cannot be ignored or banned in contemporary Sweden. Secularity as a given model for the state is challenged by increasing diversity in practice and demands from citizens, and by Swedish and European law granting individuals and groups the right to freely practise their religion in public. The editorial and column in *Dagens Nyheter* go further in accepting religious diversity as the starting point for how a democratic state should handle religion as a public utility. *Göteborgs-Posten* appears to focus on a separation between religion as primarily an individual freedom and secularity as a principle for public life, while still recognizing calls to accommodate religious diversity in public opinion and legal practice. Thus, individual freedom as a norm for expressions of religion in the public space is complex when individuals may choose to embrace as well as opt out of religion.

Complexity, continuity, and change

Finally, we will return to the question of whether the representation of religion in 2018 indicates a continuity of the trend of a more tolerant approach

towards religious diversity in the Swedish daily press. Most of the material analysed in this article is too limited to offer a coherent answer to this question. Bearing this in mind, it is still possible to point to some trends when comparing articles from 2018 and trends reported in previous research from the period between 1988 and 2008. First, the material from 2018 shows that religion is predominantly discussed as an issue that concerns public life in Swedish society. This can be seen as a continuation of the trend towards including religion as part of broader political debates rather than as a separate section of society (Lövheim and Linderman 2015, 46). Thus, articles appear to depart from religious diversity as a new reality in Swedish society, while secularity in the sense of a strict separation of religion from the public sphere is no longer the given premise for the coverage of religion. While these findings indicate an *awareness* about religious diversity in the daily press, the question of tolerance is more ambiguous. As has been pointed out, previous studies have shown that tensions between religious diversity and gender equality and individual freedom are a prominent feature of the representation of religion in Swedish editorials (Lövheim 2017). Following Hjelm (2015), the coverage from 2018 also shows a continuation of a focus on practice – religious clothing and schools, or the treatment of women – rather than belief in the public discourse about the visibility of religion. The analysis shows that Islam exemplifies regulations and practices considered problematic more often than Christianity. Although there are several examples of articles where Muslims in Sweden respond to the critical coverage of Islam, or articles that show diverging opinions within Islam, these are still the minority. Thus, the existence of a ‘conditioned tolerance’ of religious diversity, especially in relation to Islam, noted in previous research is clearly present in the 2018 coverage (see Axner 2013).

It is interesting that the question of Swedish tolerance of religious diversity is explicitly addressed in the material, most clearly in the editorial in *Dagens Nyheter* and in the news articles and columns in *Göteborgs-Posten*. It is also present in an editorial in *Svenska Dagbladet* arguing that Swedish society must face the implication of allowing the freedom of religion (7 June). On the Swedish national day an editorial in *Aftonbladet* states: ‘Swedishness has become a burning political issue. Ethnicity, language, religion, and culture are the most brutal battleground of the new age’ (6 June). This indicates that although religious diversity continued to serve as a starting point for the newspaper coverage, a debate about its *consequences* was more conspicuous in 2018 than in the period between 1988 and 2008. The material analysed in this article clearly shows that dilemmas and diverging opinions concerning

the implications of the tolerance of religious diversity for Swedish society is a burning issue in the daily press. The reflections by journalists in *Dagens Nyheter* and *Göteborgs-Posten* on the balance between the duty to expose problems within Islam, the reality of religious diversity, and the dilemmas of interpreting the meaning of the freedom of religion are mirrored in other studies about the coverage of Islam in the Scandinavian public service media (Lövheim and Jensdotter 2018; Hjarvard and Rosenfeldt 2018).

With regard to the mediatization of religion, these findings do not support a simplistic conclusion that mediatization over time increases or diminishes the significance of religion in society. As previous research has shown, mediatization as a process of change in the public presence of religion needs to be contextualized within changes in the interplay between the media and other institutions in Swedish society. The media co-structures developments by framing events in a particular way and by setting conditions for other actors (Hjarvard and Lundby 2018). In the introduction the question of a change in the Swedish newspaper coverage of religion has been set against the background of demographic and political changes since 2008. In a situation of greater religious diversity new questions arise concerning how to combine the core social democratic values of egalitarianism in the distribution of welfare, and the diverse rights and needs of the population. The NOREL study revealed an increasing focus on religion in parliamentary debates in the Nordic countries between 1988 and 2008. Islam was more frequently debated in the Danish and Norwegian parliaments than in Sweden during the period, while references to religion as part of human rights issues increased most in Swedish parliamentary debates (Lövheim et al. 2018b). In 2010, when the right-wing populist party *Sverigedemokraterna* (the Swedish Democrats) won seats in the Swedish parliament, debates in the parliament began to more closely resemble those in the other Nordic countries. The Swedish Democrats became the third largest party in the elections of 2014 and have since pushed for stricter immigration policies, more control of religious schools, and a focus on Swedish culture, traditions, values, and religion (*Skolpolitiska inriktningsmanifestet* 2018). The most prominent themes in the material analysed in this article concerning religious schools, the investigation of 'moral policing', the allowance of calls to prayer, and state subsidies for faith communities followed from political initiatives published as op-eds in the daily press. Besides references to these initiatives, religious freedom in the Swedish constitutional law, the UN Declaration of the Rights of the Child, and the European Court of Human Rights feature prominently in several articles. As the analysis in this article

shows, the newspapers' representation of religion is interconnected with changes in political opinion in Sweden, as well as juridical debates in the European Union concerning the freedom of religion in secular or mono-religious societies. Thus, the new visibility of religion in Swedish society is framed through the implications of this situation for the secular state. As Hjelm (2015) points out, the construction of religion as a social problem takes place where other social problems are defined and handled – in the media, politics, and the legal system.

The analysis shows that the daily press sets the stage for political initiatives but also engages in political debate. As Hjarvard argues in analysing media coverage of the Mohammad cartoons (2016), traditional newspapers have become more inclined to engage in opinion journalism, with increasing competition between print and digital news outlets. Similarly, Lundby (2019) argues that changes in the visibility of religion in the Norwegian daily press need to be analysed in conjunction with such structural changes in the newspaper industry. The analysis in this article shows that the newspapers co-structure political and religious change not only by representing various opinions in news articles and columns, but by taking a stand concerning the complex issues of how a democratic state should handle the freedom of religion.

In conclusion, this study shows that the coverage of religion in the Swedish press between 2008 and 2018 has developed through parallel trends of the continued acknowledgement of religious diversity and more contestation with regard to the implications of this condition. By highlighting the complexity of parallel and overlapping trends, and multi-vocal and at times inconsistent representations, this article can contribute to further studies of the interplay between the media and religious change that move away from predictions of single and coherent developments. Media representations of religious diversity are interrelated with changes in other institutions in Swedish society, such as politics, law, and education. Further analysis of how the media co-structures changes in attitudes to religion and religious diversity in Sweden are needed to assess the future of the 'Swedish condition'.

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MIA LÖVHEIM is Professor in Sociology of Religion, Faculty of Theology, Uppsala University. E-mail: mia.lovheim@teol.uu.se

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Book Reviews

Daniel Enstedt and Katarina Plank (eds): *Levd religion: Det heliga i vardagen*. Nordic Academic Press 2018, 352 pp.

The anthology *Levd religion: Det heliga i vardagen* [Lived Religion: The Sacred in Everyday Life], edited by Daniel Enstedt and Katarina Plank, gathers studies by Swedish and Danish scholars contributing to the lived religion research field. The book consists of nineteen independent and thematically arranged chapters providing a thorough and versatile presentation of studies addressing the nature of religion outside institutions, texts, and beliefs. The book's various case studies cover a wide range of topics: contemporary and historical Sufism; religious tourism; alchemy; religious youth; gardening; apocalyptic groups; tantric practices; and lived religion within institutions like schools and hospitals, just to name a few. Besides a large variety of research subjects, the volume also presents studies utilizing different kinds of research data: for example, qualitative fieldwork data, historical archive materials, and media material. Different theoretical approaches such as spatiality, materiality, and queer theories are also addressed in relation to the overall topic of lived religion. Together, the chapters convey a nuanced and extensive picture of the religious lives of individuals beyond official practices and belief systems. The large variety of case

studies, research data, and theoretical perspectives employed within this anthology also underline that lived religion cannot be regarded as a specific way of being religious or spiritual. It is rather a versatile field of research that seeks to investigate the ways in which religiosity and spirituality are present in people's lives.

The volume continues in the footsteps of pioneering scholars like Robert Orsi, Meredith McGuire, and Nancy Ammerman, and thus relates to the religious lives of individuals as bodily practices with spatial, material, and cultural dimensions. The chapters are organized in five themes, each addressing the overarching topic of lived religion from a different perspective: religion in the field, place, and materiality; life and archive; society and institutions; the body and sexuality. The first part focuses on the relationship between academic discussions and ethnographic fieldwork. While ethnographic methodologies are certainly not a new approach in the study of lived religion, they are undisputedly a very fruitful (if not, the most fruitful) method for exploring the practice of spirituality and religion in individuals' everyday lives. The section therefore seems essential, emphasizing the advantages of scholars engaging in the lives of their research participants, and discussing how such a research method often challenges theoretical assumptions and provides new perspectives

on the studied subject. Furthermore, Enstedt and Plank suggest that combining ethnographical research data with additional 'non-narrative' materia and analyses may serve to enrich and deepen future studies of lived religion.

The volume's second part addresses questions concerning place and materiality. This section consists of texts which illustrate the ways physical places and artefacts influence individuals' religious lives. The third part includes four chapters, all utilizing different kinds of data and methodologies for studying religious practices. It includes different methodologies to investigate everyday religious lives such as in-depth studies of individual cases, studies of internet material, participant observations, and analyses of archive data. The fourth part examines lived religion in a societal context. It consists of four chapters, discussing religious engagement and expressions of religions within social institutions like hospitals and schools from a lived religion perspective. The final part gathers studies examining the body as an essential part of people's religious lives by employing theories of embodiment and queer theory. Since people express, feel, and encounter both inner and external experiences through their bodies, a bodily dimension is fundamental for understanding how religion operates in individuals' lives. Meredith McGuire (2016) has even referred to the concept of embodied practices to emphasize that

spiritual experiences are 'embedded in and accomplished through the body'.

The book represents an intriguing addition to the lived religion research field. Many chapters interestingly illustrate how religiosity and spirituality often appear in mundane situations. For example, Jessica Moberg's chapter on Pentecostals in Stockholm demonstrates that religious dilemmas not only materialize in religious practices and items, but may at an individual level emerge through more day-to-day objects like a pair of jeans. Many of the other chapters also depict in different ways how the religious and seemingly secular parts of life interact. Åsa Trulsson's study shows how religious young people use religion to orient and structure their day-to-day lives in secular surroundings, while Lena Roos's article considers how mundane activities like gardening can become elementary components in constructing a religious identity. Both chapters effectively illustrate how seemingly secular daily practices and explicitly religious activities are not by default separate spheres of life. Instead, personal religious lives appear more complicated and nuanced than such traditional distinctions allow us to assume. As Roos puts it, the most mundane activities like gardening may be important elements of religious practice or the developing of a religious identity. Another chapter dealing with this question is Wilhelm Kardemark's study, in which he analyses how individuals relate to a secular place – the gym.

In Kardemark's study it emerges as an important arena for reflection on worldviews.

An aspect of the anthology with room for further elaboration is what the authors refer to as seven levels of lived religion, presented in the introductory chapter. The levels consist of seven recurring and overlapping themes in the articles: material; embodiment; religious practice; relationships; power; spatiality; and narratives. These categories are doubtless intriguing and may well provide central and novel perspectives for scholars to gain a deeper understanding of how religion is subjectively expressed and experienced in everyday life. However, it would have been interesting to read more about these levels in relation and comparison to each other, and how they might be operationalized in future studies. This is not a major shortcoming, and it by no means diminishes the book's main strength, which is that it provides the reader with an extensive collection of case studies, methodologies, and theoretical discussions examining how religion is lived in both contemporary and historical settings. The book can be warmly recommended to anyone interested in how religious and spiritual lives are individually expressed and practised in everyday life.

Linda Annunen

Åbo Akademi University

LINDA ANNUNEN PhD is a postdoctoral researcher at Åbo Akademi University and coordinator for the Åbo Akademi University Foundation research institute.

Email: linda.annunen@abo.fi

Tommy Ramstedt: *Knowledge and Identity within the Finnish Fringe-Knowledge Scene*, Åbo: Åbo Akademi University, 2018, 273 pp.

The theme of Tommy Ramstedt's doctoral thesis is the fringe knowledge milieu in Finland. The Finnish concept, *rajatieto*, coined in the 1970s, includes diverse phenomena connected especially with parapsychology, ufology, and esoteric currents. The fringe knowledge milieu is kept together by a number of events, magazines, and associations, and represents worldviews and ideas which are seen as strange by mainstream society.

Ramstedt aims to identify its most important media, events, and leading participants, and to observe how fringe knowledge is meaningfully constructed and becomes part of personal identity (pp. 7-8). The study is based on semi-structured interviews, magazines, and participant observations. Because the Fringe Knowledge scene is about alternative knowledge and spirituality, Ramstedt applies theoretical concepts derived from studies of alternative religion such as 'cultic milieu' (Colin Campbell), 'rejected knowledge' (James Webb), and 'stigmatized knowledge' (Michael Barkun) to illuminate his material (p. 70). Ramstedt is well read in the scholarly literature, and while he draws on several theoretical perspectives in his work, the most important perspective comes from his use of the concept 'scene'.

The concept has earlier been applied by Marcus Moberg (The Concept of Scene and its Applicability in Empirical Grounded Research on the Intersection of Religion/Spirituality and Popular Music, *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 26 (3) (2011): 403-17) and by Ramstedt with Moberg (Re-contextualizing the Framework of Scene for the Empirical Study of Post-Institutional Religious Spaces in Practice, *Fieldwork in Religion* 10 (2) (2015): 155-72). How does the concept of scene work in the thesis? According to the author scene is 'a systematic way by which one can approach, map, and study alternative religious spaces in practice' (p. 55). The approach includes analysing the internal discursive construction of the scene, its external discursive construction, and the aesthetic of the scenic construction. An important point, Ramstedt suggests, is that this framework does not pre-theorize its object of study. This means that scene in the thesis is a general methodological framework which keeps the other theoretical tools and approaches together. Scene is thus applied more as a perspective than a theory. Structural, material, spatial, aesthetic, and discursive elements are seen as interconnected building blocks which together constitute the scene. The concept of discourse is applied and connected to the scene perspective and treated as an integral part of the framework.

Ramstedt constructs an overview of the culture of late modernity, presents the religious landscape of Finland, and analyses the prac-

tices and values of the readers of the magazine *Ultra*, before presenting 'scenic structure' and 'scenic capital'. Scenic structure consists of the infrastructure of associations, media, and events; scenic capital is the merit and importance attributed to leading people within the scene (Chapter 4). In Chapter 5, which is the longest in the thesis, the author discusses how the members of the scene discursively construct the phenomenon of fringe knowledge, and their personal and group identities. This implies that we can see how people talk about this knowledge, what the focus is in lectures and events, and how fringe knowledge is described in magazines. An important point is that fringe knowledge is constructed as a different kind of knowledge from the knowledge of scientific society – more in line with traditional religious ideas about the meaning of life and life after death. In this milieu there is an ambivalent relationship with science (p. 176ff.) and an interest in parts of popular culture such as science fiction and books like *The da Vinci Code* (p. 190ff.).

Like other contemporary loosely organized groups, the stress is on individualism and being eclectic at the same time as the fringe knowledge milieu is kept together by a certain like-mindedness. This is an ambiguity which is well known in New Age religion and alternative religion in general. Books and reading play an important role, and Ramstedt comments that one 'could thus talk about a form of armchair religiosity,

where the main activity consists of reading different books about Fringe-Knowledge phenomena' (p. 160). There are also bodily enactments in the form of meditation and sometimes in the form of dancing and walking, a sort of 'enactment of discourse' (p. 164). In addition to the concept of the authority of the individual, another concept, generally shared by the participants, concerns perennialism – that religions at their core contain a common universal truth (p. 166). The Indian concept of the world as an illusion or dream is also present (p. 167), as are millennial expectations connected with a new age (p. 205ff.). The internal discursive construction of the fringe knowledge scene is further shaped by how other people see the participants, referred to as the external discursive construction of the scene. The participants share a sense of being rejected by mainstream society, which contributes to the strengthening of their sense of unity and the creation of a feeling of belonging to an elite. Ramstedt describes this phenomenon as 'receiving authority through rejection' (p. 234).

Ramstedt succeeds in presenting an interesting analysis of the fringe knowledge milieu in Finland, and his application of the scene perspective helps to shed new light on the phenomenon. One of the benefits of the perspective is that it affords a more holistic and comprehensive picture of this milieu. Similar milieus exist in other countries. They are partly a result of the decline of institutional organized religion and

of a general weakening of religious authority structures. What is unique to Finland is that a particular concept has been coined to describe this phenomenon, *rajatieto*, which probably also contributes to the phenomenon having a stronger unity. The book will be an inspiration to those who want to study fringe knowledge scenes in other countries, as well as to those who want to study loosely organized religious milieus more generally.

Ingvild Sælid Gilhus
University of Bergen

INGVILD SÆLID GILHUS is professor in the Study of Religion at the University of Bergen.
Email: ingvild.gilhus@uib.no

Ingvild Sælid Gilhus, Siv Ellen Kraft, and James R. Lewis (eds): *New Age in Norway*. Equinox, 2017, 290 pp.

The anthology *New Age in Norway* explores how the New Age phenomenon has developed in a country usually considered one of the world's most secularized. The stated goal of the book is to make Norwegian-based research available to an international audience, while contributing to the theoretical discussion of alternative spirituality. *New Age in Norway's* twelve chapters set out to accomplish this in relation to their authors' particular topics and interests. The book ends with two afterwords, in which Liselotte Frisk and Mikael Rothstein discuss the Norwegian New Age milieu in relation to the Swedish and Danish milieus.

The introduction by Ingvild Sælid Gilhus and Siv Ellen Kraft offers an overview of how New Age ideas have spread and developed in Norwegian society since their introduction in the 1960s. While the New Age is a global phenomenon, it is always shaped by local influences. The book's strength lies precisely in its exploration of how global New Age discourses take on particular traits as they develop in a certain context. Concerning the Norwegian context, international New Age teachings are, among other things, spread and reshaped by domestic New Age celebrities, and blended with Scandinavian Sámi neo-shamanistic traditions.

Norway has a strong Lutheran tradition: more than 70 per cent of the population belongs to the Church of Norway. The first chapter, by Lisbeth Mikaelsson, explores how the protestant tradition has influenced people's perception of the category of religion, or what it should be. The church has seen the New Age as a serious challenge: scholars and officials have discussed the matter for decades. Although there have been polemical attacks against New Age spirituality, the main trend among church members is to combine New Age elements with the Christianity. A newer trend, likely to continue, is that the church has started to have an active dialogue with alternative milieus and diversified its activities to include retreats and blessings of haunted houses.

Margrethe Løøv's chapter deals with the role of the organization *VisionWorks* in disseminating New Age practices and beliefs. The organization has had a significant impact in spreading New Age spirituality: it organizes a fair attracting around 12,500 people annually. Siv Ellen Kraft contributes a chapter to the anthology about how the New Age has been portrayed in the Norwegian news and entertainment media. Kraft enters a dialogue with Stig Hjarvard's mediatization thesis, arguing that it has limited potential to describe the media treatment of New Age spiritualities. Although the media generally treats the New Age negatively, spiritual practices linked with Sámi shamanism and traditional folk

healing are usually presented more favourably. The most extensive media coverage of Norwegian New Age phenomena concerns Princess Märtha Louise's belief in and communication with angels. This and her establishment of the Astarte Education angel school were treated in the media as a national scandal. Angel spirituality is the focus of the chapter by Ingvild Sælid Gilhus, in which she discusses the relations between various angel discourses in Norwegian society. Angels cross the borders between Lutheran theology, popular religion, and New Age spirituality.

Both national borders and borders between the sacred and profane are treated in Torunn Selberg's chapter on spiritual tourism. Apart from trips to South America inspired by the *Celestine Prophecy* or to Bali in the spirit of the bestseller *Eat Pray Love*, Norwegian trip organizers have realized the national heritage is also open to spiritual commodification. Medieval Christian sacred sites like Nidaros Cathedral in Trondheim can be reimagined and reinterpreted as 'places of energy' to cater to seekers who do not necessarily see themselves as Christian. Sites sacred to the indigenous Sámi people of Norway have also become places of New Age pilgrimage. In her chapter on contemporary Norwegian shamanism Trude Fonneland points out that shamanistic practitioners seek inspiration from many sources like literature on pre-Christian traditions, the core shamanism developed by Michael

Harner, popular culture, and various New Age courses. This in turn has the potential to create hostility among practitioners as they disagree about what real shamanism should be or resemble.

Bengt-Ove Andreassen discusses how the New Age was treated in secondary and upper-secondary religious education textbooks between 1996 and 2008. As the New Age is a diverse phenomenon, with no self-evident authorities or canonical teachings, it is challenging to summarize what it is about in the relatively short space devoted to it in textbooks. The generally dismissive tone towards the New Age and warnings about occultism and Satanism have given way to more nuanced descriptions. Nevertheless, textbooks still tend to portray the New Age as something connected with entertainment more than religion.

Anne Kalvig contributes two chapters to the book. One deals with alternative medicine; the other focuses on contemporary spiritualism. In providing a general overview of alternative medicine in Norway, Kalvig also discusses the field of alternative cures in relation to Jonathan Z. Smith's spatial model of religion. Alternative medicine is also very present in contemporary Norwegian spiritualism. Although a focus on spirit communication and haunted houses is relatively popular in the country, Kalvig chooses to focus on the more active forms of spiritualism – people and organizations actively offering contact

with deceased loved ones or other suprahuman entities.

Asbjørn Dyrendal discusses the hybrid of New Age belief and conspiracy theory. This phenomenon, referred to as 'conspirituality', gained prominence after the 2001 attack on the Twin Towers. The focus of Dyrendal's chapter is on a certain scene within the larger Norwegian New Age milieu in which conspiracy discourses took centre-stage. Dyrendal's investigation of the blog forum *Nyhetsspeilet* offers insights into the rise and decline of an online environment. One of the reasons for the decline of this scene, Dyrendal argues, was its links to the millennial ideas surrounding 2012. When the Mayan calendar ended with no significant global change or spiritual awakening, the conspiratorial scene seemed to diversify.

Inga Bårdsen Tøllefsen looks at three Hindu-inspired meditation movements in Norway. As with many Hindu-inspired movements in the West, meditation movements in Norway have developed more individualistically, with less emphasis on guru devotion. The third editor, James R. Lewis, contributes a discussion on the dynamics of the Norwegian alternative spiritual milieu in a chapter co-written with Oscar-Torjus Utaaker. The authors argue the New Age is a phenomenon that would gain much from larger longitudinal studies, with samples of seekers being studied over time.

As the New Age is a diverse phenomenon emphasizing the freedom of the individual to create their own

combinations of beliefs and practices, it challenges scholars to pin down and conceptualize what they are actually studying. When New Age beliefs and practices interlink, it is clear that chapters in the book will to some extent treat – and sometimes even repeat – the same subjects and matters. The index thus proves very useful. The book should be of interest to scholars interested in the New Age and New Religious Movements, and a general audience with an interest in these topics.

Tommy Ramstedt

Åbo Akademi University

TOMMY RAMSTEDT PhD is a postdoctoral researcher in comparative religion at Åbo Akademi University. Email: tommy.ramstedt@abo.fi

Anders Sjöborg and Hans-Georg Ziebertz (eds): *Religion, Education and Human Rights. Theoretical and Empirical Perspectives*. (Vol. 1, Religion and Human Rights). Cham: Springer, 2017.

If we agree that the language of human rights is a useful language for human social life, the legitimacy of these human rights depends on the extent to which the population at large agrees with the rights, inscribed in law, and lends them their support. When people identify with human rights, it is possible that a kind of human rights culture may develop. (p. 2)

This anthology brings welcome theoretical, and perhaps more importantly, empirical perspectives to the field of human rights education (HRE). Its articles are mainly a result of a 2014 international workshop in Uppsala, which aimed to explore the relationship between religion, human rights, and education. Although religion is common to all the articles, the main focus is on human rights and how they can best be promoted. Starting from what the editors call the modern view that human rights implementation must be the responsibility of individuals as well as governments, the book's authors set out in different ways to shed light on the conditions for the shared support of human rights in various countries.

As is often the case in anthologies, the articles deal with very different topics. The editors pro-

vide only a short introduction, and there are no concluding remarks. Although this is understandable, a larger effort by the editors to tie the threads together would have been welcome. This makes it a little difficult to review the book as a whole. Yet the effort to bring together the fields of religion, human rights, and education is commendable, and the articles bring important insights for those interested in the intersection of these fields.

Four articles deal explicitly with religious education (RE) from different perspectives. Zielinska and Zwierdzynski (Chapter 2) provide an analysis of how textbooks used in confessional religious education in Poland understand and construct human rights. The authors find that RE textbooks provided by the Roman Catholic, the Orthodox and the Pentecostal Churches present human rights according to a religious understanding, limiting their applicability and universal status. Olga Breskaya (Chapter 3) gives an interesting account of the public debates on RE in Belarus. Using the framework of 'twin toleration', she problematizes the Belarusian model of secularism to identify whether the realization of the rights of its citizens can be properly protected. The role of the state, established religious institutions, and public opinion play important roles in considering RE models. Poulter et al. (Chapter 4) discuss how different considerations of human rights in relation to religion should be considered in the Finnish context when implementing RE.

Schihalejev and Ringvee offer a very interesting article about the role of RE in promoting respect for the freedom of religion in Estonia (Chapter 5). Estonia provides a fruitful context for this question, because it offers three different models: no RE; non-confessional RE; and confessional RE. Their analysis of data from the REDCo project and a newer supplementary study suggests that RE, both confessional and non-confessional, affects how students see issues such as fewer prejudices, more complex ideas about religion, and a more positive attitude towards religious difference. Although the picture is complex, the study indicates that the difference between having RE and no RE is more significant than whether RE is confessional or non-confessional in promoting respect for the freedom of religion.

The articles from Scandinavia examine religion and education more broadly. Based on the recurring public controversy about the role of Christian church services in Norwegian public schools, Pål Ketil Bottvar (Chapter 6) uses two cases to explore the complexities in attitudes to the public role of religion. Dan-Erik Andersson (Chapter 7) problematizes the teaching of the history of human rights in higher education. He shows that common human rights and religious narratives simplify complex historical issues. Victoria Enkvist (Chapter 8) delves into the complexities concerning freedom of religion in schools by analysing the Swedish Education Act in relation to the Instruction of Government and

the practices of the European Court of Human Rights. She shows that schools can become a special case concerning pupils' human rights and points out that there may be inconsistencies in Swedish law in this respect. Kavot Zillén (Chapter 11) explores conscientious objection in clinical healthcare education in relation to Article 9 of the European Declaration of Human Rights. Examining both the Article itself and relevant jurisprudence, she shows that conscientious objection can be covered by the right to manifest one's religion. However, the right can still be limited to protect other rights, which seems most relevant to this case.

In Chapters 9 (Ziebertz) and 10 (Ziebertz et al.) the authors explore the individual level in attitudes to human rights, discussing various factors relevant to their structuring by individuals. In the final article Paula Gerber (Chapter 12) deals directly with HRE, identifying six key elements of successful human rights education in schools.

Despite or perhaps because of the wide range of topics covered, the book offers many relevant perspectives on religion, human rights, and education. I feel the book's most important contribution is to empirically demonstrate the importance of the national and sociocultural context for attitudes to human rights. Ziebertz et al. deal directly with this question in Chapter 10. Aiming to make an empirical contribution to the debate concerning whether culture and society or individual

factors are more important in shaping attitudes to human rights, they analyse survey data from young people in Germany, Sweden, Indonesia, India, Kenya, and Nigeria. A statistical analysis of this data shows that the sociocultural context has a significant explanatory relevance for the respondents' attitudes to human rights compared to the influence of personality and individual factors. The anthology's other empirical articles confirm the importance of the national and cultural context. In the studies from Poland (Chapter 2), Belarus (Chapter 3), Estonia (Chapter 5), Norway (Chapter 6), and Germany (Chapter 9) historical, demographic, religious, political, and cultural factors unique to each nation are shown to significantly influence the conditions affecting the development of attitudes to human rights. This insight makes an important contribution to the international field of human rights education. One implication of this is that while HRE aims at universality, a common European HRE design may not be the most efficient way forward. The national context needs careful consideration in implementing HRE.

Another overarching theme is the role religion plays in promoting human rights. Across the articles this is shown to be ambiguous, especially when the role of religious institutions is considered. Different models of RE may provide various conditions for promoting human rights. At an individual level religious affiliation seems to influence

the way people structure their views of human rights. Although the book does not treat the role of religion systematically, the concerns the articles raise will be important if RE is to be relevant in promoting human rights. The editors propose that 'religious education has to develop programmes that do not cover the ambivalence but develop concepts from the inner heart of the religion, which can work as a religious source for modern liberties'. However, I feel this proposition raises serious questions about how such a development of concepts from 'the inner heart of the religion' can be undertaken and by whom, given the multifaceted state of religious education across Europe.

This anthology is a welcome addition to the field. A major strength of the book is that the empirical articles build on extensive studies with large samples, providing solid foundations for its conclusions. The relationship between human rights at the state level and the attitudes of individual citizens is complex, and the role of education in building and sustaining a human rights culture may be essential. This book significantly contributes to expanding our knowledge of this complexity.

Audun Toft

University of South-Eastern Norway

AUDUN TOFT is Associate Professor at the University of South-Eastern Norway.
Email: audun.toft@usn.no

Contributors

LINDA ANNUNEN PhD is a postdoctoral researcher at Åbo Akademi University and coordinator for the Åbo Akademi University Foundation research institute. Email: linda.annunen@abo.fi

HENRIK REINTOFT CHRISTENSEN is Associate Professor in the Sociology of Religion, Aarhus University. E-mail: hc@cas.au.dk

INGVILD SÆLID GILHUS is professor in the Study of Religion at the University of Bergen. Email: ingvild.gilhus@uib.no

KNUT LUNDBY is Professor Emeritus of Media and Communication, University of Oslo. E-mail: knut.lundby@media.uio.no

MIA LÖVHEIM is Professor in Sociology of Religion, Faculty of Theology, Uppsala University. E-mail: mia.lovheim@teol.uu.se

TOMMY RAMSTEDT PhD is a postdoctoral researcher in comparative religion at Åbo Akademi University. Email: tommy.ramstedt@abo.fi

TEEMU TAIRA is Senior Lecturer in Study of Religion, University of Helsinki. E-mail: teetai@utu.fi

AUDUN TOFT is Associate Professor at the University of South-Eastern Norway. Email: audun.toft@usn.no