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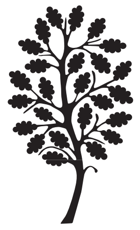

THE FINNISH SOCIETY FOR THE STUDY OF RELIGION

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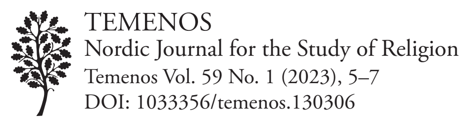

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Editorial Note

We are pleased to introduce this new issue of Temenos, the first issue under our journal's updated name: *Temenos – Nordic Journal for the Study of Religion*!

Changing the name of a journal is seldom done on a whim, especially not with a journal as distinguished as Temenos. However, academia is not a set field. Subjects and concepts develop and change. This is also the case in our field, the study of religion. While the term 'comparative religion' for some still broadly incorporates the multifaceted field of religion research, it is for others a fairly unknown concept, highlighting more a method than a varied perspective. This varied understanding, or lack thereof, is something both the current and earlier editors have noted.

The discussion about updating the name of Temenos to better communicate the aim of the journal was initiated with the publishers of the journal, the Finnish Society for the Study of Religion, and its board. We then brought the topic to our prominent editorial board. The support for a name change was unanimous, though the need to continue to highlight the comparative approach as one important method was also underlined. The final decision to update the name of our journal was taken at the annual meeting of the Finnish Society for the Study of Religion in 2022.

At the same time as we update the name of the journal we have also wanted to update our look. We hope you like our new colour scheme!

What has made Temenos such an important publication in the study of religion over the years is of course not to be found in the journal's name but in its content. Our new issue brings together both Nordic and international research on a range of current and thought-provoking topics, ranging from death to mental illness and from Christmas and Covid-19 to the journey of a drum.

We begin with last year's Temenos lecture by Anna Sokolova. The lecture was held on 8 December and is titled 'Imagine There Is No Death… Soviet Funeral Reforming en Marche'. Sokolova argues that the Soviet practices of death and attitudes towards dead bodies can be seen as one of the most important changes that have taken place in Russian society over the last 150 years. While Soviet leaders were given lavish state funerals, the death of an 'average' person became less and less visible. The state made efforts to

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reform the funeral sphere, but this did not lead to the development of new funeral rituals. Rather, as Sokolova shows, this policy gradually diminished the social value of funerals and facilitated a transition to DIY funerals.

The following two peer-reviewed articles focus on Christmas in different ways. Evelina Lundmark explores how Christian heritage is engaged with, strengthened, and contested in and though Swedish newspapers and in the annual Swedish Christmas Calendar. While Sweden is perceived as highly secular, the ideas of the Swedish cultural heritage remain tied to notions of a Christian past. Christmas is particularly salient for Swedes' understanding of their cultural heritage and national identity, which includes perceptions of Christmas as 'merely' a tradition. Using theories of nostalgia and banal religion, Lundmark illustrates how Swedishness is constructed in the Christmas Calendar and in the framing of the Calendar in Swedish newspapers.

Elisabeth Tveito Johnsen next explores ecclesial online identities during the Covid-19 pandemic, focusing on the majority churches in Denmark, Norway, and Sweden and their Facebook activities during the Christmas of 2020. The Covid-19 pandemic was a situation in which churches were 'forced' to use digital media as a primary arena of outreach. The study demonstrates how the Church of Norway and the Church of Sweden enacted church practices on Facebook, while the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark tried not to be too 'churchy'. Overall, Johnsen shows that the churches' online identities on Facebook are not new representations but rather intensified versions of their distinct offline identities as 'folk churches' for the whole population.

In the third peer-reviewed article Siv Ellen Kraft takes us on the fascinating journey of a drum. In October 2006 a drum embarked on what is possibly the most extensive journey of any drum at any time. The ambitions of the world drum were grand: to serve as a wakeup call to the needs of Mother Earth by linking people, things, and places. Kraft presents her take on the project in the context of the reclaiming of drums in Sápmi and globalizing discourses on indigenizing religion, and through a focus on object agency, and the modes and codes of Indigeneity on the move. 'Drift matter' is proposed as a concept to think with as we follow the drum's journey.

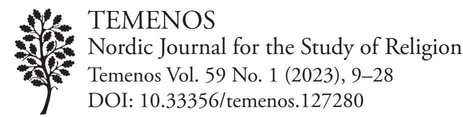
In the final peer-reviewed article Francis Ethelbert Kwabena Benyah explores the role of prayer camps in contemporary Ghana. Prayer camps serve as an environment for healing rituals and play an important role in the lives of many Ghanaians, spiritually, economically, and socially. Benyah illustrates the reasons for the continuous reliance on prayer camps as institutions of healthcare for individuals suffering from mental illnesses. He

argues that prayer camps will continue to exert public influence and play a dominant role in the treatment of mental health issues in Ghana due to the underlying religio-cultural beliefs associated with illness and the inadequate resources at the disposal of state-owned psychiatric hospitals.

We conclude this issue with a review article written by Jere Kyyrö, in which three recent volumes exploring discourse analysis in the study of religion are presented and compared, and a book review written by Linda Hyökki.

We hope you will enjoy this issue!

Sofia Sjö and Minna Opas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Temenos Lecture 2022

Imagine There is no Death… Soviet Funeral Reforming en Marche

ANNA SOKOLOVA
University of Helsinki

Abstract
The idea of human mortality and its derived funerary practices seem to be among the most enduring aspects of culture. What if we stated that death meant nothing but pure organic decomposing, leaving nothing behind but the chemical constituents? What if such an approach became the basis of an active reformatory policy of a state? Soviet practices of death and attitudes towards dead bodies can be mentioned among the most significant changes that have taken place in Russian society over the past 150 years. While Soviet leaders have been given lavish state funerals, the death of an 'average' person has become less and less visible. Although the state made considerable efforts to reform the funeral sphere, this did not lead to the development and enhancement of brand new funeral rituals. Rather, this policy gradually diminished the social value of funerals and facilitated a transition to DIY funerals. Following Robert Hertz and Arnold van Gennep, I consider funerary practices as a social phenomenon and a social mechanism that allows society and its members to adapt to mortality, experience loss, and restore their integrity. In this Temenos lecture I will show how a new understanding of human nature and human mortality transformed the social fabric of Soviet society. The lecture is based on my recently published book *A New Death for a New Man? Funeral Culture of Early USSR*.

Keywords*: funeral culture, Russia, Soviet Union, atheism, cremation*

On 3 January 1921 the famous children's writer and literary critic Korney Chukovsky visited one of the first crematoriums in Soviet Russia. Boris Kaplun, cremation movement enthusiast and an organizer of the crematorium in Petrograd (Leningrad), conceived his creature as a luxurious

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crematorium-temple, which ‘by its very appearance, should help in every way to create the necessary spiritual mood in the masses, which alone will make the idea of corpse-burning acceptable to the public’ (TsGA SPb 1919). However, during the three-year construction period the project underwent numerous changes. The result was that instead of a specially built gorgeous temple, the public baths on the outskirts of Petrograd were converted for the needs of the crematorium. Chukovsky described his visit in a diary note:

> We are laughing with no respect. No kind of solemnity. Everything is bare and straightforward. Neither religion nor poetry, not even simple politeness, brightens up the place of burning. The Revolution took away the old rites and decorum and gave none of its own. Everyone is wearing hats, smoking, and talking about corpses as if they were dogs. Indeed: what ceremonies! Who cares about the name of that useless carrion going to the furnace? It would have burned sooner, that’s all. But, as bad luck would have it, the carrion did not burn. The furnace was Soviet, the engineers were Soviet, the deceased were Soviet – all in disarray, somehow, barely (Chukovsky 2012, 313).

Twenty-two years later, in 1944, the Council of People’s Commissars of the RSFSR conducted a series of audits of the funeral services in the largest cities of the Union, which gave the impression that the staff of funeral trusts across the country not only did not work well but did not expect anyone to apply to them for help in the organization of a funeral:

> The undertaker has no stores for selling coffins and funeral paraphernalia. There is no signboard for manufacturing coffins. There is no entrance door, and customers enter the workshop through the window. The workshop is not equipped and is full of garbage. On the inspection day, the workshop did not have any ready-made coffins. From January 1 to September 1, 1944, there were 126 coffins made in the workshop, and the cemetery workers dug out 1145 graves during the same period. By comparing these figures, we can see that the population’s demand for coffins was satisfied by 9% only. (GA RF 1944)

Another 35 years later, in 1978, a resident of the Sumy Region of Ukraine wrote a letter to the Central Commission for the Study and Implementation of New Civil Festivals and Rites under the Council of Ministers of the Ukrainian SSR in which she drew attention to the complete absence of any funeral institutions in the entire region where she lived:

> Everyone knows how they organized funerals in pre-revolutionary times: all the equipment was in the local church. One could borrow a long strap (not a rope), and there were special stretchers to carry the deceased. Nowadays, we carry the deceased on a truck. A man dies, and relatives are running around looking for a chauffeur with a car. And, sometimes, the car came out from under the manure. As soon as they dumped the manure, they put the dead person on it. Sometimes some manure is still left on the car, and the car smells. Then they search for something to put the coffin into the grave (Smolkin-Rotrock 2012, 457).

These quotations, reflecting feelings and personal stories from different years and places in the Soviet Union, represent the typical experience of the encounter with death and the mortal practices of Soviet man. Finding a burial place, forging documents and bribes, seeking someone to make the coffin from something and a vehicle to transport the deceased to the cemetery, and finding someone who could dig a grave or stuff to make a fence from so that it would simultaneously protect the tomb from grazing cattle and could not be stolen for firewood – all were questions the family of each person who died in the USSR had to solve in the shortest possible time. How did it happen that throughout the Soviet period, against the background of the lush funerals of Soviet leaders, a completely different reality unfolded, in which, de facto, no institutions were responsible for the funeral of the average person so that for many years funerals became DIY affairs, with the relatives of the dead carrying out every stage of the funeral without the involvement of any funeral professionals? How was the funeral transformed from an elaborate transition ritual into a kind of quest with a traumatic and unpredictable scenario? How did funerals and death turn from a natural, regular, and proper end of any life into something shameful, silent, and hidden? These are the questions I will address in this lecture.

Soviet project and social significance of death

The Bolshevik revolution of 1917 is well known for its anti-religious and atheist attitudes and the effort to create a new social order and even a new man. These approaches led to the creation of new social relations and the destruction of old ones. However, I will not address the destructive power of the militant atheist movement or the projects to create a new way of life. Instead, I will focus on how discursive practices based on a new atheist understanding of man transformed rituals of transition in Soviet society – notably, how they changed death-related rituals.

The interpretation of human nature, its relationship with the phenomenon of mortality, and its derived funerary practices are among the most enduring aspects of culture. However, the Bolsheviks questioned this fundamental cultural constant by declaring the creation of a new society and a new man based on a materialistic and scientific view of the world. Such a view eventually created what might be called a two-layered system of Soviet funerals. The funerals of Soviet leaders and notorious Soviet citizens took place on such a scale that they are etched in memories even today, many decades later. In contrast, the funerals of ordinary Soviet people became increasingly invisible over the years, dropping out of the social fabric.

Undoubtedly, the displacement of funerary practices from the public space is not a unique feature of Russian society. Philippe Ariès believed that displacing death, or making it invisible, was a crucial feature of modernity. 'Except the death of statesman, society has banished death. In the towns, there is no way of knowing that something has happened [...] Society no longer observes a pause; the disappearance of an individual no longer affects its community. Everything in the town goes as if nobody died anymore' – he notes (Ariès 1983, 560). However, I think the situation we are dealing with in the Soviet period is significantly different. It is not simply a question of pushing death out of the public sphere but of forcing it out of a broader range of social practices and institutions, creating a situation where society lives as if death does not exist.

I argue that this feature is a product of the basic concepts underlying the Soviet project, whose foundations were related less to the socialist ideology of the new regime than to the fundamentally new anthropological constants underlying the new worldview confessed by the Bolsheviks. This utopian project of building a new society implied the formation of a novel and perfect human being, free from the imperfections of the old world. The idea of this person, who will have to live in the beautiful world of communism, gave rise to a new interpretation of man around which society was being 'reassembled'. It is no exaggeration to say that a significant part of this interpretation was an original view of human mortality. The deliberately atheistic worldview of Bolshevism's supporters presupposed a fundamentally alternative sense of human nature's finiteness. The old categories, based on the Christian notion of the immortality of the soul and the subsequent resurrection from the dead, were unacceptable to the Bolshevik regime, which created the need to redefine the entire set of ideas about human existence, even if only a minority of the population shared the new ones.

The alternative conception of human existence and mortality was by no means a peripheral feature of the social order the Bolsheviks created. In any case, no matter how utopian the reformers' concepts were, it was impossible to ignore not only the fact of the physical finiteness of each person's earthly life but also the numerous deaths resulting from the Civil War and the accompanying epidemics that were a constant reminder of this fact.

Far more important, however, was the social role of death in a newly emerging society. Considering death and the practices of dealing with the dead body as a social phenomenon, I suggest that death is not only a physical act of the end of life but forms a set of essential practices that determine and structure collective behaviour. Following Robert Hertz and Arnold van Gennep, I suggest that the transitive nature of funeral rituals should be a focus of this study. Along with other transitional rites, those dealing with the dead body are intended not only to ensure the successful transition of the deceased to the other world but even to facilitate a change of status of those left alive. Each member of society taking part in the rites not only contributes to the separation of the deceased from the community of the living but also acquires a new status, first associated with the limitations of the transition period (mourning) and then with successful reintegration into the community of the living (Gennep 1960, 146–165). The death of any member of society creates a rupture in social relations. From Hertz's perspective death destroys not just a person, but a social essence created in a long relationship between people (Hertz 1960, 76–86). Following Hennep and Hertz, Thomas Lacker argues that 'Death in culture takes time because it takes time for the rent in the social fabric to be rewoven and for the dead to do their work in creating, recreating, representing, or disrupting the social order of which they had been a part' (Laqueur 2016, 10).

Indeed, by doubting the significance of individual death and death-related rituals, the Bolsheviks compromised these essential functions of the social importance of death. We shall see the consequences of this in what follows.

Funeral reform

Funeral rites and other practices dealing with dead bodies are the most conservative element of culture. When changes occur, they always have some value, testifying to the internal development of society, the direction in which it is moving, and how its self-consciousness is changing (ibid., 93–94). That said, the rapid changes in the practices of dealing with dead bodies

that occurred in the early Soviet period are crucial for studying the Soviet project and exploring the changes taking place in society at the deepest level.

Shifts in practices dealing with dead bodies occurred gradually and unevenly throughout the Soviet period. However, whatever these changes were, they all had a common starting point: the funeral reform of 1917–1918, which included several decrees. All these decrees in one way or another were aimed less at changing funeral rituals than at secularizing family life.

Like other life cycle rites in Russia before the Revolution, funeral rites were entirely under the control of religious organizations. Religion was one of the most critical social characteristics in the Russian Empire and was more substantial than ethnicity (Baiburin 2017, 55–56, 216–219).

When handling the deceased, everyone had to obey the strict rules of the confession to which they were formally assigned. The influence of religious communities concerned not only the burial itself and its regulation but also the administration of funerals, the management of cemeteries, and, of course, the revenues from burials. In addition to burying and cemetery supervision, the church was responsible for registering deaths. It was thus impossible to bury a person (or register a new birth or marriage) without the involvement of a religious institution. In this sense, being a 'practising' atheist, a literal 'non-religious' person in pre-revolutionary Russia was formally impossible.

According to Tony Walter the specific form that funeral culture takes in a given country is determined precisely by the architecture of funeral management (or by those who control and dispose of dead bodies) (Walter 2005; 2012). In pre-revolutionary Russia dead bodies, in this sense, belonged entirely to the church. This fact dictated the entire structure of funeral culture and a specific set of practices for handling dead bodies. The atheist invasion of a newly emerging state related to funerals intended to overcome this 'priests' dictate' (Bonch-Bruevich 1968, 13).

The first decree concerning the practice of dealing with dead bodies was the decree 'On civil marriage, on children, and on the keeping of registers' of 12 December 1917, which proclaimed the creation of a new system of registration of 'civil status acts' – that is, marriages, births, and deaths. The decree did not simply create the possibility for family ceremonies outside any religious organization but made their secular form, the registration, the only legal one. Naturally, this made the question of the deceased's confessional affiliation meaningless. Neither a church funeral service nor the formal adherence to a particular denomination or parish mattered any longer (Dekret SNK 1957, 249).

The most significant part of the funeral reform was the Decree of the Council of People's Commissars of the RSFSR 'On cemeteries and funerals' of 7 December 1918. The decree abolished the categories of burial places, transferred all cemeteries, crematoria (which, incidentally, did not exist in Soviet Russia at that time), and morgues, as well as the organization of the funeral itself to the local Soviets, abolished payment for places in cemeteries, and established the same funeral for all citizens. It also allowed the performance of religious rites at the request of the relatives at their own expense. No less important was that from the publication of the decree all private funeral businesses with all their staff submitted to the local Councils of Deputies without stopping their activities. Thus, the entire funeral industry in the country underwent municipalization. Finally, the decree introduced funerals to the social insurance system, transferring workers' burial costs to the state through funeral benefits (Dekret SNK 1968).

The funeral reform thus had several goals at once. First, it implied alienation from the church and other 'bourgeois' institutions of the legal and actual control of dead bodies. The established system of civil registry offices transferred the registration of deaths to local councils. The municipalization of undertakers, cemeteries, morgues, and other infrastructure in turn transferred control of the practical aspects of burial to the latter. In addition to creating a legal possibility for non-religious funerals, this decision significantly redistributed financial flows, excluding the church from an essential source of income: the undertaking of burial services. Second, the reform intended to create funerals that were uniform and accessible to everyone, as it eliminated the division into funeral ranks according to social estate and introduced funeral allowances. With other social services such as jobs, housing, and medicine funerals were among the 'default benefits' for all workers in the country (Papernyi 1996, 116). A third goal was the legalization and introduction of cremation, a project that the synod of the Russian Orthodox Church had systematically blocked before the Revolution (Beliakova 2013, 537). In other words, if the dead bodies belonged to the church before the Revolution, after 1918 they were completely taken over by the state.

Consequences of the reforms

Regarding funeral services, neither the methods of the Bolsheviks' reforms nor their specific content was unique. The basic ideas of the 1918 reform already occurred in the draft of the 'Regulation on the arrangement of

cemeteries and crematoriums', dated 1913. They were in line with the transformation of funeral culture in every European country during the nineteenth century. However, if the methods and ideas of the Bolsheviks were unexceptional, the results were truly unprecedented. Although the funeral system in Russian cities in the autumn of 1917 was not flawless, by the spring of 1918 the funeral business and cemetery administration in the country's main cities had fallen into complete disrepair and neglect. Mortuaries and hospitals were overflowing with corpses, unburied bodies lay in cemeteries, gravediggers sabotaged work, people and livestock settled in cemeteries, and it was challenging to obtain burial documents.

The collapse affected every sphere that had been the object of utopian reforms in 1917–1918 – housing maintenance, education, medicine, and so on. Funeral services were no exception, but one of the most striking examples of the rapid degradation of the municipal sphere. However, the transition to a new economic policy in the first half of the twenties made it possible to restore many segments of the municipal domain in an old-fashioned way. At the same time, the attempt to restore the old order in cemetery management, reproducing the modernized pre-revolutionary schemes in the new conditions, undertaken in 1923, did not significantly improve the situation. As a result, cemeteries continued to decline – there were no coffins, spades, or gravediggers in cities across the country.

There is no straightforward answer to the question of why the attempt to reform the funeral administration in the 1920s in a practical way led to the dysfunctionality of this essential sphere of life. By focusing the entire reform on removing the church from funeral services, the Bolsheviks ignored the internal logic of that institution and the infrastructural role the church played in it. The reform ideologists believed funeral services were only an instrument of enrichment for the church, which manipulated the relatives of the dead for enormous profits. Thus, the Bolsheviks viewed the relationship between the church and the relatives of the deceased as one of faith and ritual.

They believed the church was an obsolete parasitic element in this framework, without which the workings of the whole mechanism would stay intact. In doing so, they ignored the essential role the church played. In the multi-actor configuration that emerged in the funeral business by the turn of the century, the part the church played was by no means exclusively related to rituals or religious faith. It was much more important that the work of the funeral industry as an integrated social institution was looped precisely into the church. The economic foundations of the funeral industry were in

the sphere of its management, which allowed it to function. The division of funerals into funeral ranks according to the social estate was seen by the Bolsheviks as a manifestation of social inequality inherent in the class society of the Russian Empire. This system made places near the church more valuable than places on the periphery of the cemetery. However, at the same time, these funeral ranks aimed to serve cheaper and free-of-charge burials, using the revenues from more expensive ones and creating a fund for the cemeteries' improvement and sanitary maintenance. The funeral business in this system functioned as a fully-fledged social institution, subject to an institutional logic based on the concept of the common good, to which all families who became unitarian members of the cemetery had access. By entering into this relationship, they entered into a contract with the church, represented by the cemetery parish. Thus, the reforms destroyed the funeral industry as an institution by mechanically removing the church from this system. Once the foundations of the funeral industry were destroyed, it is unsurprising that the entire cemetery economy fell into disrepair with lightning speed.

In my opinion this perspective of the reform and its consequences explains quite convincingly the decline and degradation that followed the municipalization of the funeral business. Yet although the general sense of the reforms and their basic idea – the transfer of control of the cemeteries and funeral infrastructure from the church to the city authorities – followed the vector outlined long before 1917, this does not explain why the dismal condition of the funeral services continued until the end of the Soviet period and largely into the post-Soviet era.

The reason for this ongoing abandonment and dysfunctionality is that after the mid-1930s funeral enterprises fell out of the system of state provision and regulation. Cemeteries were resubordinated to the local authorities, and all surveillance and funding for them ceased. At the same time the work of undertakers and the production of funeral accessories almost stopped. The whole industry, which until recently, even after the reform of 1918, had been a fully functioning institution, passed to the level of grassroots management, disintegrating into individual actors, each doing its work only part-time alongside another occupation.

A world with no place for death

The transformation of funeral services into a set of self-supporting practices that occurred everywhere from the second half of the 1930s can be better

understood if we examine it from the perspective of urban planning and the place the innovative practice of cremation held within it. This shift in optics shows that the problems occurred not because there were hidden defects in the alternative principles of funeral administration but because there was no place for death and the deceased in the world that emerged after the Revolution. Utopia, populated by healthy people ignoring the diseases conquered by a proper healthcare system, and who satisfied hunger with food synthesized directly in factories, was fated not only to evict death but to ignore it in every possible way. Unsurprisingly, in the projects of Soviet cities designed for the new world there was simply no space for cemeteries. A purifying cremation that turned an irrelevant corpse into two kilograms of sterile white powder became the novel practice for dealing with dead bodies. 'The old', 'the dying', and 'the sick' were characteristic epithets of a past – a defeated world. Its remnants must be eliminated. The new world and the new man in Soviet rhetoric were consistently associated with aliases of health, youth, and vitality. The famous parades of athletes on Red Square could be a perfect demonstration of the vigorous nature of the newly emerging men who had come to the capital from all over the Soviet Union to march in orderly rows, acting with their healthy young bodies (Petrone 2000, 23–46).

In a utopia that displaced death cemeteries as enormous and incomprehensible domains of death seemed highly inappropriate. In the symbolic space of the new Soviet city the cemetery had no place at all. In old cities historic cemeteries were closing, while in rising cities they were completely absent from construction projects. In the future world a factory-like crematorium, set in an optimistic production landscape, should replace the old-fashioned cemetery. However, despite the active promotion of cremation and the positive attitude expressed by state leaders towards this innovative form of burial, throughout the pre-war period there was only one constantly working crematorium – the Donskoi Crematorium in Moscow – which opened in 1927. Meanwhile, people continued to die and bury the deceased in cemeteries that had long been closed and overcrowded.

How can a simple human death fit into the Soviet narrative in this context? And what are death and human mortality in the Soviet understanding of human nature?

The change in the dominant discourse from Christian to Marxist radically alters the transcendental foundations underlying ideas about human beings. Friedrich Engels, one of the founders of the new doctrine, defines the essence of human mortality as follows: 'Death is either the dissolution

of the organic body, leaving nothing behind but the chemical constituents that formed its substance, or it leaves behind a vital principle, more or less the soul, that then survives all living organisms, and not only human beings' (Engels 1955, 387–388). But are there many people who are capable of leaving behind 'a principle that outlives all living organisms'? According to Engels the conclusion from this premise is obvious. As such people are few, death for most is merely the decomposition of the physical body into a set of chemical constituent parts, and the funeral rite makes no sense to them. But what does it mean to recognize that a person's death is an absolute end? How do we mourn the dead in such a case? Why do we need funerals as such?

Red funerals

The answer to these questions was complicated, even for the most ideologically minded atheists and Bolsheviks. The writer Vikenty Veresaev devoted a separate work to finding it. Aware of the semantic gap that the denial of the traditional interpretation of the funeral ritual opens for the thinking person, Veresaev expressed himself as directly as possible:

> For us nowadays a living person is only a certain combination of physiological, chemical, and physical processes. When a person dies, this combination disintegrates, and the person as such disappears and turns into nothing. What's left is a carcass of rotting meat. How can this carcass be treated rationally? With the same attitude as to garbage. But we place this decomposing body in a box wrapped in red fabric and place a guard of honour in front of this box, which takes turns every ten minutes. So what about all this mess? What is the point of all this? (Veresaev 1926, 6).

However, the 'work of the dead', that is, the social role of the practices of dealing with dead bodies, is binary. For the dead its meaning consists of the rite of transition from the world of the living to the deceased's society. The Christian ritual about which Veresaev wrote is based on the notion of the soul's immortality, which leaves the dead person's body to continue its eternal life. At the same time funerary practices play an efficient therapeutic role for the living by helping them adapt to loss and, having survived it, return to ordinary life. Veresaev, like other early Soviet propagandists and publicists, acknowledges this binarity. He calls for the abandonment of the first part related to continuing to live beyond death but the preservation of the ritual's therapeutic role by giving it new content.

However, experience has shown that the two functions of funeral practices are closely related, and one does not work without the other. If we abandon the first part, recognizing the dead body as only a 'carcass of rotting meat', the therapeutic component of the funeral would also vanish. The funeral ritual, even performed following the best examples of Soviet culture, does not bring relief and solace.

Although the Bolsheviks' atheist approach assumed it was easy to purge religion from the funeral rite, it proved impossible to remove the semantics associated with the transitive nature of the funeral. It turned out that when the semantics of transition underlying the funeral ritual was abandoned, any sense of dealing with the dead disappeared. At the same time, reducing funeral culture to a set of sanitary measures, which seemed obvious to the most radically minded Bolsheviks, also proved insufficient. Meanwhile, the foundations of the Bolshevik worldview made it impossible to offer any alternative semantics of death other than the abstract 'life in the memory of descendants'. This substitute form of immortality developed significantly in Soviet mass culture, becoming, in particular, an essential foundation of socialist realism in Soviet literature (Clark 1981). However, its symbolic meaning was insufficient to create a workable funeral ritual for the ordinary Soviet individual. The design, symbolism, and procedure of the funeral ritual remained significantly reduced and hollowed out, bearing no adaptive potential associated with the trauma of death.

While it was clear that the old practices of framing death, closely related to Christian doctrine, were inappropriate for convinced communists, new ones were hard to find, and their necessity was not apparent. Should the death of a communist be furnished with some 'communist rituals', or was it better to process a body into a useful raw material – soap or fertilizer – as happens after the death of animals? And if a rite was still necessary, what did it actually symbolize if the end of a person was just the beginning of the decomposition of their body into a multitude of microelements? In seeking a new form for an unclear purpose, the ideologues fell into emptiness.

The most prominent Bolsheviks joined the discussion of the new rituals. Trotsky, in his book *The Culture of the Transitional Period* (1923), devoted a separate section to an apologia for the new red rituals, including the funeral rite. The regional press throughout the 1920s published articles detailing red funerals all over the country. The very discussion of the new funerals in the pages of newspapers and pamphlets, at debates and meetings, and on excursions to the crematorium and mausoleum is evidence of a collective reflection seeking a new form of farewell to dead bodies that would

articulate emerging ideas concerning the individual and social relations. It was also a sign of a growing vacuum and dissatisfaction with the solutions that occurred during the evolution of the Soviet project.

Despite the active support of prominent Bolsheviks, the red funeral project predictably failed. The most conservative estimates suggest the Soviet people buried no more than eight per cent of the deceased according to the novel ritual. The lack of demand for the red funeral as a new universal funeral rite shows that the reflection proposed by the ideologists was unproductive, provided no prescriptions, and generated no imperatives. The red funerals did not offer any 'organized, fixed forms for the expression of feeling' (Veresaev 1926, 18). They did not lead to 'ready-made, artistically fixed channels for the expression of the sentiments crowding the soul' (ibid., 30), as Trotsky and Veresaev had expected. They confounded and provoked 'the thought of the pettiness of the new funeral rite' (ibid., 9). People for whom the 'old rites' were a backward thing of the past, that is, ideological atheists and communists, found themselves in an unsolvable paradox. On the one hand the nature of Soviet utopia ultimately ruled out the endowing of death with positive or any meaning. On the other, in a utopian frame where death had lost all its meaning, a mechanism for adapting to it that implied a collectively experienced semantics of death could not be formed. First within highly ideologized communities and then throughout Soviet society, funerals as an adaptive mechanism of reassembling collectivity ceased to work. Ordinary Soviet funerals became an increasingly dysfunctional act. Death in the new paradigm turns out to be an endless void.

Life in the memory of descendants

Robert J. Lifton suggests using the concept of symbolic immortality to describe how people adapt to human mortality (Vigilant and Williamson 2003, 173–175). This mechanism of living in the memory of descendants becomes a Soviet variant of symbolic immortality – the primary mode of adapting to the fact of death in Soviet society. Life in the memory of descendants becomes a normative version of Soviet symbolic immortality. Thus, in the writings of socialist realism, the individual end continually underwent a procedure of symbolic formalization ('died on duty', 'died in the name of ideals', 'died in the struggle', and so on) and was incorporated into the mechanisms of memory.

The new mortal frame, creating symbolic immortality and overcoming death through life in the deeds and memory of descendants, worked to a

certain extent as an adaptive mechanism. However, it entirely left aside the materiality of death itself, its factuality – the presence of a corpse and the need to perform specific and painful actions over it, as well as to assume the obligations of taking care of the material objects associated with the dead (cemeteries, tombs, monuments). The paradigm of 'deeds living in the memory of descendants' smoothed out the social trauma of the desemanticization of death, but only partially. The physical and symbolic components of death – cemeteries, ritual, and funeral infrastructure – remained outside. Moreover, they became even more meaningless, as they were unnecessary for affairs living in the memory of descendants (the only valuable thing the dead left behind). The exceptions were socially significant memorials such as Lenin's mausoleum, the necropolis at the Kremlin wall, and so on, which functioned as an assemblage point for the Soviet super-collective.

Displacing death

Although the transformation of the funeral culture of the early Soviet period started in 1917 with the new state's close attention and great interest, it continued later with waning interest and withdrawal from any regulation. The new understanding of the individual and society led to a loss of the meaning of death not only as a personal but also as a collective experience, and the attempts to find new sense (such as 'life in the memory of descendants') were only partly successful.

The only way to adaptively experience death in early Soviet society was its denial. The emerging mortal frame gradually negated the question of what should be 'good' practices for dealing with dead bodies, a question that had so concerned the minds of Soviet ideologues in the early 1920s. However, by the end of the 1930s it was becoming clear that the main effort concerning ordinary death should be directed not towards the creation of helping institutions and infrastructures or even new rites reflecting a new understanding of the human being, but towards making ordinary death as little visible as possible.

In 1937 the People's Commissariat for Communal Services prepared a draft of the 'Decree of the SNK of the USSR on Burial' that fully reflects this situation. It directly legitimizes the established double principle of Soviet funerals. According to this text special 'solemn funeral processions for outstanding figures of public or political significance' had certain advantages over the funerals of ordinary citizens. Such processions could be present in the public space of Soviet cities. At the same time, the project declared

the presence of standard funerals in public areas to be undesirable. The latter continued to pose a problem and should take place beyond the public sphere. Public processions of ordinary funerals, which:

> …disturb the regular traffic flow and produce a negative impression in passers-by and especially those who live on highways leading to cemeteries, in cities (more than 50,000 people) must end [...] [C]itizens should transport the dead in the dark to temporary storage, where, according to the wishes of the families or institutions, they should perform funeral rites at specified hours (GA RF 1936).

Thus, the funerals of ordinary people, being obscure and confusing and unfitting for the realities of the socialist city, should be eliminated from public spaces – literally pushed out into the invisible (ibid.).

Decay of funeral culture

The newly emerged funeral culture had two partly opposing doctrines at its core. The welfare state concept was to include funeral services in the general package of social services. Each Soviet family therefore had to get assistance in the dignified burial of a loved one. By including these services in a wide range of social goods – kindergartens, general education, medicine, physical education, access to housing, and so on – the young state placed funeral services among the most necessary elements of communist life. Putting funeral services in line with the other social benefits of communist society was justified by its crucial sanitary significance. However, such an approach conflicted with the novel funeral culture's second but no less critical foundation – a materialistic view and acute rejection of the metaphysical notion of the continuation of life after a person's death. Previously, various funeral expenditures were associated with a set of religious beliefs. It never occurred to anyone to abandon them in favour of a simple 'wooden box covered with a piece of fabric'. The refined materialism of the Bolsheviks made it necessary to explain the necessity of every expenditure, including that of burying the body, instead of deriving some extra benefits for the national economy – for example, by processing one's own body for soap or fertilizer. These approaches clashed in insurmountable contradiction. By including funerals in the list of social guarantees, the state committed itself to spending vast (on a national scale) amounts of money on organizing and performing a ritual without a distinct meaning.

This conflict replaced 'equal burial for everyone' with a bizarre two-level funeral system that emerged in the early years of Soviet power and persisted until the end of the USSR. The demonstrative political funerals of revolutionaries and Civil War heroes gradually formed a unique funeral ceremony for Soviet leaders and the nomenklatura during the 1920s. The most famous such funerals were those of Lenin in 1924 and Stalin in 1953. Although these ceremonies attracted enormous attention from contemporaries, they did not significantly affect funeral culture. A different ritual emerged for other communist leaders of a lower rank, an essential part of which was cremation at the Donskoi Crematorium in Moscow and the burial of the ashes in the necropolis by the Kremlin wall. More minor Soviet leaders who did not have the honour of being buried in the Kremlin wall could also rely on cremation in the Donskoi Crematorium. However, even in these cases their funerals became symbolic mass events involving hundreds of spectators, mourning speeches at the grave, obituaries in the newspapers, lavish decorations in the procession, and so on. In other words, these funerals were social acts, during which the new government reasserted the value of its reference points and heroes. Regular appeals to the memory of the 'righteous' dead structured the present and shaped the image of the future.

Soviet funerals of those of high rank were memorable events, eye-catching spectacles, and rich collective experiences. The overwhelming majority of Soviet funerals, those of ordinary people, were a less vivid social phenomenon. In the context of domestic state policy they migrated increasingly into the realm of simple body disposal, creating a general sense of the marginality of these practices and of 'ordinary' death more broadly. Unable to justify the enormous costs of improving urban cemeteries and maintaining the funeral infrastructure, the state authorities transferred the responsibility for controlling this sphere increasingly far down the bureaucratic ladder, gradually losing all administrative interest.

This duality resulted in the collapse of the institution of ritual specialists in cities. At the beginning of the twentieth century undertakers offering a wide range of services for people of different confessions, estates, and wealth worked efficiently in Russian cities. After their nationalization many funeral enterprises became defunct or reduced their activities. Almost the only thing that was available – though not always – was the sale of a coffin and the digging of a grave. Funeral paraphernalia, funeral arrangements, decorations, the care of graves, and even tombstones were not universally available. Few services that nominally existed were actually available. The old infrastructure – not only cemeteries but also equipment like a hearse,

coverings, canopies, shovels, and pickaxes – was not maintained and fell gradually into disrepair. This led to a severe marginalization and de-professionalization of the funeral domain.

By the beginning of the 1930s there was nothing left to provide funeral services to ordinary Soviet citizens. The Soviet reform of the funeral sphere had failed, and the bulk of grassroots regulations and spontaneously formed practices replaced the state policy. The families of the deceased assumed the primary responsibility for providing funerals for ordinary citizens. Undertakers, united in trade unions, were replaced by part-time custodians, providing individual funeral services for additional earnings.

The farther they were from large cities, the earlier and more quickly relatives started to resolve problems with funerals on their own. Each family had to make a coffin, search for gravediggers, transport the deceased to the cemetery, and make the grave monument. This state of affairs contributed to society forming a circle of people who, in addition to their formal duties, took on some funeral services.

Graves from the Soviet period show an almost complete absence of factory-made, standardized professional monuments. However, they are full of artisan constructions or DIY objects made from improvised materials. In contrast to pre-revolutionary headstones of marble and granite or simple wooden crosses, Soviet gravestones and fences could include a variety of elements, often borrowed from nearby production – waste gears and saw blades, rebars – anything that came to hand, and from which it was possible to create a specific pattern with a welding machine. In cases where such an expert was unavailable, relatives would make fences and monuments from improvised materials on their own. In the late 1940s, when my family finally managed to register an old pre-revolutionary family plot in Moscow's Vagankovskoye cemetery, they had to use the headboards of metal beds to make a fence. Most Russian families could share such memories.

Soviet funeral reforms and a new understanding of human nature led to a dramatic disintegration of the rituals, practices, and infrastructures associated with death. The intrinsic meaning of death as a social process is to reassemble the collective body after losing one of its parts, to create in its members the confidence that the danger has passed, the group is operating well, and that life will continue. There is thus no fundamental difference between a funeral as an individual and as a collective rite. In both cases it is a rite of passage. According to Douglas Davis death destroys the social being associated with a particular individual, creating a 'successful' community of the dead that mirrors that of the living (Davies 2000). In doing

so, society recreates itself. The transformation of the rituals of dealing with dead bodies considered here shows there was a rejection of the old rite of transition as not corresponding to the new understanding of the human being, and that a new one did not appear in Soviet Russia. The consensus on what the death of an ordinary person meant for relatives and society was lost. The lack of agreement concerning death contributed to the endless wars of memory around those who died during the Soviet period – in WWII, in the Gulag, and so on. The absence of a commonly expressed and shared understanding of what death was led not only to difficulties in dealing with people who had already died but also to a shocking ease in dealing with life – not only one's own but also that of others.

Abbreviations

GA RF 1944: Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Rossiiskoi Federatsii, f. A-339 (Ministerstvo gosudarstvennogo kontrolia RSFSR), op. 1, d. 1226, l. 20–20ob. (g. 1. Proverka hoziajstvenno-finansovoy deyatel'nosti moskovskogo tresta pokhoronnogo obsluzhivaniia i ego biuro magazinov v Proletarskom i Sovetskom raionakh g. Moskvy za period ianvar'–sentiabr' 1944, g. 2. Proverka vypolneniia postanovleniia SNK RSFSR ot 18.3.43 ob uluchshenii pokhoronnogo dela i ego magazinov g. Kirov i oblasti).

TsGA SPb 1919: Tsentral'nyi Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Sankt-Peterburga, f. R-2815 (Komissariat zdravookhraneniia soiuza kommun severnoi oblasti. Petrograd. 1918–1919.), op. 1, d. 320 (Delo po ustroistvu krematoriia v Petrograde (postanovlenie komissariata zdravookhraneniia, sanitarnye pravila)).

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ANNA SOKOLOVA PhD belongs to the Helsinki Collegium for Advanced Studies and is a Kone Foundation Fellow at the University of Helsinki. Email: anna.sokolova@helsinki.fi

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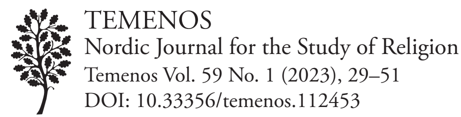
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Banal and Nostalgic: Memories of Swedishness in the Christmas Calendar

EVELINA LUNDMARK

Agder University

Abstract

This article explores how Christian heritage is engaged with, strengthened, and contested in and through Swedish newspapers and in the annual Swedish Christmas calendar. Although Sweden is perceived as highly secular and characterized by an increased distance between the former state church and the Swedish population, ideas about Swedish cultural heritage are still tied to notions of a Christian past. Previous research has highlighted Christmas as particularly salient for Swedes' understanding of their cultural heritage and national identity, which includes perceptions of Christmas as 'merely' a tradition. Using theories of nostalgia and banal religion, this article addresses how Swedishness is constructed in the Christmas calendar, as well as through its framing in Swedish newspapers. While the narrative of the Calendar does not normally include overt references to Christian parables, it frequently uses Christian and folkloric symbolism to effect a backdrop of nostalgia. I argue that the Calendar and its framing in newspapers play on conceptions of Swedishness that are inextricably linked to ideas of 'secularized' Christianity, and by extension to constructions of what counts as national belonging in contemporary Sweden.

Keywords*: national identity, banal religion, Christmas, Christmas calendar, Advent calendar*, *secularism*

Secular Sweden and mediatized Christian heritage

Despite large-scale surveys asserting Sweden's secularity (e.g. Norris and Inglehart 2011), and while a majority of the population is characterized by weak personal connections to the Swedish church, Swedes do appear to maintain a sense of kinship with Christian traditions as part of a cultural or national identity (Lövheim et al. 2018). However, in contemporary Sweden

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children are more likely to encounter religion and religious people in and through media than to experience religious practices themselves (Lövheim 2012); many children growing up in Sweden may thus only witness Christian practices and rituals via popular culture that plays on tradition and nostalgia like the Christmas calendar. The cultural heritage passed on to children by schools and public service media is still imbricated in Christian traditions (Burén 2015; Thurfjell 2015); traditions with which educators – in schools, as well as in public service media – are increasingly unfamiliar. This affects the depiction of traditions, in many cases by discursively reducing elements of practice rooted in Christianity to 'mere tradition' (Reimers 2019). In this article I explore how ideas of Christian heritage are engaged with, strengthened, and contested in and through the Swedish news and popular media.

Karin Kittelman-Flensner has shown strong linkages between culture, Christianity, and the celebration of traditional holidays – particularly Christmas – and perceptions of Swedishness among pupils and teachers in Sweden; a link that 'was articulated as obvious and unproblematic' (Kittelman-Flensner 2015, 206). Some of her informants would thus affirm the Christian roots of Christmas while disavowing religious linkages, emphasizing practices over belief (Kittelman-Flensner 2015). In this article I examine a constantly debated cultural institution in Sweden, the televised Christmas calendar, exploring how Swedishness is constructed both in the Calendar itself and through its framing in Swedish newspapers. Despite the Calendar's ubiquity, there is a clear lack of understanding of its place within Swedish culture. I thus explore how 'banal' Christian elements (building on work by Hjarvard 2012) may evoke a sense of nostalgia, and how this nostalgia plays into conceptions of Swedish national identity and modes of belonging.

The Christmas Calendar

Paper Advent calendars with Christmas motifs appeared in Germany in the early 1900s and first came to Sweden in 1934. Unlike the Christian motifs in the German variants, Swedish calendars tended to depict the countryside, nature, snowmen, sledges, and *tomtenissar*.[1] The first mass mediatized calendar was aired in 1956 on Swedish Radio, and a paper calendar specifically designed to accompany the radio programme came a few years later. In the

1 *Tomtenisse* or *tomte*, generally translated as gnome. The contemporary understanding depends largely on national romantic depictions (famously Victor Rydberg's poem 'Tomten', originally published in *Ny Illustrerad Tidning* in 1881) and are influenced by German folklore (Strömberg 2017).

1960s the televised Calendar started airing, first called the Advent calendar, switching to the Christmas calendar in 1971 (Nordiska Museet 2013). The contemporary televised Calendar is an originally produced show each year, running from 1 December and ending on Christmas Eve, with episodes of around fifteen minutes. While the Calendar's narrative does not necessarily have anything to do with Christmas, traditional celebrations, folkloric elements, and cultural references often function as a backdrop. There has been some research in Denmark on the Danish televised Christmas calendar, in which the cosy and nostalgic features of the holiday season are often emphasized, and traditional celebrations and folkloric elements often function as a backdrop (Agger 2013; 2020). Gunhild Agger has argued that the Danish variant has 'assumed the status of an institution' (Agger 2013, 267). There is no known equivalent research on the Swedish Calendar, but in a more general sense previous research has noted the role mass media – particularly newspapers – plays in nationalizing and homogenizing 'traditional' celebrations in Sweden (Löfgren 1993). For example, Strömberg (2017) has noted the role *Stockholms Dagblad* (1824–1931) played in shaping the modern celebration of Lucia, which had not previously been celebrated nationally (Strömberg 2017).[2]

Considering research which questions if the national romantic movement in Sweden truly ended (Barton 2002), it is crucial to examine how contemporary newspapers in Sweden frame traditions, as such framings are part of nationalizing processes. Johansen and Johansson has pointed out that public service media function 'as agents negotiating the content of cultural memory' (Johnsen and Johansen 2021, 232), and as an institution involved in the 'negotiation and renewal of Christian cultural heritage' seeking 'to realize community' (Johnsen and Johansen 2021, 231 referring to Denmark and Norway). The work of Strömberg (2017) and Löfgren (1993) suggests that newspapers in Sweden have a similar function in negotiating cultural memory. The prominent place given to the calendar in Swedish newspapers during the Christmas season indicates that the Calendar itself is part of this negotiation. In this article I analyse the Calendar which celebrated the sixtieth anniversary – *Mirakel* (Eng. *Miracle*) – as well as examining how it, and the Calendar more broadly, was positioned in Swedish newspapers in 2020.

2 Lucia refers to St Lucy's Day on 13 December. The modern celebration initiated by *Stockholms Dagblad* was tied to the national romantic movement in Sweden, and as Strömberg (2017) shows, contained allusions to racial biological ideology.

Data and method

Mirakel was interesting for several reasons, first because it depicts and contrasts two Christmases – in 1920 and in 2020 – as well as being the Calendar which celebrated the sixtieth anniversary. The analysis focuses on the depiction of Christmas via Christian, commercial, and folkloric elements, as noted during the qualitative coding, and how these tie into ideas of Swedishness. In addition, 36 articles related to *Mirakel* in Swedish newspapers were analysed, excluding notices about airtimes. Articles were found using the search terms *julkalender* (Eng. *Christmas calendar*) AND mirakel in media retriever, which yielded 415 results between 2019-11-01 and 2020-07-31 (day of data collection, most were from the end of November and the beginning of December 2020). Articles were selected from all the available print media; articles printed in multiple local newspapers were only analysed once. An additional search was conducted to analyse coverage of the sixtieth anniversary, which left an additional 21 articles (excluding articles focusing on *Mirakel*). Articles were found using the search terms julkalender AND 60 between 2020-01-01 and 2020-12-31, which yielded 137 results.[3] The newspaper articles were coded inductively, focusing on mentions of folkloric or Christian elements, how the Calendar was described in general, the use of emotive words or descriptions in the article (the most prevalent examples being a calendar living up to expectations, *julkänsla* [Eng. *Christmas atmosphere*], cosiness, the calendar fulfilling a need, and nostalgia), and mentions of old calendars. In the articles that covered *Mirakel* the elements in the *Mirakel* narrative were coded. In the articles covering the anniversary whether and how the articles described the historical development of the calendar was coded.

Chains of memory and nostalgia

In this article I am working from a theoretical understanding of nostalgia that builds on Danièle Hervieu-Léger's (2000) seminal work on religion as a chain of memory. She defines religion as 'an ideological, practical and symbolic system through which the consciousness, both individual and collective, of belonging to a particular chain of belief is constituted, maintained, developed and controlled' (Hervieu-Léger 2000, 82). In discussing the splintering of collective memory due to the processes of modernization, Hervieu-Léger defines

3 A search for the fiftieth anniversary was also conducted, which yielded 10 relevant articles. Overall, these articles did not appear to add or detract from the findings of the sixtieth anniversary and were excluded.

secularization as a crisis of collective memory, as the continuance of the chain depends on consciously passing on mentions and memories of the past. This splintering means that institutions like the Church of Sweden and its attendant practices and traditions 'become sources of cultural heritage revered for their historical significance and their emblematic function', but that they in themselves are unlikely to be 'mobilized for the production of collective meaning' (Hervieu-Léger 2000, 90). Religion is thus 'transformed into a reservoir of signs and values which no longer correspond to clear-cut forms of belonging and behavior that comply with rules made by religious institutions', signs that can be 'incorporated into other symbolic constructions, especially ones which come into play in the development of ethnic identity' (Hervieu-Léger 2000, 158).

This is aligned with Hjarvard's (2012) notion of banal religion, building on Michael Billig's (1995) work on banal nationalism, and in turn drawing on Hanna Arendt's (1963) conceptualization of the banality of evil. Billig uses the concept of the banal to highlight the 'ideological habits which enable the established nations of the West to be reproduced' (Billig 1995, 6), emphasizing with Arendt (1963) that banal refers to the commonplace and does not indicate harmlessness. Hjarvard deploys the concept to refer to religion as a commodity dispersed in public discourse, outside politics and inside culture; not in content explicitly dealing with religion as such, but as marginal phenomena appearing 'in relation to issues and stories that have no explicit, elaborate or intentional religious meaning', evoked to connote authenticity, for example (Hjarvard 2012, 34). This transformation does not sever the links with Christianity but does obscure them, and Christian elements are primarily mobilized 'for the purposes of identity' (Hervieu-Léger 2000, 159).

Because of the high level of church membership coupled with low levels of belief, Hervieu-Léger identifies Sweden as an example of 'ethicosymbolic imbrication of ethnics and religion in modernity' (Hervieu-Léger 2000, 160). In describing the rise of 'ethnic religions', Hervieu-Léger emphasizes that this is the result of a process of reconstruction of religious memory, arguing that 'the religious and the ethnic strain compete or combine in re-establishing a sense of "we" and of "our" which modernity has at once fractured and created a nostalgia for' (Hervieu-Léger 2000, 157). She further emphasizes that religion is 'effectively consigned to a function of nostalgic or exotic remembrance, apart from fulfilling the function of memory and upholding the survival of tradition in the world of modernity' (Hervieu-Léger 2000, 86). Nostalgia can thus be seen to function as a defence against change and as providing a sense of continuity with the past (May 2017). The emphasis on nostalgia in contemporary popular culture thus addresses a 'loss of

identity, continuity or stability' (Niemeyer and Wentz 2014, 131); an attempt to patch the broken chain. Boym thus argues that we are experiencing 'a global epidemic of nostalgia, an affective yearning for a community with a collective memory, a longing for continuity in a fragmented world' (Boym 2007). In this article I build on Schiermer and Carlson's extension of Boym's (2007) categorization of nostalgia as restorative, reflective, or ironic to analyse how Swedishness is constructed, both in the Calendar itself and through its framing in newspapers, examining how 'banal' Christian elements may evoke a sense of nostalgia, and how this nostalgia plays into conceptions of Swedish national identity and modes of belonging.

Framings of the Calendar as part of Sweden's memory

The press coverage of *Mirakel* focuses on the contrasting ways in which Christmas is depicted. One article likens the 1920 depiction to a Christmas card (Nilsson 2020); another describes *Mirakel* as 'packaged in a shimmering Christmas wrapper' (Lindström 2020); a third considers it 'an adventure which mixes *folkbildning* (Eng. *popular education*)[4] with Christmas cosiness and a vintage feel' (Lindblad 2020). A few emphasize the similarity between the depiction of 1920 and the Swedish children's classic *Maddicken*; *Mirakel* is thus framed both as referring to other nostalgic objects and as depicting a particularly nostalgic aesthetic. Moreover, several newspapers frame it as especially crucial, as 'it has been a year that has left people longing for more carefree times' (Lindblad 2020). The Calendar is more broadly framed as something that 'lends a sense of security' even for adults, especially in times of social distancing (Nilsson 2020). In one article Johanna Gårdare – the chief of children's programming at SVT – is quoted as saying:

> There is probably a greater need for a common context and for escapism into fictional worlds this year. It's our pleasure to be able to fulfil this need with warm and inclusive content (TT 2020).

There is a tendency for newspapers to frame the Calendar as inclusive and comforting, and *Mirakel* is positioned as functioning as a cure for longing. However, it is not necessarily a past version of Sweden that is longed for but the idea of a pure childhood experience of Christmas, facilitated by idyllic depictions of past Swedish Christmases – a Christmas that includes the calendar.

4 Refers to a social moment imbricated in the Swedish labour movement which arose in the late 1800s (Gougoulakis 2016).

Several articles frame the Calendar as being for everyone, regardless of age, as well as allowing adults to reconnect with their childhood selves: ‘I was reminded that we are all children deep inside’ (Ernryd 2020) and *Mirakel* as enabling a nostalgia for childhood. The annual return of the Calendar is framed as providing an opportunity to vicariously experience a sense of wonder by watching it with one’s children, as well as allowing adults to recall their favourite Calendars from childhood and discuss how well this year’s Calendar measures up to their legacy. The connection between conceptions of childhood and Christmas for Swedes has previously been noted (Löfgren 1993), and this focus on childhood accords with how the Calendar is more broadly framed in the coverage of the anniversary:

> The Calendar is the TV programme most have an opinion on. One has such strong childhood memories attached to it, and like all memories, they are probably distorted by age and idealized in various ways, one wishes to return to that warm childhood feeling… (Brännström 2020).

Eva Rydberg – an actress who appeared in the Calendar *Trolltider* – is quoted as saying that the Calendar has gone from ‘being children’s television to becoming a cross-generational tradition on which everyone has an opinion. It is wonderful that children get to grow up with these memories’ (Brännström 2020). Similarly, Hanna Stjärne (CEO at SVT) says that the Calendar ‘is part of Sweden’s memory’ and a symbol of childhood (uncredited 2020).

Gårdare, interviewed in another newspaper, suggests that appealing to both children and adults has been part of a deliberate strategy since the sixties: even people in their seventies have grown up with the Calendar and write in to complain if a Calendar does not measure up (Brännström 2020). Gårdare offers some reflections on what makes a Calendar successful:

> Some elements must be present for a Calendar to succeed in winning the audience’s heart. There doesn’t have to be snow, but there must be a Christmas atmosphere. It’s also good if there is some national romanticism – people especially long for a homespun Christmas and dipped candles. A ‘*Madicken*’ feel. Nordic mythology, *tomtar* and trolls, and [other beings from Nordic mythology] also work very well. I also think there must be a reflection on contemporary issues (Brännström 2020).

Notably, the first thing Gårdare mentions is a Christmas atmosphere (Swe. *julkänsla*), tying into the framing of the Calendar as especially important in

2020 because of the stress of the pandemic. This perceived function of creating a Christmas atmosphere links the Calendar to Christmas preparations, the need for which is again perceived to be greater during covid:

> Miracle – that is something to wish for a Christmas like this one, it seems everyone longs to decorate, light candles, and be cosy at home. For many [...] SVT's Calendar is an important piece of the puzzle when it comes to creating that special December feeling (Zandihn 2020).

This illustrates that the Calendar is framed as part of creating a Christmas atmosphere, something that is emphasized in the reporting on both *Mirakel* and the anniversary; and the depiction of the Christmas of the 1920s is continuously emphasized as the source of a Christmas atmosphere in *Mirakel*. This framing is particularly clear in an article detailing the practical ways in which readers can create a Christmas atmosphere by baking, making sweets, playing board games, making decorations, and watching previous Calendars as part of a cosy Christmas (Edling 2020). The anniversary articles also emphasize a Christmas atmosphere, accompanied by descriptions of Christmas preparations, decorating, anticipation, various types of sweets, baked goods, and drinks specific to Christmas, and mentions of folkloric beings, most frequently *tomtar*.[5] Although less frequently mentioned than in the anniversary articles, elements like Christmas spirit, cosiness, *julstök* (Eng. *Christmas preparations*), specific sweets and beverages, and beings like *tomtar* also appear in a few articles focusing on *Mirakel*. These elements are not necessarily used in describing *Mirakel* or other Calendars but rather are part of evoking a sense of Christmas cosiness in the reader and emphasizing the importance of the ritualistic Christmas preparations in the Swedish celebration (cf. Löfgren 1993).

The Calendar is framed as connected to children and childhood, and a few anniversary articles point to it as a source of strong nostalgic feelings. Everyone is said to have a favourite, and the reporting on the anniversary focuses on recounting favourite and influential Calendars. The most frequently named is *Mysteriet på Greveholm*, followed by *Teskedsgumman*,[6] *Titteliture*, *Mirakel*, *Trolltider*, *Pelle Svanslös*, and *Sunes jul*. The mention of these Calendars is unsurprising: Titteliture was the first televised Calendar; *Teskedsgumman* and *Trolltider* were both classic Calendars that later aired as

5 *Tomtar* is referred to slightly more frequently than *Tomten*. The latter may refer to Santa Claus, while the former does not.

6 *Mysteriet på Greveholm* and *Teskedsgumman* were the two most frequently mentioned things in general in the anniversary articles.

regular children's programming in the nineties; and *Mysteriet på Greveholm* and *Sunes jul* were both very well received calendars, airing in 1996 and 1991 respectively. These four Calendars are thus likely to illicit nostalgia from people born in the eighties and early nineties, which may say more about the age of the journalists than these Calendars' broader popularity. However, given the role newspapers have played in cementing particular understandings of Swedish traditions (Johnsen and Johansen 2021; Löfgren 1993; Strömberg 2017), journalists' role in establishing a canon of good Calendars against whose legacy new Calendars are measured should not be overlooked.

Indeed, the most frequently mentioned thing in articles about *Mirakel* is assurances that it 'lives up' to the expectations of the Calendar. Related to this are frequent comparisons with the previous year's *Panik i tomteverkstan*, which, unlike *Mirakel*, was poorly received. The anniversary coverage frames the calendar as a beloved tradition and simultaneously as the centre of a heated debate:

> Debates about the Calendar have – on the culture pages and in *fikarum*[7] and at dinner tables – covered things like alcohol consumption, the absence of a Swedish Christmas atmosphere, connections with Christianity that are too vague or too strong, excessive product placement or political propaganda, a lack of solemnity, a lack of ease […] The question is, what will this year's topic of debate be? Probably nothing, according to my prediction. Except in the closed circles of the so-called friends of Sweden, who in their troll forums complain about 'politically correct' feminist or climate crisis elements (Janson 2020).

However, the reporting about *Mirakel* was not without controversy. This was mainly related to the depiction of HVB homes and adoption practices in Sweden,[8] which were described as damaging to children living in such homes (never in articles reviewing *Mirakel* but rather in notices specifically detailing this critique). Another minor source of controversy that is nonetheless illustrative of the position of the Calendar surrounds the *folkbildande* elements of *Mirakel*.

> Something about Sweden that's such fun is how highly we regard social realism – that is, raw depictions of life when it is at its worst. […] Not even SVT's children's Calendar is safe. It is otherwise an escape from the boredom

7 Refers to a place where one has *fika*. This usually refers to lunchrooms: calling them *fika* rooms has a particular connotation similar to 'water cooler talk'.

8 HVB homes – homes for care or habitation – are facilities that aim to care and/or house people of all ages run by municipalities (regulated by social services).

> of midwinter. A shimmering Christmas atmosphere – is that too much to ask for? Apparently (Magnusson 2020).

The social realistic elements of *Mirakel* are perhaps not readily apparent, but it does have some elements that were positioned as '*folkbildande*' in the news coverage: class disparities, gender roles (both solely referring to the 1920s), and to a lesser extent climate commentary. Gårdare positions the presence of such educational elements or reflections on contemporary issues as important for a successful Calendar. The descending order of class, gender, and climate commentary corresponds to the weight these themes were given in *Mirakel*, and the frequency with which they were mentioned in the articles. In contrast to the above commentary on these elements as depressive, these features of *Mirakel* were overwhelmingly framed as a good thing in much of the press coverage, which emphasized how *Mirakel* could be used by parents to facilitate conversations with their children about these topics, eased by the sense of comfort the Calendar provides. *Mirakel* was thus framed as 'steeped in the best Swedish children's programming tradition' (Ernryd 2020).

Mirakel and the Calendar more broadly was thus framed as evoking strong nostalgic feelings, as living up to the legacy of a beloved institution. The Calendar was also framed as an integral part of Christmas, connecting Swedes with their childhoods, and perhaps even part of Sweden's memory. How the framing of *Mirakel* slots it into a schema of symbols evoking a Christmas atmosphere and as part of Christmas preparations illustrates how newspapers in Sweden continue to be an important part of 'the reproduction of tradition', with its own vocabulary of 'grinning gnomes, the gleaming candles, the sparkling eyes of the children' (Löfgren 1993, 224); a standardization against which readers can measure their own Christmas. Moreover, while ostensibly for children, the Calendar was framed as being for everyone and emphasized as being inclusive and comforting for everyone watching. At the same time the framing of the Calender in the newspapers continuously emphasized the national elements of *Mirakel*, and how quintessentially Swedish its depiction of Sweden was perceived as.

Religious nostalgia in the Christmas Calendar

The 2020 Calendar *Mirakel* – a pun combing the names of the two main characters Mira and Rakel to form the word 'miracle' – is aligned in its depiction of a 1920s Christmas with a noted trend towards nostalgia in contemporary television (Niemeyer and Wentz 2014). It is thus presented as an appeal to

different modes of nostalgia, both in the aesthetic depiction of the 1920s – especially with reference to classic children's programming depicting past versions of Sweden (such as film adaptations of Astrid Lindgren's work, most readily *Madicken*) – and in its function as a Calendar. The association with *Madicken* illustrates the particular national romantic tropes with which *Mirakel* plays, namely that of a manor house Christmas (the other popular trope being that of a Swedish peasant Christmas; Löfgren 1993). Thematically, *Mirakel* touches on broad issues like the advancement of women's rights, class differences, and climate change, the depiction of which remains somewhat ambivalent throughout the series. The narrative focuses on an orphan girl, Mira, in 2020 who does not care about Christmas and her path to finding a family and enjoyment in the celebration of Christmas (cf. the typical adult role in the Danish Christmas calendar; Agger 2013). This contrasts with the story of an entitled upper-class girl, Rakel, in 1920, centred on her breaking free of sexist conventions and her growing class consciousness, facilitated by her experiences in 2020. In the following sections I highlight the elements used in constructing the 1920 and 2020 Christmases in *Mirakel*.

The elements of Christmas, then and now

The two Christmases are depicted with contrasting elements. The 2020 depiction includes a bricolage of Swedish and international elements, presented variously with earnestness and ironic distance. In the first episode Galad (an unaccompanied refugee, and the only other child living in the HVB home with Mira) is trying to create a Christmas atmosphere – 'how will Christmas come if no one untangles all the lights?' (Åstrand 2020, Kapitel 1, 8:28), a phrasing that emphasizes the long run up of the preparations for Christmas and their significance for creating a Christmas atmosphere – a crucial feature of the Swedish Christmas (Löfgren 1993) – contrasted with Mira's apparent disdain for the holiday, illustrated by her responding to Galad by defiantly playing a song with an anti-Christmas message (Kapitel 1).[9] Other elements in the 2020 bricolage include a sparkling pink Christmas tree (Kapitel 2), the hanging of mistletoe, 'Deck the Halls With Holly' playing in the background in the final episode (Kapitel 24), the celebration of Lucia (Kapitel 13), pomander balls on display (Kapitel 24), Christmas sweets like *glögg* (sweet mulled wine Kapitel 3), Galad building a tower-

9 '*Det är inte snön som faller*' by Anders Rönnblom, initially released as part of a Christmas album in 1980. Rönnblom's song paints a picture of decay, fascism, and violence, notably referring to the absence of children to illustrate the emptiness of the holiday.

ing gingerbread house, and frequent mention of *skumtomtar* (a sweet sold around Christmas in the shape of a *tomte*); one character mentions baking because they 'deserve some Christmas atmosphere' (Kapitel 8, 0:58), and later refers to a breakfast he serves as *mysfrukost* (a compound of breakfast and cosy, Kapitel 21, 4:46).[10] These are all examples of *julfika*, a compound of Christmas and *fika*; the latter refers to a social institution in Sweden centred on the eating of pastries or sweets while drinking coffee with family, friends, or colleagues.[11]

Much like in 2020, the tone for the 1920 Christmas is set by music. In the first episode Rakel sings a popular Swedish Christmas song with Christian elements ('*Gläns över sjö och strand*') for her family and servants, who are then forced to compliment her singing, even though she sings off key; this not only contrasts with the punk song in 2020 but also highlights the class differences in 1920. In 1920 Rakel's mother is responsible for creating a Christmas atmosphere, and we see her urging Rakel to write a letter to *Tomten* (Kapitel 1).[12] Other elements include the family decorating the Christmas tree (Kapitel 11), later contrasted with the servants decorating their own, smaller, tree, emphasizing class differences (Kapitel 22), wrapping Christmas presents and sealing them with wax while singing carols (Kapitel 21), and visiting the annual Christmas market during *Tomasdagen*[13] accompanied by carols sung in the background (Kapitel 21). There is also a strong focus on food and the preparation of food from scratch in 1920 – making liver pâté, for example (Kapitel 5).

Ambivalent nostalgia in Mirakel

Mirakel's depiction of Christmas in 1920 accords with Niemeyer's and Wentz's observation that television tends towards a complex relationship

10 'Mys' or 'mysig' is similar to the Danish concept *hygge*. A key component of creating a Christmas atmosphere and of Swedish culture in general.

11 The social significance of *fika* might be compared to grabbing a pint at the local pub in Britain or an aperitif in France. While the types of sociality implied by these activities differ, how they are woven through the fabric of the respective hegemonic cultures of Britain and France is similar.

12 The contemporary version of *Tomten* bears similarities to Santa Claus and is increasingly inspired by American popular culture. Strömberg (2017) speculates that there may be a link between the Swedish version and Judas with the bag, who was featured in the early Lucia carnivals (1928) and may have been a feature of the Christmas spectacles that preceded it. Despite sharing a name, *Tomten* is distinct from the *tomte*, which instead refers to a type of guardian spirit attached to a house or property.

13 St Thomas's Day is on 21 December. It was then an important holiday in Sweden.

with nostalgia, complicating notions that seek to exclusively link 'nostalgia to a more or less unrealistic past, adorning its portrayal exclusively with affirmative and positive feelings' (Niemeyer and Wentz 2014, 130). *Mirakel* thus seeks to problematize the past in favour of the present while relying on the aesthetic image of the past to convey a Christmas atmosphere. Despite the apparent critical lens applied to the 1920s, there are some ambivalences in this depiction. For example, while a family feud which starts in 1920 is not resolved until Christmas Eve 2020 – with the handing over of a Christmas present from one heir to the other – the Christmas Eve celebration in 1920 contains a softening of the class divide, as the family patriarch includes the servants in the family Christmas celebration (Kapitel 24). This is in line with a more idyllic depiction specifically of Christmas Eve, which has characterized the contemporary Calendar and works to de-emphasize the familial tension of the 1920 Christmas and instead presents a congenial Christmas atmosphere in both periods in the final episode (which aired on the morning of Christmas Eve).

In other words, while *Mirakel* seeks to present an image of 1920 that emphasizes negative features like class divides, they are muted in the final episode, which may appeal 'to an undifferentiated emotion generated by an unreal, synthetic, universal image of the past' and thus risks affecting 'an ahistorical defense of the status quo' (DaSilva and Faught 1982, 49). By status quo I here refer to the implied essence of Swedishness that *Mirakel* affects, a clearer example of which is Rakel's apparently easy acceptance of immigration. Notably, Rakel appears mostly unfazed by the presence of Galad, Mira's teacher, and non-white students in 2020 (e.g. Kapitel 12). If anything, she identifies it as something wonderful, telling Galad 'you have people from all over the world – I have seen folk today from countries I did not know existed!' (Kapitel 12, 12:05), while listing the numerous ways in which she thinks 2020 is better than 1920.

The inclusion of visual diversity largely appears to be an aesthetic choice rather than something which affects the narrative, characterization, or experience of being in Sweden in any tangible way. Galad is introduced as an unaccompanied refugee, but beyond this we learn nothing about his family, country of origin, or cultural heritage. His two defining characteristics are his devotion to Mira and his love for Christmas. The only real hint at a discussion of racism comes when Mira's teacher talks about the Lucia procession held at school, where everyone can be whatever they want except a gingerbread man. The only explanation she offers is 'we've stopped doing that' (Kapitel 13, 8:06; probably a reference to a recurring public debate in

Sweden that began in earnest in 2012 about whether children dressing up as gingerbread for Lucia was racist). Rakel's acceptance of diversity can be contrasted both with the absolute confusion she displays towards technology (she hugs and pets a robot vacuum cleaner for comfort; Kapitel 3) and her immediate identification of someone she encounters in 2020 with visible tattoos as a pirate (Kapitel 6). Sweden in 1920 is thus depicted in a way that both emphasizes the negative features of the past in favour of the future and glosses over them in ways that appear to render them accidental. Today's more equitable Sweden is thus rendered more indicative of the essence of Swedishness across time.

Another ambivalence that conversely complicates the positive depiction of present-day Sweden is the depiction of Christmas ham and gingerbread biscuits. In episode 15 we see Rakel's father reverently slicing a piece of ham, eating it, and declaring 'now it's Christmas!', to which his wife replies 'so the ham passes muster?' (Kapitel 15, 3:58), emphasizing the centrality of the Christmas ham to the celebration and the Christmas atmosphere. This is contrasted with Agneta (the woman running the HVB home in 2020) contriving to burn a prefabricated vegetarian 'ham' in the microwave (Kapitel 15), a contrast that illustrates the ambivalence concerning the depiction of global warming in *Mirakel*; the reverential depiction of meat and meat consumption in 1920 (exacerbated by the fact that the wealth of the 1920s family comes from owning coal mines) is contrasted with the depiction of prefabricated artificial vegetarian food in 2020. The ambivalent depiction of climate change was not noted in the reporting about *Mirakel*, which tended to take the climate change commentary at face value.

The contrast between authenticity and artificiality is not limited to vegetarian food. Another example is the making of gingerbread from scratch (including the grinding of the spices with a pestle and mortar) in 1920 (Kapitel 19), contrasted with Agneta in 2020, who unpacks shop-bought gingerbread dough while wondering if its smell will create a Christmas atmosphere (Kapitel 7); Mira later consumes this dough raw in a fit of depression (Kapitel 8). The wistful way in which Agneta asks if the smell will create a Christmas atmosphere illustrates the contrasting ways in which this atmosphere fails to manifest itself in the different periods. In 2020 the Christmas atmosphere seems to be complicated by apathy combined with sudden attempts to enact it, whereas 1920 is continuously steeped in the preparations for Christmas, and the Christmas atmosphere is instead complicated by the family feud between Rakel's father and uncle. Indeed, the family feud and its impact on Christmas is illustrated by how Rakel's

mother presenting gingerbread biscuits made for each family member – including the offending uncle, which upsets her husband, who declares that the uncle has left the family as he picks up the biscuit and snaps it in two (Kapitel 19).

Some of the main distinctions between the elements used in the construction of the respective Christmases are the presence (in 1920) and absence (in 2020) of Christian elements. However, even in 1920 the inclusion of Christian imagery appears secondary, mainly occurring in the background through the singing of carols or in passing through unironic mentions of God (though these are infrequent). For example, there is no mention of the church or depiction of church attendance. This is contrasted with Mira, who at one point prays to God:

> Please, please, please God. I know that I have said a lot of mean things about you, like how you don’t exist, otherwise there wouldn't be wars and cancer and stinging nettles, but I need your help (Kapitel 6, 6:05).

Later in the same episode she again calls out to God, saying God will be given a ‘one hundred and fourth’ chance to help her (Kapitel 6, 12:06). In instances like these *Mirakel* relies on ironic nostalgia, creating an idyllic image while maintaining ironic distance through a contrast with 2020, which is repeatedly identified as better than 1920 in relation to the social issues of women’s rights and class division. This idea of ironic nostalgia builds on Schiermer’s and Carlson’s extension of Boym’s (2007) categorization of nostalgia as restorative, reflective, or ironic. Schiermer and Carlson explain that while restorative nostalgia idealizes and seeks to restore an imagined past, reflective nostalgia, while idealizing the past, remains aware of its irretrievability. They suggest that ironic nostalgia is a comment on restorative nostalgia, which ‘performs ironic distance by furnishing content and ritual with extreme or absurd significance; it thus enforces collective bonds through an over-identification with the object, and the depiction and exaggeration of its most failed traits’ (Schiermer and Carlsen 2017, 171–72). The distance enabled by irony thus undercuts the Christmas card image of the 1920s, while maintaining some of the features of restorative nostalgia, especially in the depiction of food preparation but also in how the issue of class is glossed over in the final episode in favour of affecting a cosy Christmas atmosphere. The historian Joe Perry has suggested that this type of narrative structure, where ‘holiday interactions between rich and poor typically portrayed utopian visions of social harmony, in which small acts

of bourgeois charity alleviated harsh social inequalities' (Perry 2020, 452), is part of the national romantic tradition, again emphasizing how *Mirakel* plays with national romantic ideals.

Chains of memory in the Christmas Calendar

In its depiction of the 1920s *Mirakel* affirms the Christian linkages of Christmas while downplaying the significance of religiosity by lending the depiction a quaint quality. This appears to correspond with how Kittelman-Flensner (2015) describes students affirming the Christian roots of Christmas while disavowing religious linkages; imagined as a distinction between practice/tradition, and belief. Johnsen and Johanssen suggest that such a 'coding of Christianity as culture – particularly at Christmas – facilitates "secular normality" in which central religiously coded elements […] are made invisible', contributing to a negotiation of 'Christian cultural heritage as culture, not religion' (Johnsen and Johansen 2021, 231, 251). The distinction between practice/tradition and religion is interesting, especially as the former is associated with nostalgia in the reporting about the Calendar, whereas Christian sentiments are only mentioned in passing as something that has caused controversy around the Calendar in the past.

Modernization and the attendant processes of mediatization and commodification mean that nostalgia is frequently mobilized through and in relation to popular culture (Niemeyer and Wentz 2014), where the 'past is transformed into a warehouse in which ideas and artifacts are stored for use as reconstituted commodities' (DaSilva and Faught 1982, 59). This is akin to the notion of banal religion, which refers to religion as a commodity dispersed in public discourse, outside politics and inside culture, not in content explicitly dealing with religion as such, but as marginal phenomena appearing 'in relation to issues and stories that have no explicit, elaborate or intentional religious meaning' (Hjarvard 2012, 34); evoked to connotate authenticity but rarely to sell a religious message (Hjarvard 2012). Nor does *Mirakel* attempt to convey a religious message or frame it as one. Although belief in God is present to some extent in the depiction of the 1920s, it is not foregrounded and appears to be more in service of an 'authentic' depiction. The only person who directly attempts communication with God during the series is Mira, who does so in a way that marks ironic distance. *Mirakel* thus balances ironic and earnest attitudes towards the holiday, tending towards the former in the earlier part of the series and focusing on the latter especially in the final episode.

While Christmas in 1920 is depicted as a nostalgic *aesthetic* object, the depiction of social inequalities – primarily class divisions and women's rights – is framed as belonging to the past, something Sweden has moved beyond, and thus not something that affects children growing up in 2020. This is a curious choice given that the children we follow in 2020 are an orphan and an unaccompanied refugee. Even more egregious is the depiction of 1920 and 2020 as both unaffected by racist biases. As DaSilva and Faught has noted, 'nostalgia may become an ahistorical defense of the status quo [...] inhibiting a realistic appraisal of contemporary social relations' (DaSilva and Faught 1982, 49). The pedagogical qualities *Mirakel* is framed as having in Swedish newspapers appears to have been primarily directed towards how much better Sweden is now.

Hervieu-Léger has pointed to Sweden specifically as an example of an 'ethicosymbolic imbrication of ethnics and religion in modernity' (Hervieu-Léger 2000, 160), meaning that the type of banal elements with which *Mirakel* plays can be seen as attempting to re-establish a sense of 'we' that 'modernity has at once fractured and created a nostalgia for' (Hervieu-Léger 2000, 157). Cultural practices, celebrations, and beliefs that involve folkloric elements are present in the newspapers' framing of both the Calendar in general and *Mirakel* in particular. *Mirakel* is framed as part of the ritualistic preparations leading up to Christmas; such writing mobilizes various elements which may work to re-establish a connection with ideas of cultural heritage. For example, one article describes a family's Christmas preparations such as making tree decorations and the children wishing for a miracle and explaining that they have 'a *nisse* [*tomte*] in our home who plays tricks' (Drath 2020). This article is filled with elements making up Christmas – baubles, angels, stars, crackers, stockings, Lucia, *tomten* – that, much like the elements from the 2020 depiction of Christmas in *Mirakel*, include a mixture of specific Scandinavian and more generally western Christian elements.

Nostalgia is a social emotion that exists in relation to others, enforcing a sense of connection (Sedikides and Wildschut 2019). In relation to the Calendar this sense may be strengthened by habitually watching it every morning (or evening) at the same time every year (cf. Niemeyer and Wentz 2014); something one does with family with the awareness that everyone else is doing the same with theirs (cf. Schiermer and Carlsen 2017). This knowledge further ties into associations between the Calendar, national feast days, and national identity. The type of mediatized nostalgia represented by the Calendar thus potentially contributes to a sense of belonging to an ingroup, strengthening ethnocentrism and simultaneously contributing to the exclusion

of others (Sedikides and Wildschut 2019). It is interesting to consider how the Calendar is framed by the newspapers via interviews with key people at SVT as simultaneously being for everyone, as well as playing on a particularly Swedish tradition of children's television, preferably containing national romantic elements, and as something that is part of 'Sweden's memory'.

It is pertinent to ask if this nostalgia is mobilized in response to perceived threats to national identity (building on work by Routledge et al. 2011, who argue that nostalgia is an important component of meaning-providing structures), similar to Zuckerman's argument that religion may be strengthened in the Scandinavian countries when such identities are perceived to be under threat 'as a pillar of ethnic, communal, national, or cultural defense' (Zuckerman 2009, 62). The depiction in *Mirakel* and its framing by newspapers suggests a view of Sweden as an open and equal country that may once have had some issues in the past, but that no longer does. Yet even this depiction of issues in the past is ambivalent, exemplified by the softening of the class critique in the final episode. This appears to be a result of how the 2020 Calendar relates to Christmas as a nostalgic object; moving from an ironic depiction of Christmas and Christianity more broadly to a restorative approach, especially in the Christmas Eve episode, which undercuts the distance established at the start in favour of establishing a cosy Christmas atmosphere. The idea of restorative nostalgia corresponds to nostalgia functioning as a defence against change, and as providing a sense of stability or continuity with the past (May 2017): addressing a loss of identity in modern society, actualizing the past in the present, an attempt at patching the broken chain. The movement from an ironic position is interesting, as ironic nostalgia is first used in *Mirakel* to establish a link to the past through an identification of its failings, which are later glossed over to cement a particular image of Sweden as essentially equal, open, and diverse. This image of Sweden is firmly rooted in a particular set of cultural practices, inextricably tied to Christian elements, yet it is divorced from a clear reflection on them as either religious or potentially non-inclusive.

Conclusion

The purpose of this article was to ask how the Swedish televised Christmas Calendar depicts Swedish traditions, if it utilizes banal Christian and folkloric elements, and how it constructs ideas of Swedishness. In doing so, I have argued that the Calendar uses such elements to affect a backdrop of nostalgia linked to a construction of Swedishness as it relates to a specific

idea of cultural heritage and by extension to constructions of what counts as national belonging in contemporary Sweden. The analysis has focused on the use of Christian symbols, practices, and rituals, as well as on folkloric and commercial elements in the depiction of Christmas, and how this ties into ideas of Swedishness. I have argued that the depiction in *Mirakel* and Swedish newspapers' framing of *Mirakel* and the Calendar suggest a view of Sweden as an open and equal country that may have had some issues in the past which it has now overcome. Christian heritage is approached as functionally 'secularized', and the Calendar thus constitutes and maintains a chain of memory that is separate from religious authority structures yet appealing to decontextualized elements in constructing an ethno-symbolic identity for Swedes.

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EVELINA LUNDMARK has a PhD from Uppsala University. This article is part of her postdoctoral research in the Religious Minorities and Religious Diversity Research Group at Agder University, Norway. Email: evelina.lundmark@im.uu.se

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Ecclesial Online Identities during the Covid-19 Pandemic: Scandinavian Majority Churches on Facebook, Christmas 2020

ELISABETH TVEITO JOHNSEN
University of Oslo

Abstract
The majority churches in Europe are paradoxically considered to be both powerful and weak religious institutions. Their complex position in secular society makes it important for them to communicate who they are to the public. The Covid-19 pandemic was a situation in which churches and other religious institutions were 'forced' to use digital media as a primary arena of outreach. This article investigates how three Scandinavian majority churches negotiated their ecclesial identities on Facebook during 2020, the first year of the Covid-19 pandemic. The following question is explored: did 'online' enactments represent their religious identities and core values in new ways to the public? The data material consists of material from the official Facebook pages of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark (the ELCD), the Church of Norway, and the Church of Sweden, as well as interviews with Facebook editors from each church. The study demonstrates how the Church of Norway and the Church of Sweden enact church practices on Facebook, while the ELCD tries not to be too 'churchy'. Facebook emerges as a hybridized third space where Scandinavian majority churches pursue new logics and forms of meaning making to retain their position in secular societies. Overall, the churches' online identities on Facebook are not new representations but intensified versions of their distinct offline identities as 'folk churches' for the whole population.

Keywords*: majority churches, mediatization, social media logics, sacred–secular, Christmas, Covid-19, digital religion, lived religion*

The scholarly and public discourse about the majority churches in Europe is contradictory and complex. The majority churches are presented as powerful and privileged (Astor and Mayrl 2020) and as weak institutions experiencing an irreversible and accelerating decline (Monnot and Stolz 2018). This

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.

article investigates how three Scandinavian majority churches negotiated their ecclesial identities on Facebook during 2020, the first year of the Covid-19 pandemic.[1] The issue of 'identity' has been a major concern from the very beginning of internet research. Initially, the internet was perceived as a virtual space where individuals were free to create online identities, and these were perceived as separate and alternatives to one's everyday identity (Turkle 1995). This perception was also a dominant view within early research contributions to what was called 'cyber-religion' in the mid to late 1990s. As researched by Heidi Campbell, cyber-religion suggested that religion on the internet meant new kinds of religious community and rituals freed from traditional constraints (Campbell 2013). As the internet developed and became part of the everyday, the concept of cyber-identities, as well as 'religion online' and 'religion offline' (Helland 2000), became increasingly blurred and blended.

The current research interest is rather to investigate the connections between online and offline religious practices, and how a 'third space' emerges when lived religious practice and digital culture meet within 'a hybridized and fluid context requiring new logics and evoking unique forms of meaning making' (Campbell 2013, 4). Thus, studying how Scandinavian churches negotiate their ecclesial identity on Facebook does not entail studying their online identities as segregated from their offline identities as churches. Facebook is perceived as a social medium that offers individuals – but also religious institutions – an opportunity to represent their religious identities and core values in new ways to the public (Lövheim 2016), but as Heidi Campbell and Mia Lövheim argue, multiple connections exist between who a person – or an institution – is online and offline. Of particular relevance for this article is that 'online expressions of religion can be seen as part of broader social and cultural transformations, where new media technology, as well as offline religious institutions, play a part' (Campbell and Lövheim 2011, 1084).

This emphasis on how new hybrid spaces evolve when religion online and religion offline connect is related to another major concept within the field of religion and media: *mediatization*, the long-term influence of media on religious structures and agency (Hjarvard 2016). Crucial for this study,

1 The preliminary analysis of this article was presented at the 'Religious rituals and community in an age of social distancing' workshop between 17 and 19 November 2021, which was sponsored by the ReNEW (Reimagining Norden in an Evolving World) research hub. Responses from Knut Lundby, as well as Henrik Reintoft Christensen, Erika Willander, Lene Kühle, Auli Vähäkangas, Olaf Aaagedal, and Ånund Brottveit have contributed to this article.

mediatization at an institutional level entails processes in which religious institutions integrate media logics into their workings (Hjarvard 2016). However, in a society where the impact of media, as intertwined with social media, transforms basic conditions and rules for social interaction, scarcely any institution, including religious institutions, can afford to avoid being part of these logics (van Dijck and Poell 2013). Nevertheless, the empirical investigation of how established religious institutions like the Scandinavian majority churches adopt or adapt different media (Nielsen and Johansen 2019) and social media logics (van Dijck and Poell 2013) in their everyday workings is a less explored area of research.

The article examines how three Scandinavian majority churches negotiate their ecclesial identities on Facebook and discusses whether their online enactments represent their religious identities and core values in new ways to the public. The data consist of material from Facebook pages using the official church logos of the Church of Norway, the Church of Sweden, and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark (the ELCD), as well as semi-structured interviews with one Facebook editor from each church. Whereas religious institutions before the Covid-19 pandemic could decide how and to what extent they wished to pursue digital media technology (Campbell, 2010), the infection control regulations 'forced' all churches and other religious communities to communicate digitally almost overnight (Kühle and Larsen 2021; Campbell 2021). Yet the studied churches are not digital or social media novices. They have been digitally present from the internet's early stages (Lundby et al. 2018) and had implemented social media strategies before the pandemic (Moberg 2017; Den norske kirke 2021; Folkekirken.dk 2017–2020; Ershammar 2019).

Apart from reports published by the churches themselves (Fransson et al. 2021; Folkekirkens udannelses- og videncenter 2020; Den norske kirke 2020), some of the first publications addressing Scandinavian majority churches and the Covid-19 pandemic were surveys. Unlike US surveys (Pew Research Centre 2021), surveys from the Scandinavian countries do not show an increase in self-reported religiosity as a result of the pandemic (Christensen 2021; Mauritsen et al. 2022; Rafoss and Aagedal 2021). Similar to research on US churches (Raiber and Seabright 2020), surveys show that social media is mainly used to communicate with active church members, that worship and information purposes dominate (Hodøl 2021), and regarding digital services, that reconcilability, authenticity, and direct communication are important for the users (Hodøl and Sæbø 2021). None of these studies examines in depth what churches did online during the pandemic. My study

therefore contributes to the field by investigating Facebook material from three Scandinavian majority churches, and how users actually participated in church activities on these Facebook pages.

This study is connected with research on the targeted churches' ecclesial offline identities in several ways. The first part of the analysis identifies how each church explicitly framed the Covid-19 pandemic discursively. However, this is not a study of the churches' first emergency responses (Kühle and Larsen 2021) but of their digital enactments on Facebook when the pandemic had become a more settled part of the everyday. The second part examines the communal spaces and rituals the churches enacted on Facebook, and how the churches communicated digitally within these spaces. The study includes empirical material from the Christmas season. As Ole Riis and Linda Woodhead argue, Christmas is a major example of how 'the sacred secular' is enacted in contemporary Western societies (Riis and Woodhead 2010). The last part explores how the churches enacted Christmas on Facebook.

Data material and analytical strategy

When definitions of worship and rituals undergo reconsideration and change, Baker et al. (2020) urge researchers to be methodologically innovative and to pursue emerging epistemologies, mentioning 'lived religion' in particular. This article is part of a lived religion project examining what churches are actually doing online: how these ecclesial practices on Facebook become part of people's everyday lives; and how the churches' enactments are intertwined with political structures (Ammerman 2020; Nielsen and Johansen 2019; Repstad 2019).

The Facebook material dates from 29 November 2020 to 10 January 2021. During this timeline the Church of Norway published 114 posts, or about three times a day. The Church of Sweden published 42 posts, about once a day, and the ELCD published 25, about every second day. The NSD, the Norwegian Centre for Research Data, has reviewed and approved the study. The three churches were selected because although they differed, as indicated by their publication frequency on Facebook, they were similar enough to compare how they utilized social media (Flyvbjerg 2001). Such a comparative research design is not unique (Furseth 2018), but most research on churches in the Scandinavian countries focuses on one church at a time.

The data material has been thematically coded in three rounds, using Joshua Meyrowitz's concept of *media metaphors* (Meyrowitz 1993) as an

analytical device. Meyrowitz developed his description of media metaphors in a pre-internet era, but they are still in use (Hjarvard and Lundby 2018). Meyrowitz presents his article as a 'preliminary meta-metaphorical analysis', addressing how different media metaphors foster different perceptions of the media (Meyrowitz 1993, 56). His claims that 'a full consideration of any media-related issue, therefore, requires exploring questions that grow out of all three images of media' (Meyrowitz 1993, 63). I use the metaphors as three different analytical perspectives on the material I analyse from Facebook.

The first metaphor Meyrowitz discusses is 'media as conduits'. This metaphor leads to questions like: 'What is the content? What social, political, economic, organizational, ideological, and other factors influence the development and perception of content?' Meyrowitz is aware of the essentialist framework on which this metaphor builds, but the metaphor still exists and influences how people and scholars perceive media. I employ the metaphor to address what kind of content the churches publish on Facebook, and how recurrent themes across the studied timeline create a discursive message about their ecclesial identities on Facebook. I have used the conduit metaphor to examine the message the churches 'delivered' about the pandemic during the studied timeline. The coding strategy I followed was to identify every post that explicitly mentioned the pandemic.

According to Meyrowitz the second widely used metaphor about media, 'media as languages', focuses on the grammar of each medium, such as the expressive variables and production techniques. Meyrowitz states that analysts influenced by this metaphor often ask questions like: 'What are the variables that can be manipulated within each medium? What are the effects of such manipulations within each medium? [...] To what extent are the *grammatical codes* for each medium shaped by the physical nature of the medium?' (Meyrowitz 1993, 59). I have applied this metaphor to identify the expressive variables and production techniques of each church on Facebook and especially the kinds of community and rituals the churches establish on Facebook. I also examine the patterns of interaction they facilitate by investigating how the church logo appears in the comment sections and the churches' use of emojis. I have coded the material by asking if the churches use informational/formal and emotional/informal language, if the pictures and videos are from home/professional settings, and about the dominant aesthetic style, identifying how the actors appearing on Facebook are dressed, differentiating between casual/formal clothing. Finally, I have coded the camera perspectives across the different posts, categorizing them as dominated by distance/close-up perspectives.

The last metaphor is 'media as environments'. This metaphor operates with a perception of each medium as a type of environment, or a setting. The focus is on how a medium has relatively fixed features, and how these features influence both the content and the grammar of the medium in question. Questions often asked from this metaphorical perception are: 'What are the characteristics of each medium (or each type of medium) that make it physically, psychologically, socially different from other media and live interaction, regardless of content and grammar choices? How do the features of a medium influence content and grammar choices?' (Meyrowitz 1993, 61). This metaphor leads me to investigate Facebook as a specific social medium, particularly scrutinizing how this medium as an algorithmic medium influences the churches' content and grammar choices. My strategy has been to identify the most popular posts published by each of the three churches, analysing these posts in depth. Yet, as has been mentioned, Meyrowitz's theorization is pre-internet, and I have therefore included how social media logics such as 'programmability', 'popularity', 'connectivity', and 'datafication' are built into the architecture of Facebook (van Dijck and Poell 2013).

Conduits: pandemic discourse

Infection control regulation

In December 2020 the Covid-19 pandemic dominated most parts of public life and was the defining context of almost everything taking place in society, as in the Scandinavian churches being studied here. However, how the churches explicitly dealt with the pandemic during the studied Christmas weeks is an interesting entry point for an exploration of how their online enactments represent their ecclesial position, identities, and values in new ways to the public.

Approaching 'media as conduits', the ELCD addresses the pandemic through updates on government infection control restrictions throughout the studied timeline. These posts contain a short informative text and accompanying pictures of empty church buildings and a link to the church's website for more detailed information (ELCD Facebook 7 Dec, 9 Dec, 10 Dec, and 21 Dec 2020). The first posts state the number of lockdown municipalities in Denmark and refer to the bishops encouraging the parishes to cancel everything except Sunday services and lifecycle rituals. The last infection control post, a couple of days before Christmas Eve, simply states: 'We provide an overview of how you can attend Christmas services this year. In church, outside or from the sofa' (ELCD Facebook 21 Dec 2020).

The ELCD's Facebook editor reports that they had a meeting with the Minister of Church Affairs the day after the first lockdown in March 2020. This meeting made it clear that the church administration was part of the government task force providing information to the general population:

> It was clear from the very beginning that our task was to communicate coronavirus and church matters to the population. We were required to give updates, write about, and explain [the regulations] (editor, Denmark).

These infection control posts, as well as the editor's comment, clearly show that the ELCD is a majority church that can be categorized as a 'state church', contrary to the trajectories in most of Europe, including Norway and Sweden (Kühle et al. 2018). Their Facebook page is one of the ways through which the state informs the population about how to act during the pandemic. Even if the posts signal a limited autonomy as a religious institution online, the infection control posts also verify that parishes – and pastors – have a high degree of offline autonomy within the church organization (Strategi 2017–20 Folkekirken.dk). The bishops can therefore encourage local churches to cancel their planned activities, but they cannot make decisions on their behalf. Moreover, the advice to cancel every activity except the Sunday services, as well as lifecycle rituals, indicates that they are important parts of the ELCD's ecclesial identity – possibly more valued than diaconal work, for example. Hence, the explicit pandemic discourse on Facebook powerfully positions the ELCD as part of the state, and at the same time as premised by the state.

Pandemic experiences

The Church of Sweden split from the state in 2000 (Hanson 2020), and the Church of Norway followed suit in 2017 (Nylenna and Sirris 2023). Neither publishes infection control regulations on its Facebook pages. According to the Norwegian Facebook editor the Church of Norway tries not to focus on the coronavirus. 'It hasn't been very important for us to do that [focus on Covid-19]. I mean, everyone else is doing that.' The editor added: 'We'd like to strengthen faith on Facebook, make the church available. Information or things like that is not what we do on Facebook' (editor, Norway). That being the case, the Church of Norway explicitly addresses Covid-19 on Facebook but does so as part of a seven-episode talk show during the weeks under study (CoN Facebook 3 Dec, 12 Dec, 17 Dec, 21 Dec, 24 Dec,

26 Dec, and 31 Dec 2020). In each talk show episode two church employee hosts ask famous guests from popular culture, government, and the church about their ‘coronavirus experiences’, as illustrated in this excerpt:

> Musician: […] I’ve had more time to think this year. Reflecting about life and relationships. What counts, and what is less important. […] It has given us a lot more time together as family too. […] The world has become a bit clearer in a way.
> Female host: I think, for me, when there are so many constraints on what you can do, I’ve got a stronger sense of what really counts. I think many of us have had a different year, but also quite a nice year (CoN Facebook 3 Dec 2020).

This emphasis on the pandemic as something that makes life different but also provides opportunities for reflection and close relations is a theme of each talk show episode. The Minister of Church Affairs, as part of the government task force, speaks about how the year has been for him:

> Minister: It’s been very different, as it has been for all of us. At the same time my everyday has been a little different from most. I had to go to work. […] We have to fight the virus. We have to get Norway through this. This purpose has made it a very meaningful year (CoN Facebook 24 Dec 2020).

Contrary to the ELCD, the Church of Norway gives space for the pandemic as something that has altered daily life, but not only negatively. The talk show communicates that the church can combine serious discussion of the pandemic and entertainment. It promotes an image of the online church as an up-to-date and modern institution with influential and powerful friends. The pandemic discourse on Facebook thus presents the online church as a religious institution that is part of secular society, but on its own terms.

The lonely and isolated

In its Facebook posts the Church of Sweden focuses more on the pandemic than the other two churches. One of their recurrent posts – established long before the pandemic – is a weekly three-minute live devotion. Every devotion across the studied timeline (CoS Facebook 1 Dec, 3 Dec, 8 Dec, 10 Dec, 15 Dec, 17 Dec, 29 Dec 2020, and 6 Jan 2021) except one explicitly addresses the pandemic. Overall, the church presents the pandemic as causing painful experiences, and that the church is there to help with care and words of hope:

> It's dark around us, not just because of the winter but also because of the pandemic. We can't see the way we use to. It's dull and dim. Almost like walking in a continuous nightmare. […] But we'll see the light again one day. God has given us that promise (CoS Facebook 8 Dec 2020).

This very firm focus on pain and suffering made me ask the editor if the church tended to 'overdo' the pandemic on Facebook. The editor responded resolutely: 'Yes, we communicate particularly with the lonely and isolated. If you don't feel that way, well, then, good for you, so to speak' (editor, Sweden).

This diaconal orientation online has been a prominent part of the Church of Sweden's offline ecclesial identity for several years. Particularly since the split from the state the offline church has increasingly communicated itself as a welfare agent in a secular society (Petterson 2011). Diaconal work is therefore an essential part of the church's self-understanding, but establishing itself as an offline welfare agent is also a way for the church to receive financial support from the state after the split (Edgardh 2011). Enacting the church as a care provider on Facebook benefits people requesting church care, and publicly demonstrates that the church fills a lacuna the state itself is unable to fill. Its online emphasis on care thus represents the church as an important part of secular society.

Languages: The religious landscape on Facebook

A platform for user interaction

This second part of the analysis focuses on the media languages or grammar each church applied on Facebook during the weeks of Christmas 2020. Attention to the expressive variables, production techniques, and the interaction with their users (Meyrowitz 1993) makes it possible to discuss whether the churches' online grammars publicly represent these churches in new ways.

The ELCD editor reports that live or recorded worship is unthinkable on their page. They assess how their followers react to their content, and 'if we get too "churchy" a lot of them disappear' (editor, Denmark). Those interested in services can visit their local parish's online and offline worship. The ELCD strategy is therefore to stay away from worship material and to publish links to podcasts, interviews, or articles written by pastors or other intellectuals (ELCD Facebook 18 Dec, 23 Dec, 27 Dec, 28 Dec, 30 Dec 2020, and 7 Jan 2021). An example is this post published a few days before Christmas:

> We should meet each other with forgiveness and reconciliation rather than condemnation and fear. This is the message of Pastor [name], who will preach at the DR's service on Christmas Eve (ELCD Facebook 18 Dec 2020).

The expressive grammar on the ELCD page is thus informational. It provides the users with information about events taking place offline and on other online platforms. Yet there are some posts where the ELCD invites user interaction and receives many comments. One of their most popular types of Facebook posts features recordings of hymns ending with a question like: 'What are the Christmas hymns you cannot celebrate Christmas without?' These posts work as a catalyst for people to share family memories, traditions, and long lists of their favourite hymns. The Facebook editors reply to direct questions, but the church's logo is otherwise absent in the comment section:

> We have a strategy that differs from most others. We are often quite with drawn. Because when we withdraw, dialogues between our users appear. That is our aim. That they share and communicate with one another. The ELCD logo in the comment section makes people more reserved. The communication become more authoritative. We think the best thing is to create communication among our users (editor, Denmark).

The ELCD grammar is therefore to offer information about online and offline church practices. The church facilitates user interaction on Facebook but tries not to interact with users directly. The local parish and the pastor, not the ELCD Facebook page, are the primary ecclesial place for religious community, care, and interaction. The ELCD is on Facebook, but the online and offline church take place in the parishes.

Strategic authenticity

The editor in the Church of Sweden also defines online and offline worship as the responsibility of local parishes. One of the frequent posts on this Facebook page is 'digital postcards' (CoS Facebook 7 Dec, 9 Dec, 14 Dec, and 19 Dec 2020). These posts contain a photo, often in dark or blurred colours, of a sad-looking person or a single candle in the foreground and a sentence stating, for example, 'God, be with me tonight, Amen' (9 Dec) or 'You are not lonely' (19 Dec). As in the devotions, the grammar of the digital postcards is clearly emotional but simpler to produce. However, the

users respond extensively. Every post has a comment section in which users express feelings of existential pain and loneliness, often framed as prayers or requesting prayer. Notably, each user receives a personal comment from the Church of Sweden in return, as in this excerpt:

> I'm so afraid. What awaits? The future looks very dark.
>
> Hi [name], yes, I agree, it looks dark for the moment, but I don't think God will abandon us. God will embrace you with his love. [name], editor.

The church's particular emphasis on those who feel lonely and isolated creates a digital space where several Facebook users find support and engage with people more than they might do in face-to-face encounters (Jin 2013).

Responding personally to every individual leaving a comment on Facebook has been part of the Church of Sweden's social media strategy before the pandemic:

> We have a very thoroughly prepared strategy for this. We always start by writing the name of the person contacting us. Like, 'Hi Birgitte…'. Then we try to mirror the feelings in what they have written. […]. Then we sign with our name and role. Editor or pastor, or something like that. To let them know who they are talking to, since the logo is the Church of Sweden's (editor, Sweden).

Apart from being knowledgeable about the importance of authenticity when communicating as a church in a secular society (Høeg 2020), the church enacts Facebook as a place for devotion and pastoral care. Hence, in contrast to the ELCD, the Church of Sweden does not distinguish between the online and offline church. Overall, the Facebook grammar of the Church of Sweden implies that the church expects to be at least as genuine online as it is offline. On Facebook the church is not about information but about being and doing church.

Regular and vicarious religion

The Church of Norway is the only church that publishes regular worship on Facebook. An emerging ritual behaviour on Facebook is to show acknowledgement and indicate participation through emojis and short comments (Åhman and Thorèn 2021). Worships on Facebook generate little user interaction (CoN Facebook 29 Nov, 6 Dec, 19 Dec, 24 Dec, 25 Dec, and

26 Dec 2020, and 1 Jan, 3 Jan, and 9 Jan 2021). However, one service has a significantly higher level of interactive user responses, with 1,000 likes, 138 comments, and 48 shares. This is a grief and memorial service after a huge landslide outside Oslo just a few days after Christmas.[2] The comment section has many heart and prayer emojis and comments expressing compassion for those affected. Several write that they are grateful for the opportunity to attend online. However, such 'vicarious religion' (Davie 2015) seems to be more of an emergency phenomenon (Aagedal et al. 2013). The Covid-19 pandemic affecting the everyday for a prolonged period seems not to have caused a significant increase in participation in worship.

Despite this, the Church of Norway has a frequent post, at least three times a week, called 'Words at Night', the user interaction of which is quite high (CoN Facebook 29 Nov, 3 Dec, 4 Dec, 5 Dec, 9 Dec, 10 Dec, 11 Dec, 12 Dec, 16 Dec, 18 Dec, 19 Dec, 20 Dec, 23 Dec, 25 Dec, 27 Dec, and 31 Dec 2020, 1 Jan, 8 Jan, 9 Jan, and 10 Jan 2021). This production is similar to the one in Sweden in terms of length and camera perspective. Yet the Norwegian devotions are more informal, featuring pastors from all over Norway, often dressed in hooded sweaters and casual clothes. As the editor explains, the pastors do not talk about the pandemic directly. Yet they all have a pastoral care approach, addressing loneliness, loss, and fear. The texts accompanying the devotional videos are telling in their emotional grammar:

> The first Advent candlelight is standing strongly alone. How are you doing today? (29 Nov 2020)
>
> Regardless of how deep we fall as humans, Jesus has been even deeper (12 Dec 2020).

Most user-generated comments consist of prayer and heart emojis, short comments expressing gratitude, and some private greetings to the pastor in the videos. The Church of Norway replies with a heart emoji to everyone leaving an emoji or comment.

> One might ridicule it, getting a heart from the church, is it worth anything? Well, the response we get is that people feel seen by the church (editor, Norway).

2 The Gjerdrum landslide was a quick clay landslide that occurred in the early hours of 30 December 2020. It spanned a flow-off area of 300 by 700 metres and additionally affected 9 hectares through debris flow. Several buildings were destroyed, most of them houses and apartment buildings. As of 22 March 2021, ten people had been confirmed killed by the landslide. 2020 Gjerdrum landslide – Wikipedia (accessed 23 August 2022).

The video devotions with pastors in their home contexts, filming themselves more or less successfully, make the productions appear sincerely authentic. The amateur filming, combined with an expressive emotional grammar, may therefore explain why so many users recognize and appreciate the devotions as 'their faith' (Høeg 2020).

An analysis of the technical production and expressive grammar shows that the Church of Norway perceives Facebook as a proper church space, which differentiates it from the ELCD. The Church of Norway thus enacts an ecclesial identity closer to that of the Church of Sweden but has a broader profile than being a church for the lonely and isolated.

Environments: A merry Facebook Christmas

Joseph booking a room

This third part of the analysis approaches Facebook as a social media environment. Each church has one post with a remarkably higher level of participation than all its other updates. I will examine how the fixed features of this algorithmic medium influence the churches' content and grammar choices by studying their most liked, shared, and commented Christmas posts.

The most popular post from the Church of Sweden is an animation video in which 'Joseph' is chatting with 'a bed and breakfast host' and trying to book a room in Bethlehem (CoS Facebook 14 Dec 2020: 2, 200 likes, 102 comments, 541 shares, accessed 25 June 2021). The host turns down Joseph's request at first, but Joseph begs him. His fiancée is furious that he is so late: she is extremely pregnant and will have a baby at any moment. The host asks him to wait, returns, and tells them he has managed to find a barn, a quite rustic place. 'I'll take it,' Joseph replies. The host reminds Joseph that they cannot have more than eight people in the room. Joseph reassures him, 'Don't worry – it will be a calm night with just the two of us.'

This video on Facebook exemplifies comedy as part of external church communication. Comedy is often based on some sort of incongruence where something is misplaced or surprising (Häger 2019). Placing Joseph in the contemporary situation of trying to book a room online is an obvious example. However, to find comedy amusing, one needs to understand and recognize it. The comment section indicates that many users did. Comments like 'Just love it', 'You have to see this!', and 'Can't stop laughing' are frequent. Presumably, late bookings, frustrated partners, and desperation when no rooms are available is a familiar situation for many of them.

However, a few users were critical, posting comments like, 'Why? Why does the Church of Sweden do this?', 'Has the church lost its mind?', and 'Just don't like. I prefer the original'. They therefore find the comedy religiously offensive and feel it is inappropriate for the church to make such jokes. In relation to the church's ecclesial identity, the function of comedies is often to draw lines between groups, an 'us' and a 'them' (Häger 2019). In distinction from much Christian comedy, the Joseph post does draw a line based on religious belonging or knowledge. It is understandable, regardless of people's relationship with the church or the Christian faith.

As on other parts of their Facebook page, this use of comedy is part of a thoroughly prepared social media strategy:

> We've found that they like it when we're a little funny. Yet we don't have to be very funny for it to be appreciated […]. It's an easy way to communicate the message. We think it's hilarious and love to do it, but we don't want to overuse it by doing it too often. I think it [the Joseph video] made people see the events behind Christmas in a slightly new way (editor, Sweden).

The comment that they have found that their users like it when they are funny implies what van Dijck and Poell (2013) term 'a datafication logic'. This means the church has gathered information about their user's profiles and tastes, and this has helped them fine-tune their programming decisions (van Dijck and Poell 2013). Yet the church does not have to compromise its main ecclesial identity to achieve social media popularity. Being just a little funny is enough to boost the ranking mechanisms built into Facebook as a medium. The editor also actively endorses 'programmability' as a logic, where a platform triggers users' creative and communicative contributions. She and the staff 'love' to create funny content on Facebook. However, they know that they cannot publish comedies too often. This would reduce the incongruence of seeing a biblical character in a contemporary situation. Comedy is therefore a tool they use cautiously.

The Gospel according to Ane

The ELCD also has a video that was particularly popular during Christmas 2020 (ELCD Facebook 1 Dec 2020: 6,700 likes, 801 comments, 13,000 shares, accessed 10 Oct 2022), and it has even more likes, comments, and shares than the Joseph video. The ELCD video is a cartoon-like animation in which a girl, 'Ane 4 years old', tells the Christmas story, accompanied by authentic

drawings done by 'her 9-year-old brother'. 'It all started with Augustus,' the girl's voiceover begins. 'He wanted to know how many people he ruled over in the whole world – and then we have Joseph and Mary.' We then hear and see how Mary and Joseph travel to Bethlehem, with sudden inserted comments like 'I've been to Bethlehem once, with the kindergarten,' as a bus full of small children goes by. Eventually, Joseph and Mary find the barn, and 'then they baptized him in the crib.' We also meet angels who help herds dressed in Santa hats find Jesus, 'the quietest baby in the world'. In the end, everyone looks up into the sky, and an angel waves and smiles, wishing them 'Merry Christmas', and 'everyone was extremely happy'.
Some of the same incongruent comedy elements in the Joseph video are present in this one. Some of the names, costumes, and animals are unfamiliar to Ane, but other things are part of her everyday life. Childish misunderstandings such as Bethlehem as a place she has been to are thus an important part of the comedy. The large number of shares and comments in which people make their friends aware of the video indicates that the video is understandable and relatable. The comment section shows that users find the gospel told by Ane entertaining, but that it also touches several users emotionally: '[name], you just have to see this one, amazingly cute ❤'; '[name], this is the story I told you about, just listen to it! ☺'; and 'Thanks. It made be warm all the way to my stomach. The real joy of Christmas'.

The emotional engagement on Facebook indicates that the video works as a catalyst for people to share feelings and stories related to the Christmas gospel (Åhman and Thorèn 2021, 8). The video seems to have brought several people into touch with the religion Hervieu-Léger terms 'a chain of memory' (Hervieu-Léger and Lee 2000). Just as a religious ritual has the potential to activate deep emotions and a sense of social connectedness (McGuire 2016), this narration of the Christmas gospel on Facebook became a ritual practice embedded in the participants' minds/bodies (Helland and Kienzl 2021). It was enjoyed by most users, but there were also some critical comments as well. As in Sweden, some users criticized the church for not taking theological knowledge seriously, and for not drawing clear lines between 'us' and 'them' (Häger 2019).

Accordingly, the Gospel told by Ane shows how the ELCD negotiates a 'not too churchy' ecclesial identity on Facebook. Their overall aim is to communicate that the ELCD is a church for the majority of the population. Taking into account that traffic on social media requires programmability in terms of users' participation in steering content (van Dijck and Poell 2013), their grammar and content choices in this case reflect the algorithmic

mechanisms of liking, sharing, and commenting being built into Facebook as a medium (Meyrowitz 1993). Yet the ELCD also tries to use Facebook in ways that stimulate a religious interest that goes beyond outputs like the Ane video:

> It's all about finding the right cut. When does it [the content] have to be simple, and when can we go a little deeper – more depth and substantial reflection? One might say that when we narrate the Christmas gospel with Ane's words, we are on page one in the Christmas book, so simple that everyone can understand it, but as a church what is expected from us in a time of coronavirus and crises? We want to go deeper – more complexity – but still be available to ordinary people (editor, Denmark).

This ambition runs quite contrary to Facebook as a medium. As van Dijck and Pell claim, Facebook is a platform where 'like-scores automatically select emotive and positive evaluations of topics, rather than asking for complex assessments' (van Dijck and Poell 2013). However, the ELCD manipulates this mechanism by using the Ane video as an entry for more complex material. Consequently, the ELCD tries to reinforce the effect of the Ane video by republishing parts of it four times during the Christmas weeks (ELCD Facebook 11 Dec, 15 Dec, 20 Dec, and 24 Dec 2020), each time with a new link to extended articles offering reflections and theological knowledge. However, as the Church of Sweden underscores, the effect of comedy requires surprise. Every time the ELCD republishes the Ane video, the level of user interaction declines.

Taken together, the given medium influences how the ELCD negotiates its ecclesial identity on Facebook. It actively applies a comedy customized for Facebook to communicate that it is a church for the whole population. Yet the church tries to pursue Facebook popularity and still provide additional theological and church-oriented cultural content with greater depth.

Fairest Lord Jesus line by line

The Church of Norway has a video in which various people, mostly celebrities, sing the hymn 'Fairest Lord Jesus' line by line (CoN Facebook 15 Dec 2020: 13,000 likes, 565 comments, and 8,200 shares, accessed 19 Oct 2022). Compared to the other two churches, this video generates the most likes and a high level of comments and shares. The first thing happening in the video is that we hear the voice of Jahn Teigen, a famous pop star in Norway

who had died some months previously, singing the first lines of the hymn. The camera then zooms out, and the Minister of Health and Care Services appears in his office while listening to Teigen on his computer and starts to sing the next line. Thereafter, a mix of well-known people from popular culture, theatre, talk shows, reality TV, sport, and the presiding bishop of the Church of Norway, as well as a hospital doctor, ambulance personnel, and a couple of homeless people, sing one line each. The video ends in a beautiful cathedral where a choir sings the last lines of the hymn.

This video uses a hymn that most people living in Norway know, particularly the majority population. It is not a comedy like the two other videos, and the comments on the 'Fairest Lord Jesus' video are almost unanimously positive.

> Very touching. We had that hymn at my father's funeral. He was born at Christmas time. Had to cry.
>
> Goosebumps every time. We're in this pandemic together, and we're going to march out of it together.

These comments show that the video touches many people. As such, the interaction resembles the Ane video, working as a catalyst for people to share stories and feelings. However, the emotional response to the 'Fairest Lord Jesus' video is more intense. Several write that the hymn made them cry – not laugh as is the case in the two other videos – and that they have watched it several times. They connect their feelings of being touched to memories from childhood and family funerals, and the hymn makes them hope for a better Christmas in the current coronavirus situation. The 'chain of memory' this video evokes is therefore less sentimental and more related to personal memories. In addition, the line-by-line production not only creates a mental memory chain, but it also creates a tangible chain of people. The 'Fairest Lord Jesus' video becomes an embedded ritual practice on Facebook in which the Church of Norway enables deep emotions and experiences of social connectedness in a situation where social distancing dominates everyday life.

Like the other two churches, the Church of Norway takes social media logics seriously and works strategically to gain Facebook popularity:

> We were very conscious about the choice of 'Fairest Lord Jesus'. It's a hymn everybody knows, regardless of their relationship with the church. You know, Jahn Teigen, one of the most loved artists in Norway, and the others

> [celebrities], they had also been visible during the year. We worked especially consciously to end it inside church. It [the video] became longer than we planned, and as you know, that's a risky business – people don't bother to watch for very long. Yet it worked very well. I think it's about the whole coronavirus situation. […] I think the film would have worked without the coronavirus, but the situation made it even stronger (editor, Norway).

This excerpt demonstrates that the church intentionally makes choices based on Facebook as medium. The hymn is chosen because it is familiar, and the line-by-line production with famous people is a grammar familiar from TV and other media (Meyrowitz 1993). As van Djick and Poel (2013) argue, entanglements of social and mass media reinforce one another. In this case the video may have added to the popularity of the celebrities, and some of the celebrities in the video, including the Minister of Health and Care Services, shared it on their Facebook pages, significantly boosting the popularity of the video. Accordingly, this video communicates the church's association with several famous people in Norway, a strategy not used in the two other churches. The popularity of the video also adds to the visibility of individuals representing the church. In commenting on the length, the editor confirms that the church thinks of itself in terms of social media logics and tries to shape its material accordingly (Hjarvard 2016).

Overall, the analysis of the most liked, shared, and commented posts from each church shows that the three majority churches enact themselves as churches for the large majority of the population. Their use of comedy and popular culture enables participation well beyond regular churchgoing members. Apart from their entertaining dimension, the Ane video and the 'Fairest Lord Jesus' video also assume a ritual value. The emotional response from a large number of users confirms that Christmas online can be a major example of the sacred-secular in contemporary society, and that the Scandinavian majority churches negotiate their ecclesial identities as part of this secular-sacred interface on Facebook.

Conclusion

Have 'online' enactments represented the Scandinavian majority churches' religious identities and core values in new ways to the public? In early April 2020 the economist Dani Rodik claimed that the Covid-19 pandemic had turned countries into exaggerated versions of themselves (Kühle and Larsen 2021). Working on the data material, I have asked myself if a similar claim

is true of the churches studied in this article. In an initial analytical phase I tended towards a confirmatory conclusion. However, thorough analysis and some distance from the pandemic have modified my final argument.

First, the pandemic discourse on each Facebook page reflects the churches' historical and current positions towards the state and society. The ELCD presents and understands itself as part of the state, and as a state church it is obliged to provide public information on religious matters to the whole population. The material does not indicate that the church finds this troublesome or contested. It appears more as a position that is taken for granted, even if it is an exception in the Scandinavian region, as well as in Europe (Kühle et al. forthcoming). The Church of Norway, on the other hand, represents the pandemic as a talk show topic. However, the political and famous guests in combination with church leaders signal that the church still plays an important role in society. Contrary to the ELCD, the Church of Norway needs to consolidate itself anew after the recent split from the state. The Church of Sweden is more independent from the state, and its Facebook page reflects this by focusing only on church matters. However, a large part of this diaconal offline church is possible because the church receives financial support from the state, not as a church but as a welfare provider. Its online appearances therefore testify to the broad public that the church is there to help when life is hard.

Second, this study has found that the three Scandinavian majority churches have distinct 'online-offline' identities, and that these correspond well with their offline organizations. The ELCD presents the church on Facebook but is not a church itself online. It is primarily the local parish level that is considered as the church in the ELCD, and structures at a national level are not entitled to represent the church on behalf of individual parishes or pastors. The Facebook editor and staff present the ELCD on Facebook, but they cannot be the church or enact church practices online (Folkekirken.dk Strategi 2017–20). The grammar of the Church of Norway also negotiates the online church in accordance with the formal church organization (Den norske kirke 2021). The church's synod has therefore decided on a social media strategy in which the offline church acknowledged before the pandemic that Facebook was about doing the church online (Den norske kirke, 2020). Yet few people are employed to do this. The Church of Sweden has a more professional grammar, reflected by the church's emphasis on employing people educated in communication. As in Norway, the synod of the Church of Sweden has decided that the online church is the equal of the offline church (Ershammar 2019).

Third, all three churches have integrated media and social media logics into their operations. They are knowledgeable about Facebook as an environment, make conscious choices, and can utilize the medium as a platform for user interaction, as well as ritual practices. At Christmas the churches contributed to deep emotions and social connectedness. Moreover, mediatization also entails a transformation of basic conditions and rules for social interaction. How will the online churches' content and grammar influence the offline churches after the pandemic? What will be the long-term effects of a period in which almost all churches and religious institutions were 'forced' to think of themselves in media terms? How will it affect their agency and religious structures? Research on religion in a post-pandemic society is needed to address these questions.

In conclusion, this study provides new insights into how three Scandinavian majority churches utilize Facebook to enhance their public position as important and relevant religious institutions in secular societies. The study demonstrates how the Church of Norway and the Church of Sweden enact church practices on Facebook, while the ELCD tries not to be too 'churchy'. Overall, the churches' online identities are not new representations of their identities and values, but rather intensified versions of their established and complex offline identity as 'folk churches' for the whole population. Nevertheless, Facebook emerges as a hybridized third space where Scandinavian majority churches pursue new logics and forms of meaning making to retain their contested position in secular societies.

* * *

ELISABETH TVEITO JOHNSEN is Associate Professor in Practical Theology at the University of Oslo, Norway. Email: e.t.johnsen@teologi.uio.no

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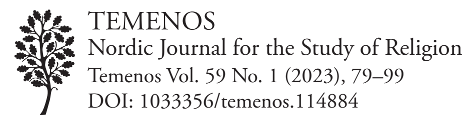
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Global Indigeneity on the Move: The World Drum – Afterlives, Drift Matter, and Object Agency

SIV ELLEN KRAFT

UiT The Arctic University of Norway

Abstract

In October 2006 a drum embarked on what is possibly the most extensive journey of any drum at any time. The journey's ambitions were similarly grand: to serve as a wakeup call to the needs of Mother Earth by linking people, things, and places. What follows is my take on this project in the context of the reclaiming of drums in Sápmi and globalizing discourses on Indigenous religion(s), as well as a focus on object agency and the modes and codes of Indigeneity on the move. I propose 'drift matter' (borrowed from the archaeological perspectives of Þóra Pétursdóttir and Bjørnar Olsen) as a concept to consider this case and for the unruliness of afterlives.

Keywords*: drum; Sápmi; Indigenous; shaman; drift matter; afterlives*

The World Drum Project comprises a drum, her travels, local organizers, digital followers, and hosts around the world. The ambitions are grand and simple: to serve as a wakeup call to the needs of Mother Earth, and a sowing of seeds; for humankind to 'unite, cooperate and heal' and to do so by connecting people, things, and places; 'from hand to hand and from land to land'.[1] Some 850 destinations had been reached by 2021, when Covid-19 brought the drum's journey to an end: around the world, usually alone, sometimes in the company of her home crew or local hosts. The home crew consists of Kyrre Franck and Morten Wolf Storeide, both leading members of the Sjamanistisk Forbund (the Shaman Association),[2] and one of whom is Sámi (Franck).[3] Having come to Franck in a vision, the drum was brought to life by the Sámi drum-maker Birger Mikkelsen and shipped off to the

1 http://www.theworlddrumprojectcom/ 42694 9214
2 For the Shaman Association see Fonneland 2017.
3 Sápmi extends across the area of four nation states, encompassing parts of Norway, Sweden, Finland, and the Kola peninsula of Russia.

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first destination after a ceremony in front of the Norwegian Parliament (on 21 October 2006).

What follows is my take on this drum (hence TWD),[4] her adventures, and some of the issues they raise. It is grounded in a longstanding interest in 'global Indigeneity' and Indigenous religion(s), here explored through a material- and thing-centred approach.[5] What are the material qualities of this thing, and how do they matter? What can TWD tell us about object agency on the move and the modes and codes of global Indigeneity? What can 'drift matter' contribute to studies of afterlives in the making?

My approach is based partly on conversations with Storeide (the drum's main organizer), partly on the drum's Facebook group, and partly on the drum itself.[6] Theoretical inspiration comes from the field of material religion, particularly for object agency, affordances, and the relationality of things (e.g. Meyer 2019; Houtman and Meyer 2012), and the archaeological perspectives of Bjørnar Olsen and Þóra Pétursdóttir,[7] particularly for drift matter. In brief, and to be further developed, I see the agency of things as relational and context-dependent (Olsen 2010; Law 1999; Asdal and Reinertsen 2020; Gell 1998). Following Olsen, I combine attention to relationality with thing-ness, the 'intrinsic material significance of things … the qualities they possess beyond human cognition, representation, and embodiment' (Olsen 2010, 3) and the 'way they *therefore* work as mediators in collective action' (ibid., 155). 'Drift matter' was developed through the 'Unruly Heritage: An Archaeology of the Anthropocene' project,[8] and concerns matter(s) on the move:

> …parts of the past that are still here, beyond the control of human agency, like the stuff washing ashore on beaches, appearing to us in their 'tumbled articulations' (Pétursdóttir and Olsen 2018, 16, Pétursdóttir 2020) … Thrown together, things bump into each other in weirdly unexpected ways, forming unimaginable coalitions and fusions (ibid., 3) … at a distance from their human companions and their intentions for them (ibid., 16).

4 Storeide uses this abbreviation in the Facebook group.

5 See Clifford 2013; Kraft 2021; 2022; Kraft et al. 2020. Kraft et al. 2020, based on a multiyear international study, argue that 'Indigenous religion' is evoked by a globalizing discursive formation, but also by 'certain materials, artefacts, architectural structures, performances and gestures, competences, and sounds' (2020, 187).

6 The interviews were conducted in Norwegian and translated by me. Communication in the Facebook group is in English.

7 Olsen and Pétursdóttir 2016; Þóra Pétursdóttir and Olsen 2018; Pétursdóttir 2020; 2018.

8 https://unrulyheritage.com/about/

First, I briefly describe the thing-ness and relationships of TWD. I then discuss three episodes in more detail: a reconciliation event in Nova Scotia (in 2018), the drum's arrest by the US Department of Homeland Security (in 2012), and the drum at Standing Rock (in 2016). While neither representative nor exhaustive of the life of this drum, these episodes constitute highlights in the sense of attention and agency, based partly on what I refer to as the scalar logics of global Indigeneity. Towards the end of the article I reflect on drift matter. Although developed for the fields of archaeology, 'drift' appears to have things to say about religious matters and contemporary Indigeneity.

Sources, media, journeys – an overview

TWD's home base is a cabin-style house in a remote part of Finnskogen in eastern Norway. The drum is away much of the time but present digitally on what Storeide calls 'an old hawk of a computer' in his kitchen. Storeide follows her adventures, provides help when needed, responds to requests for visits, and organizes transitions for a journey planned to continue indefinitely or as long as required.

I visited Storeide on 8 September 2018. We spent a long day discussing the drum, looking at pictures, and watching YouTube videos. The old hawk is an archive[9] of sorts, dating back to the drum's first journeys in 2008 and containing letters, messages, videos, and emails, most from people that have hosted her. Storeide estimated there were some ten thousand pictures, a portion of which have been posted in TWD's Facebook group. Europe, Russia, and North America are the dominant sites visited. For example, in 2008 and 2009 the drum visited locations in Denmark, Iceland, Finland, England, Scotland, Ireland, France, Switzerland, the Republic of Tuva, the Republic of Khakassia, Canada, and the USA.[10] Storeide had accompanied her on some of the trips and hoped to secure funding for a year on the road as her companion – not to control her movements, he stressed, but for his own sake and to share in her experiences. Plans also included a book, an exhibition, synchronized events for host-communities, and a collaboration with *National Geographic*.

The Facebook group was launched in 2008.[11] It is listed as a public group, with Storeide, Franck, and Sandy Rowley (Gaia College, Netherlands) as

9 Storeide himself used the word archive (No.: *arkiv*).
10 A detailed overview of the travel-route until 2012 is listed under "Files" in the Facebook group.
11 https://www.facebook.com/groups/35901743683/

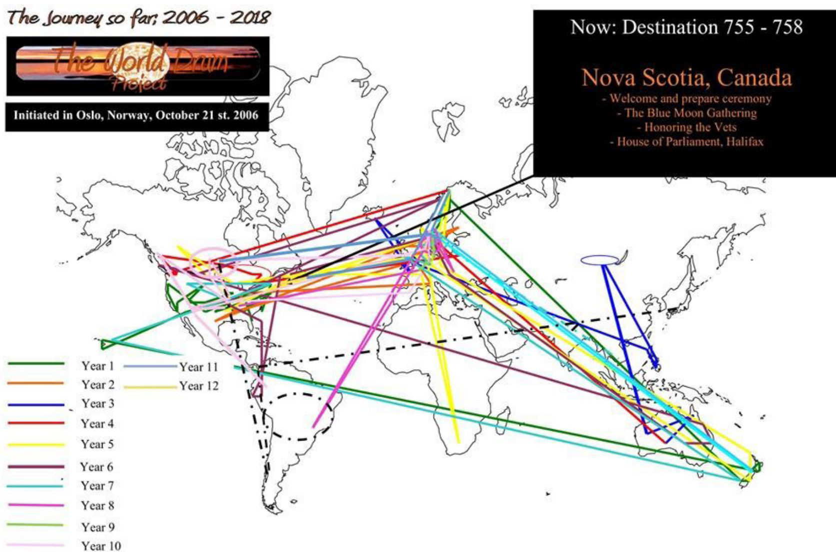

Figure 1. The World Drum´s travels, by Morten Wolf Storeide. Permission by Morten Wolf Storeide.

moderators. By 2021 2,656 members had enrolled, apparently from everywhere in the world where TWD travels. The site facilitates communication and community building, serves as an archive, and provides information about the project, including its foundation 'in a shamanic view of life' and Sámi traditions (design, materials, and a Sámi drum-maker). The profile is non-monetary, with a strict ban on commercial posts.[12] The idea is for the drum to participate in ceremonies around the world, thereby bringing 'attention to the critical situation for Mother Earth'. Hosts are responsible for collection (on arrival), housing (during the stay), and shipment to the subsequent destination. Storeide is by far the most active of the moderators, through postings and contributions to discussions and his responsibility for itineraries and annual events, including the drum's anniversary, counted from the time of her first departure. Reflections on her journey are typically posted on such occasions, along with thanks to the 'World Drum family'.

Members occasionally post links and comments of a general nature, connected with Indigenous peoples, shamanism, or threats to nature, but

12 A website has also been established, offering information, photo albums, itineraries, graphic maps of journeys, and links to Facebook and Twitter.

most of the posts deal with TWD, often in the context of ceremonies.[13] They include (g)local formats (e.g. powwows, full moon gatherings, and drum circles); interreligious events (e.g. Santiago de Compostela and the World Council of Religion); activism (e.g. the Standing Rock protests in North Dakota); and reconciliation (e.g. a reception at Province House in Nova Scotia).

Asked to comment on media interest, Storeide responded that he had regularly been contacted by foreign news and popular media, occasionally by Norwegian platforms, and never by Sámi media. While beyond the scope of this article, such tendencies match what I have found for Sámi shamanism. In brief, Sámi newspapers tend to ignore what they consistently refer to as 'new shamanism' (or 'city shamanism/asphalt shamanism'), even when Sámi shamans, drums, and audiences are involved (Kraft 2022). Norwegian tabloids tend to be more positive about these formations and to take their position as (traditionally) Sámi and Indigenous (ibid.) for granted. Shamanism is usually presented as the religion of the Sámi,[14] and drums are usually presented as their thing par excellence (despite the overall dominance of Christianity in Sámi areas). Similar views are common among city Sámi, diaspora Sámi, and those who are sometimes referred to as 'new Sámi' – people who have recently discovered and/or claimed an identity as Sámi (ibid.).[15]

Paul Johnson has noted (2018, 108) that notions of authenticity are played out in relation to 'problems of identity, the aura of the original, and commodification'. I would add that several variables are involved for Sápmi, and that designs and constellations are contested. Drums almost disappeared in the wake of targeted missionary attacks from the seventeenth century onwards. They have been back since the 1970s, increasingly, and in multiple formats: as art, musical and ceremonial instruments, and as identity symbols, accompanied by complex logics of authenticity. The similarity with ancestral models is basic, along with the identity of the drum-maker (Sámi or not), context of use (e.g. commercial or private concerns), format (e.g. art, heritage, or religion), and site (e.g. churches or traditional sacred places). Drums may be fine in the context of museums but not on church

13 The visits vary in online attention, due partly to the presence or absence of linguistic barriers and access to Facebook. For example, a visit to the Tuva Republic was covered mainly by Storeide, due (presumably) to little access to Facebook in this area.

14 The translation of *noaidi* (a north Sámi term for a ritual expert) to *shaman* had already started in the nineteenth century (Kaikkonen 2018; 2020). Later developments were shaped partly by historians of religion (ibid.), partly by Michael Harner's core shamanism (Fonneland 2017), and partly by encounters with globalizing discourses on Indigenous religion (Kraft 2022).

15 City Sámi currently outnumber Sámi in the core areas. For studies of the city Sámi see Pedersen and Nyseth 2015 and Berg-Nordlie, Dankertsen, and Winsvold 2022.

grounds (especially from the perspective of Sámi Christians). Mass production is likely to be more contested than art and personal use, and religious concerns (e.g. shaman ceremonies) more than secular formats (e.g. theatre and concert stages). Instances of cultural appropriation are occasionally straightforward (in the wrong hands, for the wrong concerns, in demeaning circumstances) but are more often greyish, unsettled, and contested.

Form, features, and affordances

Asked to describe the makeup of the drum, Storeide said that the frame was beech, the drumhead and the sinew connecting it to the frame were of reindeer skin, and a version of the Sámi sun symbol was painted on the skin. 'This symbol exists in many different cultures,' he later added.[16] While connected to the Sámi people and traditions, TWD is for everybody, everywhere.

The drum has expanded during its travels. Two separate covers were gifted during visits to Nova Scotia and Ontario. They have gradually been covered with signatures, drawings, symbols, and messages, some on top of earlier inscriptions as they have faded and partly disappeared.[17] We thus have a Sámi drum (origin, materials, format, and crafting) connected to layers of skin from elsewhere and to inscriptions by people and traditions from outside Sápmi. The drum has grown physically into the project for which she was envisioned through encounters which have literally figured and formed her.

Running parallel to this material growth is a virtual growth story played out in the Facebook group. What started as a small project has increased digitally in membership, geographical reach, worldwide connectivity, textual corpus, sensemaking, and storytelling. Digitally connected lifelines extend into physical spaces, as when new hosts welcome TWD in their homes. Virtual and material environments occasionally come together in real time, as when events are livestreamed to the Facebook group, or Storeide gathers the drum, the old hawk, and his camera in the kitchen. Material and virtual environments converge, combine, and intersect as mutually constitutive and constructive, enabling the drum's multiple and simultaneous existence.

16 Email on 14.09.2020. For studies of Sámi drums historically see Kaikkonen 2018 and 2020. For the contemporary revival see Kraft 2016, 2020, and 2022. For drums in the art-culture system see Grini 2019 and 2021. For the early collection of Sámi drums see Nordin and Ojala 2018.

17 A suitcase and a travel bag protects TWD during her travels. The bag was a gift, based on a vision by a person connected to the Canadian Centre of Shamanic Studies. Information from Storeide (email), September 2020.

Figure 2. The World Drum's cover. Photo by Morten Wolf Storeide. Permission by Morten Wolf Storeide.

There is also archival growth in the sense of increasing volumes (on- and offline, with varying access) and value. Archives are afterlife technologies and tools of validation. To be archived is to be worthy of afterlives beyond the old hawk, the cabin, distant locations, and current relationships. Expanding archives demonstrate momentum and importance and point to lives to come. Similar growth is happening elsewhere, beyond the control and knowledge of the organizers. During my visit Storeide moved between personal experiences with the drum, events of which he had not been part but had followed digitally from a distance, and spaces of wonder – parts of her life that are unknown, even to him.

TWD has aged through the wear and tear of her travels, visibly through cracks in the frame and the fading of inscriptions, discursively through refer-

ences to 'grandmother drum' (in recent years).[18] Two modes of temporality are played out. One is time as durability (Olsen 2010) through the ancient roots of the drum format. The second is chronological time, involving the lifespan of this particular drum. A similar binary can be ascribed to spatial reach, with drum connections to Indigenous peoples (past and present), and TWD as travel-based worlding,[19] globality performed and embodied.

Gender adds to humanlike features, along with age.[20] Grandmothers belong to a privileged category of Indigenous elders, associated with wisdom and tradition keeping on the one hand and maternal care on the other, here extended from local kin to *distant selves* (Indigenous people elsewhere),[21] even to Mother Earth. The gender reference is consistent, along with a body, clothes (the skin layers), emotional registers, free will, and personality traits.[22] Facebook updates portray a headstrong being, able to change plans, depart from itineraries, and find a way when lost. There is often an element of uncertainty in updates – will she find her way, manage to overcome challenges along the way? – followed by relief as problems are solved, and her whereabouts are settled. While solid, capable, and strong, TWD is also vulnerable and exposed, much like other beings on the move, on their own, away from home.

Sentient features include feelings, relationality, and responsiveness – being sad, tired, caring, joyful, vulnerable, and energized. TWD can carry things (gifts and sacrifices). She can touch and be touched and can connect the community built for her support: directly through established practices of holding her, even of lining up to touch her; indirectly through recorded versions available to her Facebook community. Touch is a basic means of contact, known from religious practices in every age (Chidester 2018; Flood 2014; for sensory aspects see also Promey 2014). It entails intimacy, relationality and connect-ability, here between the drum and the person touching her, between the drum, touchers, and host communities around the world, and between past and present drums and touchers. Touch-based relations are sticky. They stick to the toucher and to the drum as basic to her appeal and charisma, comprised by and expanding with the enabled connections.

18 For material decay and religion see Kendall 2017.

19 Gayatri Spivak introduced the term 'worlding' in an essay (1985).

20 On gender as a way of asserting agency, see Hoskins 2015.

21 The concept of 'distant selves' is inspired by Jonathan Z. Smith's 'order of othering'. For a more elaborate discussion, see Johnson and Kraft 2018a, 505.

22 For example, Storeide notes in a Facebook post (31.10. 2016) that 'Since TWD has Her own will, She finds Her way on new paths'.

Surrounding tactile and visual affordances are sonic features, referred to in Facebook posts as sounds and singing, vibrations and beat. Drum sounds are relational. Drums are silent on their own; they sound only when touched or played. Thus handled, TWD can gather audiences, instigate ceremony, centre her community, constitute contact zones, even manifest '(a) liveness', to borrow a concept from Reason and Lindelöf (2016). (A)liveness involves nowness, whether through recorded versions or in real time, at a digital distance or physical co-presence, and based on the multimodality of the drum, including similarity-based connections between drumbeats and heartbeats – drums, audiences, and Mother Earth. This is sonic aliveness with a past – moreover, coded as the sound identity of Indigeneity.[23] Drums are among the world's oldest musical instruments. They sound Indigenous due partly to their position in earlier strata of primitivist discourses, today widely accessible in museums, exhibitions, and popular culture, partly to material qualities (wood, skin, bone), sonic features (rhythm, beat, vibrations, simplicity), and the overall absence of 'modern' technologies. For the same reasons drumming can indigenize events, people, and surroundings, connect ancestral pasts (*here* and *elsewhere*), and demonstrate continuities (*now* with *then*).

While humanlike and approachable, TWD is also set apart, treated with respect, even with awe, as a sacred thing and godlike being. Many of the photographs feature her in ceremonial contexts. Many of the updates involve extraordinary powers such as empowering effects on other drums, the sending of heartbeats across space, connections with the heartbeats of Mother Earth, and an ability to take on and participate in the pain of others – even to collect, transform and release pain, as in sacrificial transferal. During my visit, Storeide said of the drum's returns to Finnskogen that:

> when I sit down and open the lid, it's just so intense, I get completely knocked out [...]. There are sounds, there are smells, there are songs, there are rhythms. It just comes rolling out. But the strongest experience – you have been to Standing Rock – was when I picked the drum up when she came from there, and then she had been there a long time.[24]

23 For a discussion of Indigenous soundscapes see Hackett 2017. For 'ethnic sound' see Meintjes 2003 and Powell 2012.

24 No.: *når jeg så setter meg ned og løfter opp lokket. altså det er jo poh. Det er så voldsomt. Jeg blir helt satt ut. [...] Det er lyder, det er lukter, det er sanger, det er rytmer, det bare kommer veltende ut. Men den sterkeste opplevelsen — du har jo vært på Standing Rock — det var da jeg tok opp tromma da hun kom derfra, og da hadde hun vært der lenge.*

Returning to this episode, his eyes watered, as he recounted 'all those people who have touched, who have in a way prayed for the drum'. 'It's incredibly fascinating,'[25] he added:

> And that's something I feel strongly when I regain contact with the drum myself. Pouring out, having come to the drum. When she came from Standing Rock, I sat on a picnic spot, just by Flisa, I recall. I sat there and cried. There was so much sorrow from everything that had happened there. It just flooded out. It was so strong. When the worst parts had come out, I felt more of the pleasure, the cooperation, everything that took over. But the second it was opened, it was like being bulldozered. I felt all the pain that was there.[26]

Things are normally present to us in a 'ready-to-hand mode', and they are usually taken for granted, noticeable only when failing or falling apart (Olsen 2010). TWD is insistently noticeable – born to be extraordinary, dressed for fascination. This is a thriller, a reality show, slow TV, and a documentary, and as an unfolding story, available digitally, in real time and in archives. Asked to describe her, both Franck and Storeide used the term *cornucopia*, a 'horn of plenty' (in Greek), related to Amatheia, the goat that provided milk to Zeus as an infant. I understand the reference as descriptive and prescriptive, centred on the drum as a being and their need to stand back; give her space to unfold and find her way. This is thing-based theology and theology of drift (to stick with the language of my conceptual approach). The idea is *not* to complete or close her story, what she is and can be, but rather to stay tuned, prepare for surprises, and trust her moves.

Episodes

Having provided an overview of journeys, allies, and material competences, let me discuss three events in more detail. They stand out in their enthusiasm and numbers of Facebook postings and as highlights regarding pride, high-key action, and excitement. They also imply 'magnification' in the sense Marilyn Strathern suggests: shifts in scope, scale, and importance (2004,

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25 No.: *Det er utrolig fascinerende.*

26 No.: *Og det er noe jeg kjenner veldig når jeg kommer i kontakt med tromma sjøl. Som velter ut. Som har kommet til tromma. Når hun kom fra Standing Rock. Jeg satt på en rasteplass, like ved Flisa, husker jeg. Satt – og grein så fælt. Det var så mye sorg fra alt som hadde skjedd der. Og det bare flomma ut. Det var så sterkt. Når så det verste hadde kommet seg ut, så kjente jeg mer på det med gleden, samarbeidet, alt det som tok overhånd. Men det der sekundet den ble åpna opp – det var som å bli valsa over. Jeg kjente all den smerten som var der.*

xiv–xvii), including the ability to make claims on behalf of an Indigenous *we*. As such, they lend themselves to a focused approach to the issues that concern me in this article: object agency; the unruliness of drift matter; and the relationship between local and global Indigeneity.

The translational logics of Indigeneity – reclaiming, remembering, reconnecting

On 21 March 2018 a reconciliation event took place at Province House in Halifax, Nova Scotia, involving TWD, First Nations representatives, and the then Minister of Culture and Community, Leo Glavine. It was shared with the Facebook group in a 26-minute video, along with several posts.[27] One sequence features an old woman crying in front of TWD. 'You cannot imagine how big this is,' she says. Having been deprived of the drum traditions of her people, she could finally hear, see, and touch them.

The Facebook posts revolved around two features. The first was pride for contributions to an important political event, marked as such by the cause (reconciliation), the site (Province House), and the company (the minister). The second was the old woman's emotional reaction, available for distant viewers through the video, and based on the translational logics of global Indigeneity. While anchored in Sámi traditions, TWD was dressed for a pan-Indigenous position (the covers and inscriptions). She emerges as an object ambassador, representing Indigenous drums vis-à-vis the minister and the drums of ancestral traditions in Nova Scotia vis-à-vis the old woman. The logic is scalar: from *this* drum to *all* drums. Temporally *here* (as a visitor), the drum links *then* and *there* (in Sápmi) with *then*, *here*, and *now* (in Nova Scotia). The colonial history of drums adds layers, based on a similar logic of scalar translation: from the destruction of drums to the destruction of peoples, traditions, and religions; and from the (later) restoration of drums to the restoration of ancestral traditions. To reclaim is to take back and talk back; to no longer be silent and invisible; to demand ownership and demonstrate presence: of things, traditions, practices, and identities.

Bjørnar Olsen has noted that materials confront us with 'coexisting temporal horizons'; with a capacity for 'enduring', for upholding the past, and remembering it (2010, 108). They also confront us with multiple layers of intimacy, described by Anne Lester for textile relics as 'a closeness to those who wore, carried, sweat, and bled in the garments' (2019, 539), for TWD: to those who have held, touched, played, and heard her, in the past and

27 The video was posted by Patricia McNair.

around the world. The video sequence emerges as an intimate encounter and a public sovereignty claim. While centred on the old woman and her people's traditions, this is also about colonial relationships vis-à-vis the Canadian nation state, and even Indigenous people vis-à-vis (Western) colonizers.

TWD adds gender to return-oriented refusal.[28] Contrasting with the male heroes of colonial crusades is a female drum on a wanderer-style journey, open to improvisation and adjustments along the way, and centred on the registers of motherhood: relations and relationality; nature and nurture; peace and love. Contrasting with the destroy and replace tactics of colonialism is a gathering of victims (Indigenous peoples, shamans, drums, and Mother Earth) in a joint mission to save the world.

Borderline Indigeneity – to be or not to be an Indigenous artefact

A Facebook update on 12 April 2012 states that the drum had been 'arrested, seized and held back by the US Department of Homeland Security and The Department of Fish & Wild, for crossing an international border with restricted objects attached', among them a feather (Storeide, Facebook 12.04.2012). A later post refers to:

> huge protests and negotiations on a high political level with involvement from APIN – Aboriginal Peoples Television Network, Chief of Aboriginal affairs, diplomats, ambassadors, and other politicians. With great efforts from a lot of people, The World Drum did get released without any damage (ibid.).

Among the stated conditions of release was the permanent removal of the attached objects, and reassurance that TWD will "NOT ever travel with restricted/unregistered/unidentifiable wild-life parts attached (feathers, bone, shells and plant materials and ribbons)' (ibid.). 'If you find objects attached to TWD, please respectfully remove them immediately,' Storeide ended the Facebook post.[29]

The arrest is the most dramatic of the drum's adventures thus far. Storeide described it in detail during our first encounter.[30] At stake, as he described it, was the status of the drum and the attached objects. The feather was initially

28 For refusals see Simpson 2014.

29 Facebook group, posted by Storeide 12 April 2012, under 'The World Drum Journey so far'.

30 The gift-giving started spontaneously, Storeide said. People left small gifts on the drum's back, or in her suitcase. The gift collection was placed in a museum in Canada in the wake of the feather incident, awaiting collection by the home crew.

categorized by the border control as wildlife and therefore forbidden to cross nation state boundaries. It was released in the wake of successful interventions by Indigenous organizations, based on claims that this was an Indigenous ceremonial drum, that the feather should accordingly be categorized as religious and Indigenous rather than as wildlife, and that different regulations would thereby apply. Names matter, in this case at the level of life or death for the feather, the drum, and her project. The defence power of ordinary drums (and feathers) is limited. The defence power of Indigenous drums (and feathers) is currently greater. As for the Nova Scotia episode, locally distinct artefacts were upscaled to the category of Indigenous things, and then downscaled to the category of Native American sacred things. Whether the case would have stood up in court is an open question. My point is that this worked, despite the foreign origin of the things concerned, from *elsewhere* (Sápmi), yet from *here* (as Indigenous). A second point concerns relationality. Alone, the drum was not recognizably Indigenous. Recognition depended on the intricate networks of contemporary Indigeneity, set into motion by a shaman in Finnskogen, his US connections, and their links with Indigenous organizations.

Protest sounds and global Indigeneity

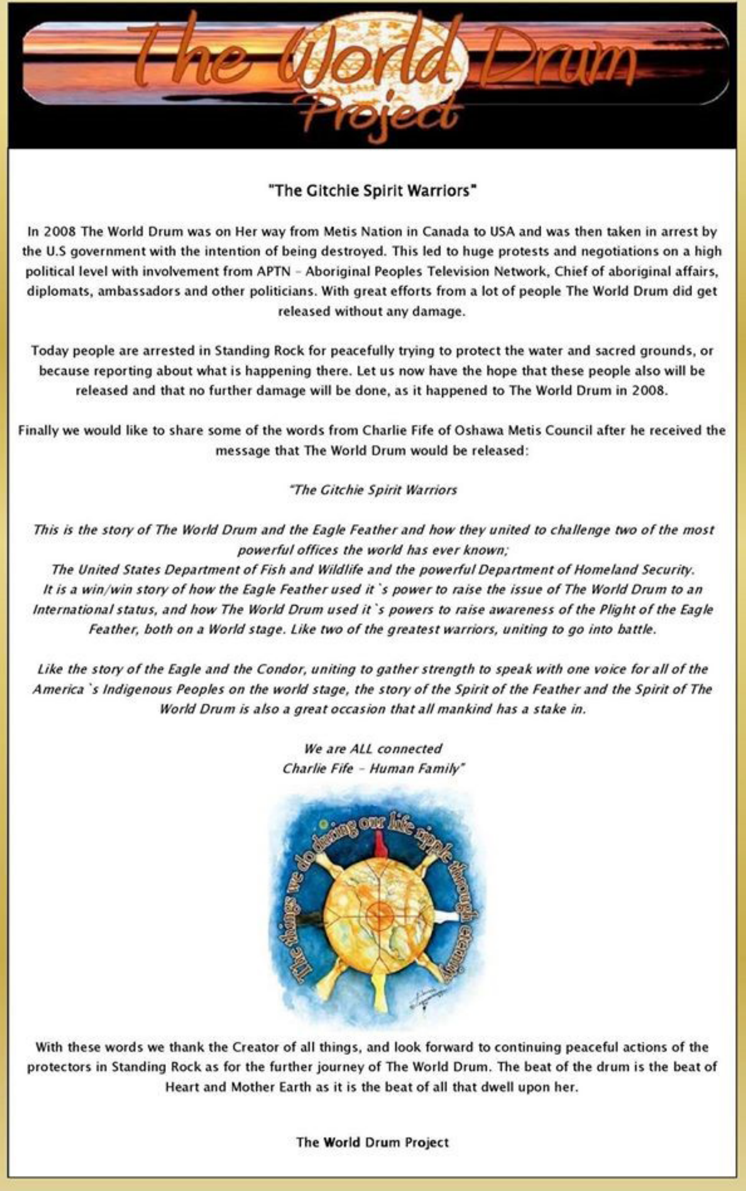
TWD's visit to the Standing Rock camps dominated the Facebook group's activity between September 2016 and January 2017 through several photos, posters, stories, and declarations of support.[31] Posts included versions of the (then) established 'stand with' slogan ('TWD stands with Standing Rock'). Among stressful elements were TWD's disappearance in the postal system en route to North Dakota. Her host, Linda Daniels, recalls nerve-wracking days before finally locating her and heading for the camps. 'Many people were present at the Fire Circle and appreciated the efforts of The World Drum to be there,' Daniels reported from the first day, and 'Many hands played the Drum' (http://www.theworlddrumproject.com).[32]

There is some excitement in the Standing Rock updates, supported by extensive digital accessibility and a sense of worldwide attention. There is also a sense of *being there* through the drum and playing a part. One post shared the fascination of a person whose signature was inscribed on the drum's cover, and who accordingly felt that part of him was there, on these grounds, as part of her and her team, participating in her mission and in the protests.

31 Many of TWD's followers were engaged in the protests. See also Kraft 2020.

32 The quotation is from a five-page summary of the event posted by Daniel, under the headline 'The World Drum Project's 10th Anniversary Story'.

Encounters with g(local) challenges added to the excitement. Consider the following post, uploaded to the Facebook group on 21 October 2016:



The World Drum Project

"The Gitchie Spirit Warriors"

In 2008 The World Drum was on Her way from Metis Nation in Canada to USA and was then taken in arrest by the U.S government with the intention of being destroyed. This led to huge protests and negotiations on a high political level with involvement from APTN – Aboriginal Peoples Television Network, Chief of aboriginal affairs, diplomats, ambassadors and other politicians. With great efforts from a lot of people The World Drum did get released without any damage.

Today people are arrested in Standing Rock for peacefully trying to protect the water and sacred grounds, or because reporting about what is happening there. Let us now have the hope that these people also will be released and that no further damage will be done, as it happened to The World Drum in 2008.

Finally we would like to share some of the words from Charlie Fife of Oshawa Metis Council after he received the message that The World Drum would be released:

"The Gitchie Spirit Warriors

This is the story of The World Drum and the Eagle Feather and how they united to challenge two of the most powerful offices the world has ever known;
The United States Department of Fish and Wildlife and the powerful Department of Homeland Security.
It is a win/win story of how the Eagle Feather used it`s power to raise the issue of The World Drum to an International status, and how The World Drum used it`s powers to raise awareness of the Plight of the Eagle Feather, both on a World stage. Like two of the greatest warriors, uniting to go into battle.

Like the story of the Eagle and the Condor, uniting to gather strength to speak with one voice for all of the America`s Indigenous Peoples on the world stage, the story of the Spirit of the Feather and the Spirit of The World Drum is also a great occasion that all mankind has a stake in.

We are ALL connected
Charlie Fife – Human Family"

With these words we thank the Creator of all things, and look forward to continuing peaceful actions of the protectors in Standing Rock as for the further journey of The World Drum. The beat of the drum is the beat of Heart and Mother Earth as it is the beat of all that dwell upon her.

The World Drum Project

Figure 3. 'The Gitchie Spirit Warriors', posted on The World Drum's Facebook Group, on 21 October 2016.

TWD's project is united with the Standing Rock protests in this poster, based on connected concerns: the arrests of the drum and the water protectors; a shared cause (saving Mother Earth); and opposing bodies (US agencies). Both involve prophecies along the line of Indigenous repertoires: the Condor, the Eagle, and the Black Snake (for Standing Rock);[33] the Eagle Feather (for TWD in Nova Scotia). The latter emerges as a forerunner of (then) ongoing events in North Dakota, and one for which victory had already been secured. It also emerges as an allied cause and case, upscaled to the level of what was at this point the most globally visible Indigenous protest.

The second part of the post deals with the battle. Charlie Fife, presented as a member of the Oshawa Metis Council, ascribed the release of the drum to clever strategizing. The feather succeeded in raising 'the issue of the World Drum to an international status'; TWD used its powers to 'raise awareness of the plight of the Eagle feather, both on a world stage'. In this case a sovereign drum contrasts with a position as a colonial trophy, on a mission to unite and heal people and Mother Earth.

Drums were key to articulations of Indigeneity at Standing Rock. Clothes, languages, and flags characterized the specifics of Indigenous belonging (e.g. Sámi or Maori). Global Indigeneity was primarily demonstrated through drum beats: at the camps; during ceremonies and direct action; and even as the soundtrack of protest marches (Mni Wiconi – water is life). While centred on a particular river (the Missouri) and a specific threat (a pipeline), this was upscaled to the foundations of life and the forces that threatened it, demonstrated audibly through the constant sound of drumbeats. A few weeks before the visit of TWD, the Sámi activist and musician Sara Marielle Beaska Gaup performed her 'We speak Earth' during a welcome ceremony.[34] She did so while holding a drum and asking the audience to clap their chests to the drumbeats, literally linking their heartbeats to the beat of the drum, synching the beat of their respective bodies; that of the audiences, that of the drum, and that of the earth; threatened here and now (the river) and everywhere (water is life).

Commenting on their visit, Beaska Gaup's sister noted that the Sámi, unlike most Indigenous peoples, were white (Kraft 2022). Things made the sisters recognizably Indigenous in this context: their *gákti* (Sámi dress); *lavvo* (tent); and drums. TWD is largely unknown in Sápmi, among *near selves* in geographical terms. She was recognizable here, among *distant selves* on foreign grounds.

33 The Dakota Access Pipeline was referred to as 'the Black Snake', based on a Lakota prophecy.

34 I was at the Standing Rock protest camps at the time for joint fieldwork with Greg Johnson: see Johnson and Kraft 2018a and b.

From Finnskogen and beyond: Final reflections

By way of ending, let me return to the questions from which I departed. My starting point was material qualities, and how they matter. The drum's intrinsic power (in Olsen's sense) emerges from multimodality and multifunctionality. Tactile, visual, and auditory qualities work together for this as sound, image, and touch with the (joint) capacity to build, bond, and gather; to summon, centre, and instigate ceremony; to trigger communication, interpretation, and imagination; to accumulate geographies; and to store time and connect temporalities, including time as succession and durability. Other (humanlike) features are similarly material: the ability to age and grow; to carry and be carried; interact and respond; to be solid and fragile, dressed and naked, sealed and open. Emerging from this particular assembly is a recognizably Indigenous mixture of sacred thing and godlike being, sanctified through attention, sites, and ceremonial circumstances.

My second question involves global matters: the modes and codes of Indigeneity on the move. More than anything else, drums visibly and audibly demonstrate this new form of collective identity. Such a position must somehow be related to the intrinsic powers discussed so far, along with mobility (easy transport) and simplicity of form (aiding reproduction and recognition). Colonial regimes paved the way for logics of reclaiming, even animated drums, for sovereignty claims to come. Drums had already been set apart, as the 'heathen and primitive' instruments of a particular grouping, associated with the premodern fabric of fetishism, magic, and nature-religion. They were thus prepared for a scalar shift to 'good' religion: for set-apartness in the positive sense of sacredness; and nature people as protectors rather than civilizational obstacles.

Global Indigeneity hinges on a different type of scalar translation, between the locally specific (Indigenous peoples/religions) and notions of shared features (Indigenous people/religion in the singular). To be recognizably Indigenous is to know these codes, have access to translational devices (material and/or discursive), and be able to demonstrate them, as in the reconciliation event in Nova Scotia and the arrest by US Homeland Security. Specifically Sámi codes had little bearing on these grounds. Hosts in places like Nova Scotia are more likely to know the taxonomies of (pan-)Indigenous religion than the details of Sámi religion, and are likely to be steered more by the former than the latter. Nuances fade at a distance. Contested-ness is likely to decrease in line with distance from home, along with increased object agency.

I have used drift matter as an orienting device, a concept to think with. Concerning potential relevance for religious matters beyond this case, let me suggest the following.

First, movement: to be a drifter is to be unsettled, to have exceeded forecasts, proceeded 'via new conduits' (Pétursdóttir 2020, 87). Although unusual, even extraordinary, TWD invites reflections on thing-ness on the move, on the potential for becoming differently, beyond origins. And she invites attention to drift as an object agency, to drift as 'potential, coincidence, contingency, sleeping giants and dark forces' (Pétursdóttir 2018, 99).

Second is unruliness. Drifty lives are bound to be unruly. TWD was born to be wild; to move freely like a force of nature, even as nature. I have been intrigued by the emic appeal of unruliness and of its productiveness. Unruliness invites wonder in my examples and in a *more-to-come* mode of ongoing mysteries. Corresponding to a lack of 'beliefs' are notions of this thing as fascinating, intriguing, interesting. We may even speak of a theology of drift, centred on the drum and her unruliness and offering *fascinans* on the one hand and sovereignty claims on the other. Colonialism was an ordering regime, imposed from outside, and aided by religions of dogma and destruction (Sámi drums were literally destroyed). To be unruly is to reject this regime, literally to move elsewhere and differently, beyond the colonial world and its religions. Unruliness versus control is a basic theme in the history of religions. While unusually unruly, TWD is accompanied along the trails of wanderer-style religion, in the past and – with the increasing turn to seeking style spirituality – as a dominant form of contemporary religiosity.

Third are ethical matters, relative to naming. Drift implies change, though accompanied by duration and continuity. The current categorizations of shamanism as either a 'new religious movement' or the 'traditional religion of the Sámi' are problematic from this perspective and in various ways. They are normative (critics tend to choose 'new'; supporters typically prefer 'traditional'). They are misleading (for formations that are neither new nor simply traditional). And they are potentially destructive. To be new is bad in religious contexts, and can similarly be bad in the context of law and jurisdiction. 'Afterlives' is neutral in conceptual terms, fairly intuitive in and beyond academic circles, less likely to offend the people involved and to have a negative impact on their projects, including political and environmental ones. It is also a plural term. Remains are the same but are shaped differently through the specifics of encounters, contexts, and rationale.

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SIV ELLEN KRAFT is Professor at the Department of Archaeology, History, Religious Studies and Theology at UiT, the Arctic University of Norway. Email: Siv.ellen.kraft@uit.no

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Healing and Mental Illness in Ghana: Why Prayer Camps in Ghana are Sometimes Alternatives to Psychiatric Hospitals

FRANCIS ETHELBERT KWABENA BENYAH
Åbo Akademi University

Abstract
Prayer camps serve as an environment for healing rituals and continue to play an important role in the lives of many Ghanaians spiritually, economically, and socially. In this article, I present the reasons for prayer camps' continuing reliance as institutions of healthcare for individuals suffering from mental illnesses in Ghana. The article argues that prayer camps will continue to exert public influence and play a dominant role in the treatment of mental health sicknesses due to underlying religio-cultural beliefs and notions associated with illness, especially from the traditional Ghanaian Akan perspective and the inadequate resources at the disposal of state-owned psychiatric hospitals.

Keywords*: prayer camps, healing, mental health, hospitals, psychiatry*

In this article I present the underlying worldviews associated with mental illness in Ghana and attempt to examine why prayer camps continue to serve as an alternative to psychiatric hospitals in mental healthcare. In doing so, I offer both a theoretical and empirical perspective on health and healing by contextualizing their conception from the traditional Akan[1] perspective. I delineate how the practice and understanding of health and healing found at prayer camps is cast in the framework of traditional interpretation, and I present plausible factors that have accounted for both the religious and public significance of prayer camps in mental healthcare in Ghana. Ghana has been shown to be one of the most religious countries in sub-Saharan Africa: 71.3 per cent self-identify with Christianity, 19.9 per cent with Is-

1 The Akan constitute more than half of Ghana's population and are arguably the largest ethnic group in Ghana, comprising the Ashantis, Fantes, Nzema, Ahanta, Akuapem, Sefwi, Bono, etc. (Buah 1998).

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lam, and 3.2 per cent with traditional and/or indigenous religion, making a total of 94.4 per cent (Ghana Statistical Service 2021; Inglehart et al. 2014).

Prayer camps are prayer centres established for prayer, healing, deliverance, Bible studies, and counselling (Larbi 2001). Except for a few that were established or founded by churches, prayer camps are mostly private Christian religious organizations that are usually managed by individuals with prophetic abilities or gifts.[2] In terms of worship style and praxis, prayer camps are charismatic and Pentecostal in nature. Prayer camps thus form 'part of the greater complex of Pentecostal deliverance ministries' (Heuser 2015, 280). The operation of prayer camps in Ghana started in the 1940s and became more prominent in the 1980s (Quayesi-Amakye 2011; Onyinah 2012). The leaders of these camps promote beliefs in miracles, consultation with angels, and spiritual healing. Pneumatic ingredients like prophecies, visions, dreams, speaking in tongues, and so on are also very much evident in their practice of worship.

Prayer camps play a major role in providing a ritual context for individuals with diverse problems and ailments seeking a spiritual antidote to or remediation of their problems (Larbi 2001; Onyinah 2012; Arias et al. 2016). With limited state resources in psychiatry and mental healthcare[3] and a lack of support and commitment on the part of successive governments to make mental health a priority of the general healthcare system, for more than fifty years prayer camps have served as 'healing homes' or surrogates for mental health hospitals. Despite the attempt to plug the gap resulting from the paucity of specialists and government defunding of the sector, prayer camps have also received overwhelming criticism for some of their practices and methods or approach to healing (Selby 2011). Previous studies have reported practices such as chaining, forced fasting,

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2 The description of prayer camps as private Christian religious organizations refers to their independence from centralized religious bodies or churches. However, there are camps that operate under well-established churches such as the Church of Pentecost, which operates more than thirty prayer camps across different regions in Ghana. Even with those under the oversight of churches, the leaders of the camps are allowed to operate without regular interference from the church. In essence, prayer camps are not churches but healing centres which draw their adherents from various denominations or churches during healing or prayer sessions (see Onyinah 2012).

3 Currently, the country can boast of only three mental health institutions: the Accra Psychiatric Hospital, Pantang Hospital, and the Ankaful Psychiatric Hospital – all in the south of the country, leaving the middle belt and the Northern Region with no facilities. As of 2017 there were only eleven practising psychiatrists in the public sector, 1,500 mental health nurses, three clinical psychologists, fourteen medical assistants, and 250 community health officers across the country.

and the deplorable conditions in which patients are kept (Edwards 2014; Carey 2015; Onyinah 2012; Arias et al. 2016). There is widespread public knowledge of forms of abuse that occur at some prayer camps in Ghana. The global media has also exposed some of the perceived violations of patients' human rights at some prayer camps in Ghana and elsewhere (BBC 2018; Carey 2015). Some literature and media reports have argued that the government and state authorities should close the camps because they support neither the healing nor wellbeing of mental health patients, claiming the practices of some camps result in various forms of victimization and the devaluing of patients that produce self-regressive narratives that erase any eventual promise of restoration (Edwards 2014; Human Rights Watch 2012; Selby 2011). Despite these criticisms and negative views, camps continue to wield much public influence and garner goodwill among citizens (Ae-Ngibise et al. 2010).

The central question this article seeks to answer is: why do research participants perceive healing rituals at prayer camps as valid and adequate alternatives to medical treatment at psychiatric or mental health hospitals? To answer this question, I address two subsidiary questions: first, what is the general understanding of health and healing among Ghanaians? Second, how do participants' understandings of disease causation and the processes of social stigmatization influence their views of prayer camps as healing places for the mentally sick?

Recent studies of prayer camps in Ghana describe the sustained belief in evil supernatural forces as the cause of most mental illnesses (Arias et al. 2016). Despite the response provided by some transcultural psychiatrists and anthropologists concerning the need to recognize traditional notions and beliefs of illness in the categorization and treatment of mental illness (Read 2017), there remains a hierarchy of knowledge in Ghana (and in a global context) in which 'natural' or biomedical knowledge is deemed superior to 'supernatural' thinking in the theory of disease causation. Although culture and religion have been highlighted as important factors in psychiatry and mental healthcare (Koenig 2018; Kleinman 1980; Kirmayer and Swartz 2013), much of the previous literature on the subject in Ghana and elsewhere has paid insufficient attention to these factors. This study extends the current debate on the relationship between cultural and religious beliefs of mental illnesses and the discourses on the theory of disease causation in the non-Western context. It seeks to provide a response to the challenges of operation of and competing views on prayer camps as healing centres for those with mental illnesses.

Next I discuss methodology, then the concept of health and healing, and tease out how these two are relevant theoretically to this article's discussion. I argue that the practice and understanding of health and healing at prayer camps resonates with the worldview of the people because it is cast in the framework of traditional interpretation. Second, I explore how the causal narratives surrounding mental illness influence help-seeking behaviours or the kind of therapeutic approaches employed. I argue that the significance attached to the health and wellbeing of the individual in the healing process at the camps makes the healing rituals more influential. Third, I examine why prayer camps continue to serve as alternatives to state interventions in dealing with the problem of mental illness. The fourth section presents the conclusion.

Material and methods

The study employed Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), which aims to explore in detail how participants make sense of their personal and social worlds. At the core of this approach 'is the meanings that particular experiences, events and states hold for participants' (Smith and Osborn 2015, 25). In this vein IPA was used both as a method for data collection and analysis (Smith and Osborn 2015). As IPA aims to explore the lived experience of research participants, the interview questions and discussions focused on extracting information about their experience of living at the camp and what they made of it. Throughout the study the participants were allowed to share how the experiences of engaging in these activities had affected their general wellbeing. They shared their lived experiences at the prayer camps of prayer, fasting, and healing as a means of dealing with mental illness. Issues discussed during the interviews included their views of fasting, the importance or meaning they ascribed to their stay at the camp, and so on. This approach was necessary to reveal participants' own shared experiences against the etic construction of the camps to avoid unsubstantiated claims.

My background as a Ghanaian with a training in religious studies and an understanding of the cultural milieu I addressed in this study gave me the necessary skills both conceptually and theoretically in examining the issues it discusses. In other words, the camps I studied were from a familiar environment, and this helped provide an informed critique, analysis, and personal reflections from both emic and etic perspectives.

The data for this article were gathered during two separate fieldwork periods conducted at four selected prayer camps in the Eastern and Central Regions of Ghana. The first set was conducted between October 2019 and January 2020. The second spanned the period between February 2021 and April 2021. The camps selected were chosen because of their long history and the significant role they have played in the treatment and care of those with mental illnesses with sanatoriums for the mentally ill, for example. The selected camps are very prominent among other camps in Ghana and have attracted public attention both locally and internationally.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 21 individuals at the selected camps, including pastors, caregivers, and patients. The selection of interviewees was based on the participants' experience of the studied issues. I also relied on the staff of prayer camps, here referred to as caregivers, to select patients for the interviews. I am aware that my inability to personally select respondents for interviews has several implications for this study's analysis and findings. However, this was expected and mitigated with IPA, which provided the opportunity to critically examine participants' responses through engagement and interpretation. For example, in engaging with the participants' shared experiences, attention was paid to the consistency of the claims they made. The sharing of lived experiences opens participants' world to the researcher about some things of which they are themselves unaware (Smith and Osborn 2015) or would otherwise hide from the researcher during the interview. This helped the researcher reflect on and critically analyse participants' claims. The approach was useful in removing biases while presenting an opportunity of not uncritically assenting to participants' claims. All the interviews took place at the camps, which gave me the opportunity to fully enmesh myself in the participants' environment. For example, I participated in healing ceremonies and had the privilege of observing the camps' everyday life. This also became important in my analysis, allowing a richer analysis.

The patient participants had a history of mental illness but had experienced some wellness and were still living at the camp. They included four male pastors and six caregivers, five of whom were males, and one female. Eleven patients were interviewed. They included seven males and four females, with ages ranging from 26 to 65. The pastors had practised for between fifteen and thirty-five years. The caregivers I interviewed had no formal training in psychology or psychiatry but had had between twelve and twenty years' experience of caring for the mentally ill at the camps. I conducted the interviews in both English and Twi. The choice of language

depended on the interviewee's fluency. As a native speaker, I translated the interviews conducted in Twi to English. In some cases some of the translations were checked by language experts to ensure accuracy.

I began my study with a visit to the camps. During my visit the study's objectives were first explained to the camp staff, and permission was granted to conduct interviews. As most of the participants were from vulnerable groups, several measures were undertaken to ensure that the principle of 'doing no harm' was achieved. This included anonymizing all the study's participants, as well as excluding any sensitive information that would be prejudicial to the participants. All the interviews took place at the prayer camps with the permission, supervision, and assistance of prayer camp staff. The participants gave their informed consent orally. Voluntary participation and withdrawal from the study at any time were assured. The participants were also made aware of their right to refuse to answer any question during the interview and assured of their confidentiality. All interviews were audio-recorded with permission. Each interview lasted approximately forty-five minutes. Participants were asked about the story of their experience of illness, their personal experience at the camp, and how the camp may have helped in the management of their illness. Ethical clearance for all aspects of this research was also granted through Åbo Akademi University in Finland.

The author transcribed all the audiorecorded interviews. For the analysis Microsoft Word was used in coding the transcribed interviews following IPA. This was done by closely studying one interview transcript and then examining the others one by one (Smith and Osborn 2015), following an idiographic approach to analysis. This approach does not mean eschewing generalization but painstakingly working on individual cases and very cautiously moving to more general claims (Smith and Osborn 2015). This method helped in classifying and presenting themes (patterns). For example, attention was paid to the aspect of the data in which participants reported the beliefs and causes of mental illness, and how prayer, fasting, and their stay at the prayer camp had aided their recovery from the illness. Other aspects of the coding captured their preferred treatment approach to mental illness.

Contextualizing health and healing

The concepts of health and healing are culturally nuanced and complex but are rendered intelligible if interpreted within a given social and cultural context. Healing is always contextual and often takes place at many different layers: spiritually, emotionally, socially, and physically (Ryle 2011). An understanding

of the concept of health, and what might count as healing in a given cultural context, may be inexplicable in another context. I attempt to do this in this section.

In Akan perception people are connected to one another through blood, which forms the *abusua* (the clan or family). An individual is thus not an isolated being but is bound to the family through blood. In other words, an individual remains the property of the clan (*abusua*), and the *abusua* is supposed or expected to take good care of its members. If something unexpected or a misfortune (such as illness, poverty, barrenness) happens, '*abusua na woko abisa*, that is, the family takes the responsibility [of consultation (*abisa*)] to find out the causes, with the aim of restoring the *odehye* (prince/princess) to the family' (Onyinah 2012, 27). The issue of this consultation (*abisa*) will be discussed in detail later, as it has many implications for the wellbeing of an individual.

Health and wellbeing are expressed to connote a person's holistic wellbeing – body, soul and spirit. A disharmony among these three components that form the human person is considered a diseased condition. This hinges on the belief that an individual is primarily a spirit being, and a spirit working on a spirit can cause damage (Atiemo 1998). Among the Akan, if a person becomes vulnerable to evil spirits for some reason, it is believed that this can cause sickness and misfortune for the individual. The notion of health and wellness is interpreted as a state of cosmological balance in the individual's physical, mental/emotional, and social life (Onyinah 2002). Health, which is conceived as total wellbeing (wholeness), is concomitant to all that is valued in life, including mental, physical, social, spiritual, and cosmic harmony.

For example, among the Akan, when an individual is confronted with a serious trauma or sickness, it is said that *ne kra adwane* ('their soul has fled'), or if a person is sick for a long time, it is said that *ne sumsum nyinaa afiri ne mu*, or 'their spirit has left them'. In other words, the essential component of the person is separated, and the separation causes sickness and therefore death. If we speak of healing, we are talking about wholeness – when the person is properly integrated into their body, soul, and spirit. This explains why the ritual aspects become crucial in the healing process. The rituals constitute part of the process of restoring and reconciling broken relationships. Thus, 'during healing rituals, issues may be raised that are relevant to others who attend the ritual, and some of the effect of the intervention may be through its ability to change the afflicted person's relationship with family and community' (Kirmayer and Swartz 2013, 48). Kirmayer and Swartz (2013) further argue that 'healing then works not only to relieve symptoms and resolve

illness but also restore proper relations with ancestors and within the community'. The importance of the rituals for restoring broken relationships lies in the fact that a distressed relationship with one's relatives or neighbours could also result in sickness. A healthy person is thus properly integrated within their personhood and is also in appropriate social relations.

The central goal of life for the Akan is health, success, and prosperity (Onyinah 2012). When such goals of life become elusive, the Akan resort to their religiosity, usually by consulting a religious functionary to divine and provide answers to the problems, questions, and complexities of everyday life. It is from this purview that an *abisa* (consultation) becomes prominent. An *abisa* is thus a 'divinatory consultation or the desire to know the supernatural causalities of affairs' (Onyinah 2012, 85). An *abisa*, as Onyinah (2012) notes, is the focus of religious activities among the Akan and is very prominent in the work of the *akomfo*, the principal figure in *abosomsom* (the worship of the gods). An *abisa* is also one type of indigenous or traditional *akom* (possession) use of therapy to extract information from a patient. The need for an *abisa* is therefore to discover the supernatural agents associated with an illness and through rituals to ward off any evil spirit responsible for the sickness. In *Search for Security* (1960) Margaret Field documents extensive examples of people from rural Ghana going to healing shrines for an *abisa* to find the root cause of various mental disorders. She reports the following as examples of complaints and requests made at a routine *abisa*: an unspecified sickness; drunkards requesting rescue; depression; mental illness resulting from physical illness; involutional psychoses, schizophrenia, and so on.

At prayer camps in Ghana supplicants also aimed to seek a solution to their mental illnesses by consulting prophets to diagnose the cause of their illness and then perform the appropriate rituals aimed to remedy the situation.

Prayer camps and healing of mental illness

It is known that how people view illnesses, what they believe about them, and how they explain what has caused them directly influence the kind of options they choose in seeking redress or a solution (Lynch and Medin 2006). They may not trust the potency or efficacy of treatment options that do not accord with their beliefs and consequently perceive such treatments as less satisfactory (Kucharski and Piot 2014; Koenig et al. 2012; Taylor 2003; Godin and Kok 1996).

In the following quotations some participants expressed the belief that their mental illness was supernaturally instigated, and they had therefore found the prayer camps as an alternative to remedy the situation:

> My sickness was spiritual. If they had taken me to the asylum [mental hospital], I don't believe I would have recovered. I was for ever going to be in a state of lunacy because when they brought me here, no one gave me an injection or medicine. It was only prayer … that made me receive my healing. My hair and beard had developed dreadlocks … when I first came here – they took pictures of me. So when I recovered, I realized that although the asylum was good, it wouldn't help other people because if it was a spiritual attack like mine, there was no way the asylum could deal with it because you don't need those injections they give there. What you need is prayer! (Patient 1, 41 years).

In the above quotation the patient's claim that sickness is spiritual is associated with malevolent and/or evil spiritual forces such as witchcraft and juju. Although the direct cause may be unknown, it is believed that such forces are behind the sickness.

A patient also shared his view of the importance of the prayer camp to his wellbeing:

> So I can really say that this is a very good place. If I had found this place earlier, I wouldn't be sitting here now. If I'd found this place ten (10) years ago, I believe God would have made me greater than I am today … At first, they tied me up and brought me here. But now I take the bus myself and come here without any hesitation or compulsion. Even when the caregivers ask me to go home, I don't want to go because I don't feel I belong at home (Patient 5: 42 years).

Another patient also remarked:

> My daughter and sister brought me here. Since I came here, the voices I used to hear have suddenly ceased. I've been here for three months. They said they would discharge me after Easter, but I have told them I want to stay a bit longer. The camp has really helped my situation a lot, especially through prayer (Patient 6: 52 years).

The two quotations from Patients 5 and 6 indicate the role prayer plays in their lives when they are staying at a prayer camp. They reveal the im-

portance of prayer and the communal relationship at the camp as factors contributing to their recovery. During the interviews the patients reflected on how prayer had helped them stop hearing voices at night and recover from an illness after ten years. This period included visits to psychiatric hospitals and other sources of healing.

One of the caregivers expressed the importance of the prayer camps in helping people deal with their problems:

> Indeed, the prayer camps help a lot … When you come to the prayer camp, we have our prophet there. The first welcome is to go and see him. He will pray for you and give you some directions (*akwankyere*). After three days he will ask you to bring the person back and through that the healing takes place. Sometimes he will also say God has done his part so take the person to the hospital for medical attention. When that is done, everything is balanced (Caregiver 3).

In this quotation, the caregiver specifically expresses the view that while prayer is good in addressing the problem of mental illness, they also combine it with or resort to biomedicine when necessary. Going to the hospital in the quotation above means using therapeutic interventions other than those found at the prayer camp. This becomes important especially when the sickness persists after periods of fasting, prayer, and directions from the prophet.

The quotations also reinforce the notion of spiritual causation and the theory of illness as embedded in local ontologies, and that hospitals do not know the art of divination and how to cure certain diseases. The combination of prayer with medicine, as argued by Caregiver 3, is similar to what Auli Vähäkangas (2012) and Carl Sundberg (2020) describe in their articles on healing in Tanzania and Congo. Such treatment is intended to offer the patient a holistic healing which hospitals are perceived as lacking the capacity to provide. In some parts of Africa 'traditional medicine' has been appropriated into the general healthcare system and reformulated as a new system of scientific knowledge to augment the development of biomedicine and healthcare, as well as to support the progress of modern scientific expertise (Meincke 2015).

As is reflected in the quotations, the healing process used at these prayer camps may include long periods of fasting, confession, and other spiritual activities that aim to hasten the individual's recovery and wellbeing. Faith healing, as typified in Pentecostalism and evidenced at the prayer camps,

has been categorized as more holistic and all-encompassing. The view is that the biomedical scientist-physician is a curer rather than a healer. The biomedical model or approach to medical care is seen as one that distances itself from the holistic psychological, emotional, and spiritual disturbances associated with disease (McGuire 2008). The title of a book by the Ghanaian author, Appiah-Kubi (1981) – *Man Cures – God Heals* – captures this succinctly.

Perceived causes of mental illness and the choice of therapeutic interventions

Although the biological or natural causes of mental illness are not entirely disregarded, the attribution of illness to supernatural causes remains pervasive in Ghana (Yendork et al. 2019; Kpobi and Swartz 2018a; Opare-Henaku 2013).[4] It is very often perceived that mental illness is caused by supernatural forces and malevolent agents and therefore needs supernatural intervention. A view shared by a pastor during an interview at one of the prayer camps I visited corroborates this:

> As black Africans – maybe others don't believe it but even when things become difficult for them to bear – they instead end up turning to God for help. For us, when you come here to do something, you have to believe that there is black power, there is African magic, witchcraft is there. You know those things? We the black people, there are curses too, envy is also there at the workplace – I will cause harm to you because I was there before you came. Why should you come for my position? We Africans, sometimes the home you come from too, no one does government work or is educated. If you try to go to school, they can make you go mad. If you try to get work in the public sector or get married, they can make you go mad. If you try to buy a car, designer shoes, and dresses, they'll make you go mad! These are there! For me, what I've seen with my eyes, no one can convince me that madness cannot be influenced or caused by evil forces. And if it is evil spirits that cause people to be mad, we also have to use the Spirit of God to drive the madness away (Prayer Camp Pastor 2).

4 The belief that mental illness can be influenced by supernatural evil forces is also common in the Western context as shown in multiple studies conducted in countries like the United Kingdom, New Zealand, and Australia among others (cf. Mehta and Thornicroft 2013). Thielman (1998, 3) asserts that 'historically, Western medical writers have held a variety of views on the relationship between religion, spirituality, and madness'.

This view is also shared by individuals who had had a history of mental illness. A patient I interviewed at one of the prayer camps said:

> I used to hear voices in my ears. When I hear the voice then I feel like I should leave the house to go and sleep somewhere. The voice can be constant. I also see things that are very scary. The voice forcefully asks me to go, and I will take my things and go out. I usually hear the voice at night. So sometimes I go and sleep at the lorry station … I went to the Pantang Hospital, but the doctor only said I had depression. To me I believe this wasn't only physical but spiritual (Patient 6: 52 years).

The above quotations from the respondents point to the sustained belief that witchcraft, curses, the breaking of taboos, a spirit, or demonic possession can all cause someone to become mentally ill.

My respondents' responses show a continuous trajectory from Ghanaians' approach to seeking healing for mental illnesses as described by Field (1960). The difference is the healing space or context from which the healing is sought and the religious functionaries involved. The prayer camps differ from the indigenous healing cults or shrines Field (1960) describes, though they share some affinities and cultural resonances in terms of the understanding and interpretation of mental illness as having a potential supernatural origin or being spiritually instigated. The prayer camps replaced the old healing shrines and provided an escape for their visitors from the severe sanctions, criticisms, and stigma that accompanied visits to the shrines by new converts or 'born-again' Christians. The healing shrines were discredited and demonized by the joint forces of Christian preaching dominated by a pronounced Pentecostal/charismatic culture (see Atiemo 2006; Kalu 2008).

At prayer camps *akwankyere* (direction) is often used in reference to the same act of *abisa*. These two terminologies or concepts may thus differ in theory but not in practice. *Akwankyere* at prayer camps involves elements of consultation. It is through the consultation that the prophet diagnoses the problem or cause of an illness and prescribes appropriate solutions or directions (*akwankyere*) to remediate the situation. According to previous research the Akan turn to the warding off of evil spirits as a last resort and not as a first response. People resort to warding off evil spirits after all initial attempts to find a cure (including biomedicine) or solution to sickness prove futile, and through *abisa* they find that the problem has a supernatural origin (Onyinah 2012; Busua 1962). My research participants also regularly

reported having first tried other solutions before visiting the prayer camps. Caregivers mentioned that for some of their clients the prayer camp was their 'last stop' after consulting several other healing sources, including going to a psychiatric hospital.

At prayer camps supplicants or individuals with problems consult the prophet, who is believed to be endowed with the supernatural ability to diagnose and prescribe solutions to their problems. Although this form of psychological methodology resembles traditional forms of *akom*, there are notable differences. In the traditional method it is the *akomfo* (the priests) that are possessed and thereby give a prognostication and give directions for the cure of the sickness. In the context of the prayer camps it is the clients or the patients who become possessed and report the cause of the disease. Yet the role of the prophet in this process must not be downplayed. As Onyinah (2012) points out, the presence of the prophet and 'his diagnostic ability that make *abisa* (divination) possible' are crucial. Some prophets can also diagnose the problem through their prophetic gifts as people with the ability to see beyond the physical realm (Asamoah-Gyadu 2015).

As previously mentioned, the approach to sickness and healing employed at prayer camps and in other Pentecostal streams of Christianity or churches corresponds to familiar cultural and religious worldviews, values, and perceptions. The prophets have become the Christian equivalents of traditional priests and diviners, and despite their resort to a Christian ethos or Christian beliefs, very much reflect 'ways in which religious mediations occur within primal societies in Africa' (Asamoah-Gyadu 2015, 86). Onyinah (2012, 203) surmises that 'prayer camps have replaced the services that the shrines formerly provided for the people'. Read (2016) has also noted the similarity of Field's (1960) healing shrines to the more recent growth of Pentecostal prayer camps, with the old minor gods now equated with the 'demons' of Christianity, and with a new power of healing through prayer restricted to the God of the Christians (cf. Meyer 1999). Prayer camps are thus a reinvention of the shrines and healing cults that emerged in the twentieth century in Ghana. People visit the camps to discover the supernatural causes of their problems and afflictions, find out their future, and seek protection.

In the context of mental health *akwankyere* works as a kind of divination in which the prophet employs diagnostic tools to determine the cause of the illness and ward off the supposed antagonistic evil spirits or demons associated with it through prayer and fasting. Healing and ritual praxis at the prayer camps are suffused with features that delineate an affinity with traditional Akan worldviews. In other words, discourses on health and

healing suggest both continuity and rupture with African indigenous cosmologies. Indeed, healing has become important in Ghanaian Christianity because it was important in the traditional culture. Ogbu Kalu has argued that the 'Pentecostal theology of health and healing recognizes that coping practices are mediated by the surrounding culture, worldview, symbolic systems, and healing myths' (Kalu 2008, 264). Kirmayer and Swartz (2013, 48) have argued that 'ritual healing is part of larger religious and sociomoral systems that cannot be simply replaced with psychiatric practices, because, even if symptoms are treated successfully, the existential meanings of the illness and the patient's social predicament are not addressed'. Social predicaments may include the traditional or societal view of illnesses as demonically influenced, with which hospitals cannot deal but are believed to be tackled through deliverance rituals in the camp.

In the next section I provide a further explanation of why prayer camps continue to remain attractive or serve as alternatives to psychiatric hospitals in Ghana.

Why prayer camps are alternatives to psychiatric hospitals

In the following discussion I examine some of the reasons prayer camps have continued to remain an alternative to the state-owned mental hospitals in the attempt to deal with the problem of mental illnesses in Ghana.

First, previous research (Opare-Henaku 2013; Kyei et al. 2014; Kpobi and Swartz 2018b) and responses from my informants – for example, Patients 1, 5, and 6 and Prayer Camp Pastor 2 – provide an answer to the question of why people turn to prayer camps: the healing they provide resonates with their underlying religio-cultural beliefs. Mental illness in Ghana is often attributed to external and supernatural evil forces such as witchcraft. Patients and their families therefore often view hospitals as lacking the ability to offer the necessary diagnostic or divinatory tools to establish the causes, consequences, and remedy of afflictions. However, prayer camps are believed to provide a ritual context in which individuals suffering from mental health disorders undergo a period of fasting and prayer and with the help of the prophet ward off any antagonistic spirit associated with the illness. The prophet or leader of the camp, who is believed to be endowed with the Holy Spirit, can communicate with the spiritual world and offer solutions to remedy the situation. The prophet can thus divine the 'why' of the supplicant's complaints. He can also understand his clients' needs from cultural, religious, social, and psychological perspectives, a

need which is completely absent in hospitals or biomedical care (see also Appiah-Kubi 1981).

There are also general prayers that serve as interventionist strategies to seek healing from the power of the Holy Spirit for other forms of illnesses that are not associated with any supernatural entities. Thus, not all illnesses are attributed to the devil, but even in situations where they are not, the participants still see the need to rely on God's grace and providence for 'total' healing. In such situations prayers are said over prescribed medications before they are taken or administered (Krause 2012). As one prayer camp pastor reflected, 'even the medicines, if you don't pray over them, won't work. Even some of the doctors who really know God very well – when they examine the situation, and he thinks there is more to it than being physical – will say send him or her to the prayer camp' (Prayer Camp Pastor 2).

Second is the view that hospitals cannot provide a solution to problems of a spiritual origin. For Patient 1, for example, although 'the asylum [mental hospital] is good, it doesn't help … because if it is a spiritual attack … there is no way the asylum can deal with it because you don't need those injections they give there'. For this respondent prayer was the only antidote to his sickness, which he claimed was spiritual. Another caregiver (Caregiver 4) argued that

> 'if the sickness has a spiritual origin, no medication can deal with it. If evil spiritual entities can cause illness in people, then we also need the power of God and the Holy Spirit to drive that demon out so that the person can have his or her healing. Because you can't use medicine. No, that won't help!'

Healing is also framed in a theological narrative about the essence and existence of the human person. For example, a caregiver asked:

> Why is it that when someone purchases a vehicle, and it gets spoilt, they send it to the mechanic and not a different place? You see. So as a human being, when you are sick, it is God that created us, so you send it to the creator who is the source of life. We believe in the medicine all right, but even those who practise medicine, it is God that gave them the knowledge and wisdom. If God doesn't give you that, you can't [have it] (Caregiver 3).

The views shared by the respondents corroborate Brown's (2011, 8) argument that most Pentecostals do not reject modern medicine, but 'they do insist that God is able to heal even when medicine is unable to help'. Simi-

larly, Yong (2011, 6) notes that 'Pentecostals have always negotiated the tension between a robust belief in faith healing that repudiated medical technology entirely and the belief that faith healing and the use of medicine were indeed compatible'.

Third, prayer camps have remained an alternative because of the stigma attached to seeking treatment at a psychiatric hospital, and because people feel that the care provided in medical hospitals is not holistic. Some respondents argued that when people or even family members see them visiting the psychiatric hospital, they always assume they have a mental problem, and they hurriedly categorize them as 'mad people', or people who are 'insane'. In Ghana the stigma attached to seeking treatment at a psychiatric hospital not only concerns patients but also professionals who work in such institutions or the field of medicine (Buertey et al. 2020). Such labelling sometimes prevents patients seeking hospital treatment. However, those who still seek hospital treatment also find the care they receive to be non-holistic or incomplete. Indeed, some of the patients I encountered at the prayer camps claimed to have visited the hospital before going to the camp. When asked why, they shared the view that it was God who had given them the total healing they were seeking because He was the source of life and the master healer.

A personal conversation with pastors, caregivers, and patients suggests that a healing ritual at a prayer camp is believed to have the ability to offer holistic cleansing and foster personal transformation through invocations of God through Jesus Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit. The healing at the camp is thus seen as all-encompassing and more transformative than Western medicine. The prayer camps serve as a community and a support system that aids in patients' healing. There is a relationship between the patients and the community that affects their healing and social positioning. This finding supports the argument of the sociologist Meredith McGuire (1985, 272) that 'because western medicine is focused on the curing of "disease" rather than on the healing of illness, the provision of meaning is privatized and undermined'. In contrast with religious forms of healing, she argues that 'religious rituals and symbols may impart a similar sense of empowerment to those who believe in them. This symbolic empowerment may indeed have concrete physical and psychological effects', thereby raising the sick person's hope and reducing their social predicaments (McGuire 1985, 274).

Fourth, unlike hospital treatment, the healing practices at prayer camps offer protection to patients and enhance their reintegration into society. As already observed, seeking treatment at a psychiatric hospital contributes to patients' stigmatization and reduces their self-confidence. However, a

prayer camp is seen as a place of prayer, a community of faith where believers, Christians and non-Christians,[5] gather to seek the face of God for the redemption of their problems. The camps help diminish a pattern of behaviour or an illusion the patients may have had in the aftermath of their hospital treatment. At the prayer camp the relationship that is developed between the patients and the community removes any fear that lurks in the personality traits of the patients regarding their social positioning after hospital treatment. The healing rituals reassure or symbolize to the wider community that a person is no longer dangerous because the associated evil powers that were influencing the illness have been destroyed. As others have observed, 'healing practices are embedded in local meaning systems that give them part of their social value and potential efficacy' (Kirmayer and Swartz 2013, 48). Through exorcism, healing, and deliverance rituals the individual is believed to be redeemed and purified. This increases their confidence, builds social capital, and enhances their reintegration and social positioning. Grimes's (2000) statement 'Cured, you are fixed; healed, you are reconnected' captures this point appropriately. This is supported by the view that 'Christian healing can be distinguished from other forms of religious healing in its appeal to Christ as the transcendent source of healing and prime symbol of personal and social integration', and that 'Christian healing situates people in community and establishes expectations and relationships' (Porterfield 2005, 9).

Fifth, the choice of prayer camps as an alternative to psychiatric hospital is sometimes influenced by financial constraints. My interaction with family members, caregivers, and patients also revealed that the cost involved in seeking treatment at a psychiatric hospital is one reason some resort to prayer camps for the required care and assistance. Medical treatment at a psychiatric hospital can be very expensive and beyond the means of the ordinary Ghanaian citizen who is economically and financially disadvantaged. As Kalu (2008, 263) argues, 'the popularity of divine healing in Africa arises from the poverty in the communities that are plagued by the collapse of [the] health care delivery system'. In such a situation a prayer camp becomes an alternative. Although patients at some of the camps I visited were made to pay a monthly fee for their subsistence, this was cheaper and more accessible than a psychiatric hospital. This accords with Gammelin's (2018) observation that in Tanzania, although biomedical is in theory accessible

5 My encounter at some of the camps indicates that Muslims also patronize them. For example, Patient 1 in this study was a Muslim before he was sent to the camp but converted to Christianity after his recovery.

to all, not everyone can afford it because of their financial situation. Some caregivers explained that the responsibility of taking care of the mentally ill was mostly shifted to leaders or the authorities of the camp, as most of the patients were unable to afford the amount being charged. However, these socioeconomic issues do not negate the premium placed on the spiritual root cause of the problem of mental illness, as it was also found that individuals with a high socioeconomic status who could afford the cost of seeking hospital treatment were also brought to the camp. These included the children of university lecturers, members of parliament, and ministers of state, revealing the utility value and pervasive influence of religion in matters of illness and healthcare.

Conclusion

In this study I have highlighted the perceived notions or beliefs associated with mental illness in Ghana. I have also discussed how these perceived beliefs influence health-seeking behaviours. The study has argued that mental illness is cast in the framework of traditional interpretation and is rearticulated in healing rituals at the prayer camps. This resonates with the Ghanaian understanding of sickness and healing, underpinning the decisions that are made by patients and their families in seeking help at prayer camps. Yet the prayer camps also serve as an alternative source of hope after repeated failed attempts to seek hospital treatment. However, the situation also reveals the social and material conditions of people in a limited resource setting and the paucity of mental healthcare specialists. As I have shown, the understanding, meaning, and interpretation people give to illness will always influence the approach and pathways they use in seeking treatment. I therefore argue that prayer camps will continue to be important for a long time, even when there are sufficient resources to build psychiatric hospitals, because of the religious beliefs and the desire for wholeness that encompass the spiritual and physical components of the lives of Ghanaians in matters such as healing. This is possible not because they do not believe in biomedical care, but because they are certain that biomedicine cannot always provide solutions to certain health problems or conditions, especially those deemed to be influenced by unseen evil forces.

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FRANCIS ETHELBERT KWABENA BENYAH is PhD candidate in the Study of Religions at Åbo Akademi University, Finland. Email: fbenyah87@gmail.com

Research Interviews

Interview with Patient 1. 2020. Records of transcription are in the possession of the author.

Interview with Patient 6. 2021. Records of transcription are in the possession of the author.

Interview with Patient 5. 2020. Records of transcription are in the possession of the author.

Interview with Prayer Camp Pastor 2. 2020. Records of transcription are in the possession of the author.

Interview with Caregiver 3. 2020. Records of transcription are in the possession of the author.

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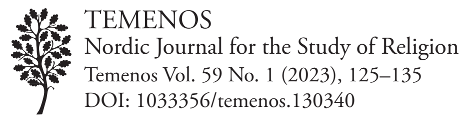
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Discursive Study of Religion: Reviewing the State of the Art in Finland

JERE KYYRÖ
University of Turku

Hjelm, Titus (ed.): *Uskonto, kieli ja yhteiskunta: Johdatus diskursiiviseen uskonnontutkimukseen.* Tietolipas 270. Helsinki: SKS, 2021, 256 pp.

Moberg, Marcus: *Religion, Discourse, and Society: Towards a Discursive Sociology of Religion.* London: Taylor & Francis, 2021, 248 pp.

Taira, Teemu: *Taking "Religion" Seriously: Essays on the Discursive Study of Religion*. Supplements to Method & Theory in the Study of Religion 18. Leiden: Brill, 2022, 215 pp.

Introduction

The years 2021 and 2022 saw the publication of three books on the discursive study of religion (DSR), all written by Finnish scholars. Hjelm (2021a) is an edited volume, with an introduction, four theoretical chapters (including ones from Moberg and Taira), and five case studies, written in Finnish. Taira (2022) is a monograph that summarizes the writer's work on the discursive study of religion, including five case studies. Moberg's book (2021) is a monograph that discusses central thematic areas of the sociological theory of religion from the perspective of the discursive study of religion, and like Taira's, it can be read as a summary of the writer's earlier discursive study of religion work. Reading these books affords an overview of the state of the art in the discursive study of religion in Finland. Although DSR is by no means limited to Finland, Finnish scholars have contributed to the development of this research area, and the above authors are among the top names in the DSR internationally.

I read these three books as a researcher who is a potential user of the concepts and tools presented in the books, and as a university teacher, who teaches methods and methodologies in the study of religion and cultures. I

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start by describing the books' key arguments and purposes. I then ask what the discursive study of religion is as presented in the books. I continue by examining variations in the presented approaches. Finally, I examine some practical issues in undertaking the discursive study of religion.

Taira's central argument is that researchers should take 'religion' seriously. The quotation marks refer to the discourse or category of religion. Instead of seeking 'better' new definitions of religion, researchers should refrain from definition and focus on studying how people classify things as religion. Such a study can be undertaken without a definition of religion, but it does not exclude the use of a heuristic definition. By talking about religion, people seek to gain various ends like legitimacy or tax exemptions. Although the use of 'religion' has certain interests, this does not mean that the users of the discourse are 'insincere' or making conscious calculations (Taira 2022, 123–124).

Moberg's mission is to subject influential 'theoretical perspectives in the sociology of religion' to a 'critical examination from a discursive point of view' that can correct these theories (Moberg 2021a, 4). He does this by discussing the concepts of secular and post-secular, religion's relationship with the individual and individualism, and religion in a market society. Furthermore, the book is structured by a three-level approach to DSR, in which research may be classified as ranging from 'purely *meta-theoretical* work, to work that contextualizes meta-theoretical reflection in relation to *theorizing within particular sub-fields in the study of religion*, to work that employs discourse analysis *as a method in empirical research*' (Moberg 2021a, 34).

Hjelm's book differs from the other two in that it is a collection of texts that take different approaches and thus includes a wider range of arguments. Hjelm's own approach is applied in one chapter of the book (Hjelm 2021c), in which he analyses how religious inequality and privilege are produced by the Finnish folk church discourse. Hjelm's approach is ideology-critical.

What is the discursive study of religion?

All the main authors would agree that the DSR is not merely the application of the method of discourse analysis to the study of religion. Instead, taking the concept of discourse seriously requires self-reflexivity in how the data are approached, as well as how theoretical concepts are employed. Additionally, as we shall see, the DSR framework may combine the use of various methods and types of data.

According to Hjelm the central aspects of discourse study are *constitutiveness* and *action orientation*. The former means that discourse not only describes but also construes reality, and the latter that various utterances are acts that seek to achieve something (Hjelm 2021a, 9–10). Taira approaches the essentials from the perspective of shared assumptions. The assumption that 1) language is crucial in constructing social reality, and 2) that its use has consequences, is basically the same as Hjelm's two aspects. Taira adds to the list 3) the assumption that there are multiple overlapping and competing sets of meaning (i.e. actual discourses) that 4) emerge historically, 'and that their [5)] affectivity is situational and contextual and that [6)] no language user is fully in control of the tool' (Taira 2022, 23). Building on Jean Carabine and Vivien Burr, Moberg (2021a, 15) defines discourse as follows:

> Different discourses construct the social world in different ways, each providing 'shortcut paths' into particular notions about good and bad, right and wrong, true and false, normal and abnormal, etc. Discourses, however, are never static. Nor do they function in isolation from one another. Rather, they constantly mutate and cross-fertilize in various ways.

Discourses can lend support to or contest with each other, and they can construct the world in different ways. As discourse offers accounts of what is true, it is 'therefore also to be viewed as a central form of social action' (Moberg 2021a, 15). The reason behind Hjelm's more open definition, compared to those of Moberg and Taira, is probably the need to accommodate the diverse approaches presented in the book's chapters. Hjelm (2021, 12) continues his characterization of the DSR by referring to Tim Murphy (2000):

> Following the definition of discourse, discursive study of religion studies how our talk about religion draws from the world, but especially how religion is actively construed in texts and speech.

Quoting Norman Fairclough, Moberg understands this as the dichotomy between 'world and word' in terms of *construal* and *construction*. Different versions of the world are construed as construals in discourse, but not all these constructions have similar constructive effects – that is, the capacity to become effective. According to Moberg this depends on the power and properties of whatever in the world is being constructed (Moberg 2021a, 12). It is important to bear this in mind to avoid the idealist trap of constructionism. Taira also touches on this issue when he writes about 'serious'

discourse, pointing out that it is important to take the context of language use into account (see also Konttori 2021). Discussing religion in a pub differs from '…a judge [stating] in a court that Jedism is a religion' (Taira 2022, 129).

This is one of the reasons the DSR rarely builds on quantified data: it would be quite easy to count instances of a certain type of language use, but although the dispersion of a certain discourse may thus be uncovered, the numbers may tell us very little about the effect of this discourse, especially if we are unaware of the context of its appearance. Critical discourse analysis (CDA) especially is often done with small amounts of data, but corpus-assisted discourse analysis, for example, may take bigger datasets into account (Taira 2022, 25).

As previously mentioned, DSR scholars are interested in discourses *on* or *about* religion. Another way of approaching discourse and religion is to study *religious* discourse. For example, a researcher may be interested in how religious language is used to justify a certain type of politics. According to Taira this leads back to the question of the analytical definition of religion (Taira 2022, 40–41). To identify a discourse as religious requires a definition of what counts as religious. Within the critical study of religion Bruce Lincoln's view has been that defining religion and studying religious discourse is the 'way forward', while Russell T. McCutcheon, William Arnal, and Timothy Fitzgerald, though sharing much with Lincoln's approach, have proposed a deconstruction of the category of religion (Taira 2022, 39–41; see also Moberg 2021a, 24–26). The versions of the DSR represented by the three main authors are more compatible with the latter view.

Variations of DSR

In the three books many ways and many traditions of doing discursive study are presented, including the discourse-historical approach made famous by Ruth Wodak (Konttori 2021); sociopsychological approaches – including discursive psychology (Vesala & Pesonen 2021), and rhetorical approaches (Sakaranaho 2022). The main distinction, in relation to which the main authors of the books align themselves, is that between Norman Fairclough's and Michel Foucault's approaches, which are both concerned with power relations.

In the Finnish context the rhetorical study of religion, advocated especially by Tuula Sakaranaho, was a predecessor of the discursive study of religion. It shares with other discursive approaches the idea of constitutiveness, but the main difference with the Faircloughian or Foucauldian

approach, for example, is that it can be combined with the hermeneutic, explanatory, and critical interests of knowledge (Sakaranaho 2021, 104). The rhetorical study of religion can be undertaken even from an Eliadean perspective. According to Sakaranaho (2021, 108) the rhetorical approach is most suitable when studying assertion, influencing, and persuasion. These can be part of other discursive approaches, but the latter's interest is not limited to them. Sociopsychological approaches are concerned with various discursive repertoires that are employed in micro-level interactions. Konttori (2021, 147) situates the discourse-historical approach as part of critical discourse analysis, which usually refers to Faircloughian discourse analysis.

Perhaps the most clearly enunciated difference within the DSR is between the Foucauldian and Faircloughian approaches and the related question of whether the concept of ideology is necessary. Taira leans more closely to a Foucauldian approach but still picks the good parts from Fairclough. Hjelm and Moberg build mainly on Fairclough, but Moberg omits an explicitly normative stance, while for Hjelm the normative stance entails revealing the privileged status of certain religious groups.

But what is meant by 'ideology' in CDA? Moberg quotes Fairclough: 'interpretations and explanations can be said to be ideological if they can be shown to be … necessary to establish and keep in place particular relations of power' (Moberg 2021a, 17). Hjelm writes about his views in his chapter about the Finnish folk church ideology. He builds on a critical understanding of ideology that is interested in 'meanings in service of power'. This ideology-critical reading seeks 'to analyse how discourses build a one-sided social reality, thus displacing alternative ways of understanding the world' (Hjelm 2021c, 230).

Meanwhile, Taira (2022, 35) rejects the use of the concept of ideology, following Foucault. Fairclough criticized Foucault for being relativist because the latter was interested in the 'truth effects' of discourse – but not the truth behind it. Taira points out that this is insensitive to Foucault, and Fairclough's insistence of 'truth beyond discourse' may fail to problematize the status of scientific knowledge that the discourse analyst produces. Taira also writes that he disagrees with the tendency to see instances of calling the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland a 'folk church' as ideological – here pointing to Hjelm – and hiding the fact that there is really a state church in Finland (Taira 2022, 35–36, n. 19). Taira points out that in the name of methodological coherence researchers should also focus on the claims that say that there is a state church in Finland. Taira's portrayal of the ideology-critical view as insistent that there is a scientifically knowable

truth beyond the discourse, however, seems a little simplistic: Hjelm's point of view seems to be that ideological discourse displaces or removes space from other possible discourses (Hjelm 2021c, 230), and not that the ELCF is 'really a state church'. Yet the question of whether there can be a non-ideological discourse remains.

The difference between Foucauldian and Faircloughian approaches also emerges when the meaning of 'critical' and the question of normativity are discussed. Moberg (2021a, 16) writes that

> CDA denotes a particular type of normative discourse analytic research that is primarily concerned with revealing how particular discourses and types of discursive practice serve to underpin, perpetuate, and sustain various forms of social inequality, marginality, exclusion etc. with the expressed aim of seeking to mitigate or overcome these.

Normativity is thus related to the mission of revealing how ideology works, and for some adherents normativity is a prerequisite of being critical (Moberg 2021a, 16). However, Moberg writes that it is up to the individual researcher to decide 'what is critical enough' (Moberg 2021a, 17).

Being able to reveal the ideology of something requires the postulation of the non-ideological version of reality, which is somehow distorted by the ideological discourse. My lesson from this discussion is that if one is undertaking critical research, one should be at least self-critical of one's own presuppositions that one perhaps assumes are non-ideological. If a researcher takes a position outside the contested discussions within the researched field, it does not have to entail a claim to 'objectivity'; rather, it can be seen as a methodological positioning that allows the premises of these contestations to be revealed, which the contestants may even share.

Typologies and levels

The discursive study of religion operates on several levels. The Faircloughian approach is equated to textual- or linguistic-leaning analysis, while the Foucauldian approach is seen as historical-leaning. For example, while one of the pioneers of the DSR, Kocku von Stuckrad, has emphasized the importance of the latter and dismissed the former (Taira 2022, 35, see also n. 18), all the main writers of the three books employ at least some parts of the Faircloughian toolkit. Moberg, for example, argues that the historical Foucauldian approach favoured by von Stuckrad, which emphasizes

understanding the orders of discourse, is not enough; the analysis should also be done on the textual level, and the levels of approach should also be combined (Moberg 2021a, 46).

Following Fairclough, the levels of analysis can be named as those of text, discursive practices, and social practices (Taira 2022, 28; Moberg 2021a, 18). Textual analysis includes naming, predication, sentence construction, presuppositions, rhetorical tropes and narratives, and the important lexical analysis. Foucault, meanwhile, sees the three levels as intra-, inter-, and extra-discursive, which, however, are rarely separated in actual analyses (Taira 2022, 28–30).

Hjelm differentiates the metatheoretical and empirical levels of doing DSR (Hjelm 2021b, 12). The levels refer to the type of work, as well as the level of analysis:

> In terms of levels of analysis, first-level analyses primarily engage with key categories and terms in the study of religion […]. Second-level analyses inquire into the inherent presumptions and classificatory schemes of particular types of sub-field-specific theorizing […]. Third-level analyses focus on actual instances of discourse and apply discourse analysis as a method […] (Moberg 2021a, 35).

Moberg (2021a, 34) notes that these levels are interconnected and should be understood as heuristic. This, I think, can also be applied to other categorizations of levels of analysis: they help conceptualize one's own as well as other's studies, but in the studies cited in this article, for example, the analysis never seems to settle on one level.

Doing discursive study of religion

In addition to certain key concepts and distinctions of which the DSR researcher should be aware, I now present the more practical points that the books offer. As noted above, the concrete analyses can work on the textual level, as well as on more abstract levels of discourses or social practices. The writers in three books employ various types of data: for example, 'face-to-face interactions, different types of textual sources (e.g., official documents, media reports, legislation, political platforms), and different types of audio-visual data such as TV shows, web pages, and so on' (Moberg 2021a, 18). Moberg (2021a, 18) notes that there are no generally accepted rules for how the elements recurring in the data should be identified.

One clue for selecting relevant data may lie in how discourses are identified. According to Taira there are two main ways: focusing 'on the discursive variety of the material [i.e. data-driven approach] or following one discourse that is recognizable from the material'. The discourses can be identified and named descriptively ('e.g. classroom, newspaper discourse') or interpretively ('e.g. colonialist discourse, racist discourse'). According to Taira in a descriptive data-driven approach the starting point is in the multiplicity of discourses, and in an interpretative approach the focus is on hegemonic discourse and attached power relations (Taira 2022, 27).

Identifying power relations and hegemonic discourses is another important aspect. Rather than claiming that something is hegemonic because it is the most common type of expression, it is important to note what is effective, unchanging, or goes unquestioned (Taira 2022, 25; 32–33). Indeed, a wide circulation of a certain type of expression may even result from a contestation between different construals. This comes very close to Sakaranaho, and Alasuutari and Qadir, who write about the use of shared values or 'God-terms' when speaking to different audiences or arguing for something (Sakaranaho 2021, 69; Alasuutari & Qadir 2021, 73–74).

The analysed data may be from a homogenous source – for example, when analysing newspaper discourse – but tracking hegemonic discourses may need to use various types of data from different sources. For example, in his chapter Tuomas Äystö analyses documents produced in the preparation of the law on breach of the sanctity of religion, and a selected court case where the named law was applied (Äystö 2021, 200). In any case, the researcher should take various contexts – be they historical, political, sociological, and/or psychological – of the text into account. This also helps avoid possible biases in the texts (Konttori 2021, 149). Although some institutional locations of discourse production may be seen as more important than others in certain cases – for example, parliaments or courts versus popular culture or pubs – it is also important to take the circulation of certain discourses into account.

One important distinction is that between naturally occurring data (NOD) and data in which the researcher has been directly involved in their production. According to Taira the benefit of the former is that the researcher is not involved in the production of the discourse, which is the case when conducting interviews, observations, or questionnaires (Taira 2022, 25). Moberg notes that from the discursive perspective interviews are understood 'as particular types of interactional contexts'. Instead of reflecting some inner states of the interviewees, they should be seen as actualizations of discourse use (Moberg 2021a, 58; see also Taira 2022, 24).

While Taira mostly analyses public and naturally occurring data, Moberg also employs interviews and Q methodology. The latter has been developed within social psychology and adapted to the study of religion in the form of the 'Faith Q-Sort'. The methodology builds on a selection of statements presented to research subjects in the form of cards (a Q-set), in relation to which the research subjects position themselves by selecting and ranking cards that contain statements with which they identify most and least. The actual sorting of the cards is analysed through factorial analysis (Moberg 2021a 139–141). Moberg (2021 a, 141) writes that

> The methodology could […] be employed to investigate how different categories of people position themselves vis-à-vis a wider range of prevalent 'religion-related' discourses, including those associated with an increasing 'individualization' of religion, such as, for example, discourses on 'spirituality,' 'spiritual, but not religious,' 'holistic wellbeing,' and 'personal choice in religious matters'.

This understanding of the role of Q methodology indicates that the DSR or DSR-informed sociology of religion is by no means methodically limited to conducting textual analysis of naturally occurring data. Using even quantitative methods may be justified when studying how people relate to a certain type of discourse, for example. However, this requires an understanding of the researcher's participation in the (re)production of a certain discourse.

Regarding the type of data, even multimodal data such as pictures, music, television shows, or comic books can be analysed within the DSR. However, the emphasis is on language, which 'remains by far the most significant semiotic form' (Moberg 2021a, 19). The DSR may therefore not be the first choice for a researcher who wishes to study such things as 'materiality' or 'visuality' on their own terms, and the books discussed here offer little help for conducting a multimodal discursive study. However, the books show that the DSR is flexible regarding methods and data. The adaptation depends on the researcher.

Conclusion

Above I have raised some issues from the current state of the art within the DSR in Finland. The three books analysed share various purposes, and a thorough reading of each would require more space. For example, the books include discussions of a researcher's public role (Taira 2022), the categories

of 'post-secular', 'individualism', 'marketization', or 'spirituality' and issues in studying official discourse (Moberg 2021a), versions of 'spirituality' in discussions of parishes' role in rural politics (Vesala & Pesonen 2021), Nicolas Sarkozy's views on Islam (Konttori 2021), and priestly discourse in WWII Finland (Tilli 2021), which this review has not discussed.

Hjelm's edited volume works as an entry-level text for the Finnish reader, and it also gives a more diverse picture of what the discursive study of religion can be than one would get from reading only Hjelm's, Moberg's, or Taira's own writings. Taira's and Moberg's monographs are suitable for more advanced readers who are somewhat familiar with the DSR, critical religion, and/or sociological theories about religion. Moberg's monograph can be especially recommended to those interested in theorizing religion. All three include various useful examples for those who are interested in building their own approach within the discursive study of religion.

* * *

JERE KYYRÖ is University Teacher in Study of Cultures at the School of History, Culture and Arts Studies, University of Turku. Email: jere.kyyro@utu.fi

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Book Review

Teemu Pauha and Johanna Konttori (eds): *Suomalaiset muslimit*. Helsinki: Gaudeamus, 2022, 263 pp.

Although the Finnish Tatar minority's roots go back to the late nineteenth century, and Tatars have therefore been granted the invidious label of the most 'Finnicized Muslims', Islam has generally been viewed in Finland as a religion of immigrants. However, as this publication also seeks to show, we should no longer speak of 'Muslims in Finland' or 'Islam in Finland', as if the people and their faith were something 'external' to society and the 'Finnish identity'. Instead, the book's title, 'Finnish Muslims' and the topics its collection of articles cover recognize that Muslims in Finland are *Finnish* Muslims. We can therefore now celebrate that Islam can and should be considered a culturally, socially, and politically relevant part of Finnish society.

Nevertheless, a frequent problem in the contemporary political and societal debates on the role that Islam and Muslims can and should play in majority non-Muslim societies is the tendency to see Muslim citizens only through the lens of religion and thus to miss the multitude of their identities. The 'Finnishness' of most Finnish Muslims is missed, which Katri Karhunen picks up in her article on Finnish Muslims in the labour market. However, although she correctly discusses the othering of Islam as a faith that can be part of Finns' religious life, she lacks a deeper analysis of how Muslim bodies are racialized in Finnish society.

The editors Johanna Konttori and Teemu Pauha remind us in their preface that Finnish Muslims' self-identification depends on their 'Muslimness' and the intersection of other identity markers. In her article on Finnish Islam in the European context Johanna Konttori notes that ties to family members abroad and other transnational connections influence how Finnish Muslims regard themselves as part of Finnish society and the larger worldwide Muslim community. With this in mind research must consider both the national and global historical contexts and contemporary developments that affect the experiences of Finnish Muslims in their everyday lives. A crucial contribution in this regard is the article by Markus Himanen and Karin Creutz on the securitization of Islam in the Finnish context, as it addresses the issue of how the global war on terror affects Finnish Muslims, who have come to develop a Du Boisian double consciousness. When the authorities perceive a person's 'Muslimness' as a security threat, it forces them to constantly reflect on and adjust their behaviour to avoid appearing 'too Muslim' and being considered a 'problem'. Although Himanen and Creutz illustrate this with the example of incarcerated Muslims, this is a general issue among the wider Muslim population.

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The ethnically heterogenous composition of the Finnish Muslim community is reflected in the rich empirical studies this edited volume's articles present. The studied communities and the interview samples consist primarily of Muslims with a mixed background, including Muslim converts. Nevertheless, four pieces examine Finnish Muslims with a Somali background more closely, which only shows that the interest of researchers continues to be directed at the particular issues of the largest ethnic community of Finnish Muslims. While the issue of gender relations is often misused for the malignant purpose of racist anti-Muslim and anti-immigrant discourses, Mulki al-Sharmani and Sanna Mustasaari explore how young Muslims with a Somali background benefit in their private lives from both Islamic family law and the secular Finnish context. Likewise, the article by Johanna Aapakallio on 'honour-based' violence focuses on the fact that this is not only a problem in Muslim communities – femicide in this regard is often falsely generalized as being rooted in Islam – but a structural problem of gender relations in every society. Aapakallio reveals that women are killed by their spouses proportionally more often than in other EU countries.

The adaptability of the Islamic lifeworld to the context of a non-majority Muslim society is a hot potato when discussing the 'domestication' of Islam in national contexts. In her article Konttori notes that when aligned with comparable tendencies in other European countries, 'Islam in Finland' is to a certain extent expected to be reformed by 'Finnish values'. However, Konttori does not further discuss the problematic side of such hegemonic representations. Yet the article by Tiina Alakärppä on the views of young female Finnish Muslims with a Somali background on the Islamic premise of FGM clearly shows that these women have differing attitudes to those of the older generation, who were not born in Finland. By being aware of the cultural element of FGM and not its religious premise, their argumentation favours Islam as a practised faith, free of 'cultural baggage', and thus adaptable to all geographical contexts. Likewise, her other article on the attitudes of young Finnish Muslim women with a Somali background to sexual intercourse before marriage shows how these women gain their voice and agency in such matters and do not correspond to the stereotypical gendered image of an 'oppressed woman'.

Nevertheless, the issue of the 'domestication' of Islam has political implications. It is tightly bound to the governance of Islam and Foucauldian power-knowledge dynamics, as it concerns questions of what form of Islam is considered civil and 'acceptable' in each national context as believers in their everyday lives practise it. Importantly, this is followed by the question of who can define these forms. It it is therefore especially noteworthy that the issue of representation and access to gain-

ing a voice is discussed in the article on the Finnish Shia community by Abbas Bahmanpour and Teemu Pauha. While the authors give an excellent overview of the thus far unresearched Finnish Shia community's history and contemporary structures, they also urge readers to remember that there are differences regarding political and theological questions even within the Shia community.

Another meaningful change of perspective that this edited volume offers is that while the previous publications mentioned above dealt with the Muslim community as newcomers whose life in Finland is marked by questions of 'integration', the articles in this publication address the civic participation of Finnish Muslims. Katri Karhunen discusses how Finnish Muslim women navigate dress code requirements and their religious practice in their professional roles, taking on the critical aspect of how these women confront the misrecognition of their Finnish identities in their workplaces. Riitta Latvio's article on Finnish Muslim women as consumers and initiators of sporting activities provides an interesting insight into how the practice of *hijab* affects not only the dress code itself but also the kinds of spaces where women participate in sporting activities and the types of sports they choose to practise. Finally, Marcus Moberg's and Teemu Pauha's article on Finnish Muslim communities' online presence shows that there is still a lack of professionalization in reaping the full benefits of online community building and increasing religious literacy.

The last three articles by Anuleena Kimanen and Inkeri Rissanen, Jussi Ikkala and Niina Putkonen, and Ulla Vähärautio-Halonen discuss the different ways in which the religious identity of Finnish Muslim children is formed and performed in public school classrooms, in extracurricular religious classes provided by mosque communities, and in the freedom of choice to practise their religion by observing prayer during school hours. Like this publication's other contributions, the empirical insights of these three articles feed into the book's general message, showing the reader how important it is always to consider the diversity of Finnish Muslims' identities, as there is no single definition of a 'Finnish Muslim' through either of its identity components. Both 'Finnishness' and 'Muslimness' are constantly produced and reproduced in a dialectic between the individual experience and the societal dynamics and depend greatly on relationships of mutual recognition.

Linda Hyökki

LINDA HYÖKKI, Ph. D., is an independent researcher with expertise on anti-Muslim racism in Finland and the wider Europe. Email: lindahyokki@gmail.com

Contributors

FRANCIS ETHELBERT KWABENA BENYAH is PhD candidate in the Study of Reli-gions at Åbo Akademi University, Finland. Email: fbenyah87@gmail.com

LINDA HYÖKKI, Ph. D., is an independent researcher with expertise on anti-Muslim racism in Finland and the wider Europe. Email: lindahyokki@gmail.com

ELISABETH TVEITO JOHNSEN is Associate Professor in Practical Theology at the University of Oslo, Norway. Email: e.t.johnsen@teologi.uio.no

SIV ELLEN KRAFT is Professor at the Department of Archaeology, History, Religious Studies and Theology at UiT, the Arctic University of Norway. Email: Siv.ellen.kraft@uit.no

JERE KYYRÖ is University Teacher in Study of Cultures at the School of History, Culture and Arts Studies, University of Turku. Email: jere.kyyro@utu.fi

EVELINA LUNDMARK has a PhD from Uppsala University. This article was part of her postdoctoral research in the Religious Minorities and Religious Diversity Research Group at Agder University, Norway. Email: evelina.lundmark@im.uu.se

ANNA SOKOLOVA PhD belongs to the Helsinki Collegium for Advanced Studies and is a Kone Foundation Fellow at the University of Helsinki. Email: anna.sokolova@helsinki.fi