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12 Public Religion in Mediatized Transformations

12.1 Introduction

There are three spheres of public religion nourished by media – the secular journalism sphere covering religion, the cultural sphere where elements of religion may become part of entertainment and popular expression and religious media run by religious institutions. In all three spheres, the media do not just disseminate or mediate religious messages or content. Rather, the workings of the media may change – and in the long run transform – religion. This thesis is the core of the theory of the mediatization of religion, to be explored in this chapter in relation to institutional theory. This chapter does not concern individual religiosity or spirituality unless it plays into the public sphere as public religion. What matters here is religion that becomes visible as part of the public sphere.

The question is how public religion may be transformed in mediatization processes within each of the three spheres. This will be discussed with examples from modern Norwegian history and using results from a survey on media and religion conducted with a representative sample of the adult population in Norway in 2015.

12.2 Three Spheres of Public Religion

The distinction between the spheres of journalism, culture and religious media builds on work by Stig Hjarvard (2012) and Mia Lövheim and Marta Axner (2015). They relate public religion to processes of mediatization in all three spheres. That religion in its public expressions through media may become changed or ‘mediatized’ is what is common to the three spheres. They are distinguished as parts of the overall public sphere: fact-based journalism in news media, fiction and cultural production in entertainment and popular media or targeted ‘religious’ discourse in specialized media.

Lövheim and Axner indicate a fourth sphere of public religion, namely a digital space. However, digital technologies and aesthetics invade all the three named spheres, which Lövheim and Axner are aware of (2015, p. 49). I include digital aspects in all three spheres of public religion. The media production processes may be digital in all spheres, as is the case with multimodal, digital shaping of content. Further, networked social media may play a role in the interaction within all three spheres. As noted by Terje Rasmussen, with the Internet, the public sphere ‘became ever more interaction-oriented, inclusive and complex’ (2014, p. 1319). This applies to public religion as well as the political public sphere. Actually, the two are quite intertwined. In particular, coverage of religion in the journalism sphere usually has political implications.

12.2.1 The Journalism Sphere

In covering religion, the journalism sphere sticks to the secular norms that news journalism refers to. This is the sphere that theories on the public sphere are primarily concerned with (Gripsrud, Moe, Molander, & Murdock, 2010). Hjarvard terms the activity in this sphere ‘journalism on religion’ that ‘brings religion into the political public sphere and subjects it to journalism’s dominant paradigms of facticity and public accountability’ (Hjarvard, 2012, p. 31). Lövheim and Axner state that the ‘form of media genres that operate here, mainly news journalism but also editorials, shapes religious content and puts pressure on religious actors to conform to criteria of newsworthiness and critical inquiry’ (Lövheim & Axner, 2015, p. 48).

12.2.2 The Cultural Sphere

Lövheim and Axner hold that a ‘working definition of the “cultural public sphere” may include the kinds of media content and forms that are not primarily occupied with news and political debate but where ideas, values, emotions and pleasure are at focus’ (2015, p. 48). The actors in this sphere who involve themselves with religion may be fiction authors, filmmakers, musicians, entertainment producers in television, computer game designers or others in the creative industries. This sphere may include classical cultural expressions but relates primarily to popular culture that is visible in lifestyle magazines, television series, novels and films such as *Harry Potter*. Bits and pieces from various institutional religious traditions may be remixed with supernatural or secular elements into media productions. Hjarvard terms this form of mediatized religion ‘banal religion’, ‘the media presence of a variety of symbols and actions that implicitly and perhaps unwillingly may reinforce the public presence of religion in culture and society’ (Hjarvard, 2012, p. 35). Lövheim and Axner (2015, p. 49) also point to the work by Gordon Lynch (2012) on how religious symbols and themes in the cultural public space may give shape to public discussion about common and contested values, identities and issues.

12.2.3 The Religious Media Sphere

The religious media sphere is the in-house public sphere within religious institutions. This media sphere may encompass religious books and journals, newspapers aimed at a particular religious readership, radio and television channels aimed at a religious audience and religious web pages and social media outlets. They may aim to ‘reach out’ but primarily function within their own faith communities. Hjarvard calls them ‘religious media’, combining mass media and social network media with a public presence. These are ‘media organizations and practices that are primarily con-

trolled and performed by religious actors' (Hjarvard, 2012, p. 28). Lövheim and Axner (2015, p. 47) comment that these media spheres embrace 'counterpublics questioning secular values and norms in modern society'. However, they find the religious media sphere eroding as digital media technologies and transnational media networks open up to broader publics. Still, the type of public religion in this sphere is defined by the actor's affiliation with a religious organization. Within the religious media sphere I include 'religious programmes', with devotions and worship that have been part of the Nordic public service broadcasting tradition (modelled after the British Broadcasting Corporation) since its beginning (Wolfe, 1984).

12.2.4 Public Religion

The term 'public religion' was coined by José Casanova in his book *Public Religions in the Modern World* (1994), in which he distinguished public religion from private religion. Casanova's work became a reference point for the debate within the sociology of religion on the increased visibility of religion in the public sphere (Lövheim & Axner, 2015). His definition invites a wider definition, as when Birgit Meyer and Annelies Moors in *Religion, Media, and the Public Sphere* (2006) argue to view religion as a practice of mediation. However, Casanova's thesis has been contested. Jens Köhrsen (2012) thinks that definitions of religion that are too broad in studies of public religion overstate the impact of religion in the public sphere.

For the purpose of this chapter, I see public religion as defined through the three spheres of mediatized religion. This is in line with David Herbert's argument that the increased public presence of religion is made possible by the rapid development of media technologies, the liberalization of national media economies and the growth of transnational media spheres. However, it is important to add that 'the public presence of religious symbols and discourses does not necessarily imply that these become more influential, but rather more visible, present, and hence available for mobilization, contestation and criticism in the public sphere and among various micro-publics, by both religious and non-religious actors' (Herbert, 2011, p. 627).

12.2.5 Mediatization of Public Religion

Public religion may be transformed through the media it relies on for its symbolic circulation in public communication. This is the essence of the thesis on 'mediatization of religion' in regards public religion. The mediatization of religion has been a scholarly focus over the last decade (e.g. the special issues of *Northern Lights* 2008; *Culture and Religion* 2011; Hjarvard, 2013, Ch. 4; Lundby, 2013; Lövheim, 2014). This research has been spearheaded in the Nordic countries (Hjarvard & Lövheim, 2012).

In the mediatization of religion, the constraints and opportunities for communication provided by various media come to change and shape the actual aspects of religion. The mediatization of public religion implies moulding of religious imagination in society and of interpretations and interactions over religion in the public sphere. Thus, the mediatization of religion changes religious institutions in terms of the interplay with media institutions. This is consistent with institutional theory underlining how institutional change takes place in the interplay between institutions (Mahoney & Thelen, 2009). The mediatization of religion demonstrates, within this particular domain, the general interrelation between the characteristics of and changes in the media and changes in other institutions or fields in culture and society.

The mediatization of public religion challenges existing religious authorities as the media themselves gain authority over religion in public communication. At the same time, the media may allow new religious voices to be heard. In Norway, religion has become more visible on the news media's agenda and more contested in the media. Coverage of conflicts over Islam is a case in point (Lundby & Gresaker, 2015).

In general, the processes of mediatization give media an 'active *performative* involvement and *constitutive* role' in social conflicts (Cottle, 2006, p. 9, emphasis in original). The media influence the ways in which religion is represented in the public realm, how citizens interpret religious dimensions of social conflicts and how conflicts themselves get amplified and dramatized in various ways (Eskjær, Hjarvard, & Mortensen, 2015).

12.2.6 Mediatization and Secularization

The mediatization of religion relates to secularization. On an institutional level, secularization implies that religious institutions lose their previous influence over other institutions in society. It is a contested concept within the sociology of religion. There are some defenders of classic secularization theory implying the decay of religious institutions as modernity progresses (Bruce, 2011). However, moderate and more nuanced theories dominate (Furseth & Repstad, 2006, pp. 82–96), partly inspired by the new visibility of religion in the public sphere.

The Belgian sociologist of religion Karel Dobbelaere (2002) recommends a distinction between societal secularization, organizational secularization and individual secularization. On the societal level, secularization and mediatization may be regarded as two grand processes of change or transformation of culture and society, on par with globalization and individualization. The concept of institution that is applied in this book comes close to organizational secularization. This matches mediatization theory on a meso level (Hjarvard, 2014b). At this level of analysis, the focus is on the interrelation between concrete religious institutions and specific media institutions. At this level, one may observe how religious institutions relate to media by establishing their own outlets in a religious media sphere and how they are treated

by and relate to the secular journalism sphere. Bits and pieces from texts and traditions originating in religious institutions may also be picked up in the cultural sphere of the media.

The issue of authority comes to the fore. Religious institutions try to keep authority in the public sphere through their own voices in the religious media sphere. However, those listening may be few in number. In the journalism and cultural spheres where audiences are bigger, the authority of religious institutions is subsumed under the authority of the secular news media or is played with in the entertainment media.

I previously studied the dimensions of secularization by checking programme topics on church and religion on the radio and on television in the early 1970s in a thesis on secularization in the Nordic countries (Lundby, 1974). The dimensions of secularization employed were: 1) privatization of religion; 2) religious and ideological pluralism and 3) contests over influence between majority church and anti-church positions. I will apply this study as a baseline for empirical discussion of changes in the three spheres of mediatized religion in Norway. The transformations of the majority Church of Norway and the dominant public service broadcaster NRK since the early 1970s tells a 40-year story of secularization and mediatization (Lundby, 2016).

12.3 Nested Institutions

Religion and media are both generalized institutions in continuous change. In this book series an 'institution' is understood through macro regulations of social behaviour on the meso level by organizations, groups and individuals. Institutions rely on formal rules and regulations. As important may be the interpretations of the formal framework, that is, the normative and cultural-cognitive aspects. The discourses around the formal institutions are influencing religion as well as media.

12.3.1 Religion and Media as Institutions

Vivien Schmidt (2008) tries to capture the dynamics of institutional change by looking at the discourses institutions engage in. She applies her approach to institutions within the political field. However, all fundamental functions performed via discourse that Schmidt identifies apply to religious and media institutions as well. The cognitive function of discourse helps in understanding how these institutions are meant to work. The normative function of discourse covers the many discussions on what religion should be and what media should do. Similarities also occur in the two interactive dimensions Schmidt describes. The coordinative function of discourse points to the need for a common language within religious communities and between media producers and their audiences. For both these institutions, the communica-

tive function of discourse concerns the ability to communicate in the public sphere. There is a ‘logic of communication’ that explains how institutions change or persist, Schmidt (2008) argues. This comes close to the ‘media logic’ in institutional mediation research to be explained below.

Institutions vary in their scope and often take on a nested character, as pointed out in the introduction to this volume. This is certainly true of the two institutions we focus on here. ‘The media’ is an institution, ‘the press’ is an institution and a newspaper may be an institution (Eide, 2008). It depends on the level of analyses. Media institutions on various levels are nested into each other. It is similar with religion. A faith community is a local institution nested into larger institutional structures and finally into ‘religion’ as a generalized institution. This chapter tries to see how ‘media’ and ‘religion’ are nested into each other in processes of mediatization.

The institutions of media and religion take different shapes within the three spheres of mediatized religion. Briefly, in the religious media sphere the religious institutions are churches or other religious organizations, and the media tend to be small and specialized and under the control of the religious organizations. In the cultural sphere, religious institutions are not directly visible, as the media institutions are the producers, playing with symbolic elements that are picked from a range of religious traditions. In the journalism sphere, the media institutions are the strong player, while the religious institutions act as sources or become objects of critical coverage.

12.3.2 Institutional Change – Changing Configurations

Representations of religion in the media shape discourses and influence social interaction. The visibility of religion in the public sphere, then, may be a crucial part of the ongoing transformations of religious institutions. The shaping of public religion is rather dependent on the media. This implies that transformations of the media system – like the emergence of digital, networked communication – have consequences for religious institutions.

The media are themselves transformed through the process of mediatization. Three phases of this institutional transformation have been identified in the northwestern part of Europe. Up to 1920, the media were instruments of other institutions (although the party press in Norway lasted until the 1970s). Between 1920 and 1980, the media emerged as a cultural institution, most prominent in public service broadcasting. From 1980 onwards, the media developed their dual position as a semi-independent media institution on the one hand while they became integrated into institutions like politics and bureaucracy, religion and sports on the other hand (Hjarvard, 2013, pp. 23–27).

The media ‘provide a *public sphere* for society’s reflection on itself’ (Hjarvard, 2014b, p. 216 emphasis in original). The media become involved with various institutions in society and may be implicated in processes of institutional change simply due to the import and export of cultural symbols and practices from one institutional

order to another (Thornton & Ocasio, 2008, p. 105) that takes place in mediated communication (Hjarvard, 2014a, p. 137). Symbolic and cognitive aspects play a prominent role in the culturally sensitive ‘new institutionalism’ (Colbjørnsen, 2014, p. 22; DiMaggio & Powell, 1991; Meyer & Rowan, 1977).

This approach opposes the rational instrumental perspective on organizations and institutions, in line with the ‘logic of appropriateness’ suggested by March & Olsen (2004). They see this logic in human action driven by rules of appropriate or exemplary behaviour, organized into institutions. Over time, such ‘rules’ and practices may be integrated into larger configurations or ‘institutional regimes’. Institutional regimes are changing. Mediatization is a nonlinear process of qualitative shifts from one institutional regime with its particular configuration to another, for example, broadcasting from a public monopoly during the mid-1990s to broadcasting in the deregulated and digital age of the early 2000s (Hjarvard, 2014b, pp. 219–220).

12.4 Mediatization as a Theory of Institutional Change

Mediatization research has been closely related to studies of the public sphere. In the early 1930s, Ernest Manheim was the first European thinker to use the term ‘mediatisierung’ to explain the transformation of mass-mediated societies. Manheim was ‘a forerunner of Habermas in describing the rise of a public sphere since the 17th century’ (Averbeck-Lietz, 2014, p. 109). Habermas applies the term ‘mediatisierung’ to institutions that are mediating between citizens and the state via parties, unions and/or the mass media. Indeed, in *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit* (1996 [1962], p. 74), Habermas ‘sees the whole power structure of society “mediatized” in the (enlightened) public sphere of the late 18th and early 19th centuries’ (Averbeck-Lietz, 2014, pp. 109, 112). However, Habermas applies here a more generalized concept of media and mediatization than Ernest Manheim introduced 30 years earlier. Manheim (1979 [1933]) was concerned with media as mass media to understand *Public Opinion and its Social Sources*, as the title of his book would read in English. Therefore, he introduced a concept of mediatization that is close to contemporary usage (Averbeck-Lietz, 2014, pp. 111–112).

12.4.1 Change and Transformation

Contemporary mediatization research ‘tries to capture long-term interrelation processes between media change on one hand and social and cultural change on the other’ (Hepp, Hjarvard, & Lundby, 2010, pp. 21–23). This is basically a media sociological approach. Mediatization is a concept ‘with which to grasp media and societal change’ (Krotz, 2009). However, mediatization implies long-term changes.

While changes in communication processes are continuous, the long-term and lasting consequences may rather be termed *transformations*. Mediatization is a process in history. However, there are mediatized moments or events and intense situations where one may sense the unfolding transformation (Hepp, Hjarvard, & Lundby, 2015; Lundby, 2014).

All communication with technical media implies constraints and opportunities, as senders and receivers have to relate to the affordances of the medium. Changes in conceptions and understanding between partners in mediated communication may have consequences for the institutions they are part of. This is ‘normal’. Mediatization, on the contrary, occurs when the interchange between media and in this case religion transform the involved religious institution over time as it has to adapt to the logic and workings of the media in its communication in the public sphere.

12.4.2 The Institutional Approach in Mediatization Studies

The theory of mediatization is actually a theory of institutional change or transformation. Mediatization is a process of incremental shifts, with technological media intervening in more and more of the ongoing interaction in society, adding up to fundamental transformations (Mahoney & Thelen, 2009, p. 2). There are three perspectives on mediatization; a cultural one, a material one and an institutional one (Lundby, 2014). In a review of mediatization research by Sonia Livingstone and Peter Lunt, the institutional approach is regarded as the strongest because it covers the exercise of institutional power in high modernity with a clear historical narrative on the role of the media. Mediatization is then seen as a double-sided development where the media gain their own institutional strength and at the same time become involved in most other institutions in society that become dependent on media for their ongoing operations (Livingstone & Lunt, 2014, p. 713).

The Danish media sociologist Stig Hjarvard is the key proponent of an institutional approach to mediatization (2013; 2014a; 2014b). He credits the Norwegian sociologist Gudmund Hernes as one of the early founders of mediatization theory. Hjarvard notes that although Hernes did not use the term himself, ‘his concept of the “media-twisted society” ... is consonant in many respects’ with an institutional understanding of mediatization (2013, p. 8). Hernes published the first version of the ‘media-twisted society’ concept (1977a) the same year he launched his draft ‘towards an institutional economy’ (1977b). Hernes remarks that ‘from an institutional point of view the key question is how media change both the inner workings of other social entities and their mutual relationships’ (Hernes, 1978, p. 181; Hjarvard, 2013, p. 9).

The media influence social institutions beyond the fact that all institutions today rely increasingly on mediated information and communication. Rather, institutions become dependent on media in their core functions.

This process is characterized by a *duality*, in that the media have become *integrated* into the operations of other social institutions and cultural spheres, while also acquiring the status of social institutions *in their own right*. As a consequence, social interaction – within the respective institutions, between institutions, and in society at large – increasingly takes place via the media. (Hjarvard, 2013, p. 17)

The media gain their strength and display their functions in relation to other institutions, such as politics and religion.

12.4.3 Media Logic – Institutional Logics

A ‘media logic’ is pointed out to grasp this interplay between the media and other institutions. Rodney Benson criticizes Habermas and many sociologists influenced by him for ‘taking the “media system” as given’ with a ‘supposedly invariant media “logic”’. He rather supports sociologists who observe variations in media logic (2009, p. 175). The same debate occurs among mediatization scholars.

Hjarvard began with a straightforward concept of media logic as ‘the institutional and technological modus operandi of the media’ (2008, p. 113). Early on, David Altheide and Robert Snow had proposed this concept in the book *Media Logic* (1979) to denote the form of communication through which media present and transmit information. After criticism of this seemingly linear and unified concept of one single logic (Couldry, 2008; Lundby, 2009), Hjarvard emphasized that the term media logic is ‘a conceptual shorthand’ for the various ways media operate, ‘including the ways in which the media distribute material and symbolic resources and operate with the help of formal and informal rules’ (2013, p. 17). Hjarvard linked his argument to the new institutionalism, picking up on the theoretical framework of ‘institutional logic’ developed by Thornton, Ocasio, & Lounsbury (2012).

The media logic may not in itself create institutional change. Change is generated in the relationship between the logic inherent in the operations of the media and the logic of the other institution in case. The relationship between media and politics is the most frequently studied, along with different relationships between ‘media logic’ and ‘political logic’ (Esser & Strömbäck, 2014; Strömbäck & Esser, 2014).

Institutional logic in mediatization theory implies that institutional change or transformation is observed in the interplay between the institutional logic of the media and the institutional logic of another institution, for example, religion. The approach stresses the inter-institutional structures and the interfaces between institutions (Hjarvard, 2013, pp. 30–40; 2014a, pp. 136–138; 2014b, pp. 212–216).

12.5 Researching Mediatized Public Religion

How does one carry out mediatization studies? In their criticism of mediatization research (“key concept or conceptual bandwagon?”), David Deacon and James Stanyer (2014) discuss the understanding of change. They find a tendency to see the media as causal agents where non-media factors are overlooked.

12.5.1 Diachronous or Synchronous Approach

Further, Deacon and Stanyer find mediatization research to be weak in its attempt to capture and explain change over time. In reply, Hepp, Hjarvard and Lundby (2015) admit that mediatization research needs to include more explicit historical analyses. However, they see a fundamental misunderstanding on the part of Deacon and Stanyer, namely that mediatization research concerns one-sided effects. Hepp et al. remind us that mediatization is about the *interrelation* between changes in media and communication and changes in institutions or fields in culture and society. ‘Media are not necessarily the “driving forces” of transformations. There are other processes of change that might find their *expression* in media and communications, as with “individualization”’ (Hepp et al., 2015, p. 320).

Mediatization is a transformative process between points in time. However, diachronous data are not always easy to obtain. There are also arguments for ‘synchronous’ analyses of mediatization that compare practices in different settings at the same time or that compare events or situations of intense transformations to times of inertia. Examples of the latter are moments when a certain media technology is appropriated in a certain context (Hepp et al., 2015, pp. 320–321).

The distinction between diachronous and synchronous approaches to mediatization is not an either–or one. Both help trace the ongoing institutional transformation. This distinction in mediatization research resonates the double insight from institutional studies that on the one hand sudden breaches may change the set path (Pierson, 2004) and on the other hand that minor changes may amass to become visible transformations (Mahoney & Thelen, 2009). Institutions are changing by keeping some elements stable while new elements are introduced. This double move characterizes the media as part of the public sphere, as Engelstad shows in this volume.

12.5.2 Interaction in Mediatized Religious Environments

Public religion exists in the said *interrelation* with media and media changes. The media work in relation to their audiences. People’s interaction with content that is represented in the media influence further editorial decisions in edited media through direct feedback or through sales and user statistics. People participate directly in

social media, producing content as part of interaction through the media. Such interaction may stimulate mediatization processes. People may interact with media institutions on the basis of involvement in religious institutions. Mediatized public religion involves this double institutional setting.

12.5.3 Baseline for the Diachronous Analysis

The baseline for the analysis of diachronous mediatization is taken from my study of secularization in public broadcasting in the early 1970s (Lundby, 1974), compared to the transformations of the dominant broadcasting institution and the majority religious institutions 40 years later.

I also look for mediatized religion in contemporary history in my study of Norway (Lundby, 1985) in the Nordic research project on religious changes in the Nordic countries from 1930–1980, comparing a range of indicators in 1938, 1958 and 1978 (Gustafsson, 1987, 1985). This is followed by my research on media and religion in the Nordic project on religion in the public sphere from 1980 onwards, with emphasis on the years 1988, 1998 and 2008 (Lundby et al., forthcoming).⁴⁶

12.5.4 Baseline for The Synchronous Analysis

A baseline for the analysis of synchronous mediatization of religion is provided by the patterns in interaction over religion in Norway. The Engaging with Conflicts in the Mediatized Religious Environments (CoMRel)⁴⁷ project examines how religion in public spaces becomes thematised and enacted through the media and further articulated in social interaction within different institutional domains. A nationwide survey was undertaken in April 2015⁴⁸, displaying patterns of interaction between people and various media over religious topics in contemporary Norway. Such individual religious practices may refer to information and representations in the public sphere and also play back into the public sphere.

Churches, mosques and similar religious locales are minor public spheres. Norwegians are, in general, not frequent attenders in such spaces. Only 1 in 10 do so every month. However, Norwegians occasionally attend transition rites at religious sites.

⁴⁶ The NOREL project. Cf. Inger Furseth's chapter in this book.

⁴⁷ www.hf.uio.no/imk/english/research/projects/comrel/index.html. The project is part of the SAMKUL programme at the Research Council of Norway.

⁴⁸ The survey was created with questions defined by CoMRel researchers and executed by TNS Gallup with a representative web panel of 1000 persons 16 years and older.

Nearly 6 in 10 had been to a wedding, confirmation or funeral in their own religious tradition at least once in the year before they were interviewed.

People need information and interpretations about religion for their ongoing interaction. Only 1 in 10 Norwegians confirmed in the survey that they had met or obtained information about religion in churches, mosques or other religious buildings during the last 12 months. Religion was talked about much more often in families (3 in 10), among friends (1 in 4) or at school or work (3 in 20). However, television and newspapers (print and digital combined) are the sources of information on religion for more Norwegians than face-to-face settings (1 in 3). Similarly, radio was the source on religion for 1 in 5. Even social media and websites were somewhat more frequently reported as the site for information on religion last year (by around 13 percent) than gatherings in religious buildings. Although churches and mosques are public places, Norwegians rather seek out public religion in the media, primarily mass media.

That people actively search or passively come across religion in public media may not imply that they take this information into debates on religion in the public sphere. Of the survey respondents, 4 percent took part in one or several debate meetings over religion during the last 12 months, while 2 percent attended demonstrations related to religion. However, in debates over religion Norwegians may employ participatory media. While only 2 percent reported to have submitted one or more debate article to newspapers (regardless of whether it was a digital or print version) during the last year, 10 percent took part in debates on religion in social media and 6 percent wrote comments in digital newspapers or in discussion forums on the Internet.

Therefore, the spheres of public religion are important to people's interpretations and interactions over these matters. Within each sphere, the media in operation may change or even transform the representation of religion and thus influence the perception of public religion. How this occurs within each of the three distinct spheres is analysed in the following.

12.6 The Journalism Sphere

Within the journalism sphere, religion is treated just as any piece of news, on the secular terms that dominate in newspapers and broadcasting. The mediatization of religion within this sphere mainly refers to the representation of public religion through the media selection of what is found to be worth making visible in the news and what is not.

12.6.1 Media History: Changes Across Reader Cultures

Norwegian newspapers differ more in their coverage of religion across the different reader cultures and political interests they represent than over time. Research data for the printed press are available at regular intervals from the 1930s until 2008.

The conservative papers *Aftenposten* and *Stavanger Aftenblad* treated religion through a respectful coverage of the Lutheran Church of Norway, the then state church. Pietistic organizations within the Church of Norway attracted journalists from several newspapers to their annual leaders meeting in the mountains, where they made declarations on Christian morals that the media conveyed. This loyal approach by these newspapers lasted until the end of the 1970s. The liberal *Dagbladet* and the social-democratic *Arbeiderbladet* were more critical and directed their religious criticism primarily towards the institutional church (Lundby, 1985, pp. 188–189).

The tendency visible in *Aftenposten* in 1978 to put more emphasis on the religiosity of individuals than on the church as an institution became stronger through the 1980s and 1990s into the new millennium. For all four newspapers, there was a sharp decline in coverage of the majority Lutheran church from 1998 to 2008. At the same time, coverage of Islam rose in much larger proportion than the immigration of Muslims should imply (Lundby & Gresaker, 2015; Lövheim & Lundby, 2013). A study of religion in the Norwegian press since 2000 shows how these media institutions have sharpened their secular watchdog function, with less respect for religious institutions (Døving & Kraft, 2013). The newspapers' greater power implies an expanding mediatization in their treatment of religion.

12.6.2 Contemporary Survey: the Significance of News Media

When Norwegians are asked in the CoMRel survey (cf. 12.5.4 above) which aspects of religion in the media they are most interested in, religion in news tops the list, followed by religion and politics. Therefore, for religion Norwegians rely heavily on the treatment in secular journalism. A majority look for religion to be discussed in this 'hard' part of the public sphere rather than in the softer cultural sphere.

In the survey, 30 percent report discussing news on religion with others daily or weekly. There are variations according to media use. However, a general picture emerges; those regularly attending to the public sphere through mass media are keener to discuss news on religion than those who more infrequently use these public media.⁴⁹ For Facebook and other social media, there are no differences between those who use these personal media and those who do not when it comes to discussions of news on religion.

⁴⁹ The questions on media use are broad, as respondents were asked about the use of various media in 'the last seven days'.

Discussions over news on religious *extremism* with others take place more often by those who give priority to international news than among those who prefer national or local news. Users of all kinds of mass media, including those who read news on the Internet, are clearly more inclined to discuss news on religious extremism daily or weekly than those who do not use these mass media.

Again, only 8 percent report discussing news on religious extremism in social media during the last 12 months. No more than 3 percent of the respondents have done so in discussion forums or in news comments on the Internet in the last year. When people discuss news on religious extremism it is primarily with family and friends, and they get the news they discuss from the mass media rather than through social media. This gives significance and responsibility to the gatekeepers in the journalism sphere.

The representations in the news media are more important for people's discussions on religion – particularly religious extremism – than social media. And for the population in general, the media are far more important than the information gathered from churches, mosques and other religious buildings. (But, of course, that minority attending religious congregations frequently will gather more of their information and understanding from within the religious institution.)

12.6.3 Mediatized Public Religion in the Journalism Sphere

The historical material shows an expanding mediatization of religion within the journalism sphere. The media institutions are gradually making more independent editorial assessments of religious matters; they are becoming less loyal to the religious institutions. The press no longer covers the majority church out of a respect for this institution, which to a great extent was the case until the 1970s. The newspapers seem rather to cater to the expanding diversity and individualisation in religion and spirituality within their readership.

Such editorial decisions are crucial for the information people gather on public religion. Despite the growth in social media, it is still the mass media that is the main source of information on religion. However, more decisive editing and coverage of the religious landscape implies a stronger mediatization.

12.7 The Cultural Sphere

Public religion in the cultural sphere primarily relates to popular culture. This is the sphere where symbolic elements of religious traditions are played out. The mediatization of religion in this sphere is based in the reconfiguration of religious elements into media-adapted stories, thus transforming the images of religion in the public sphere.

12.7.1 Media History: Popular Magazines

In the studies of media and religious change in Norway, particular emphasis has been put on lifestyle magazines as expressions of popular culture. *Allers* and *Hjemmet*, two weekly magazines with wide distribution, were studied for the years 1938, 1958 and 1978. There were more articles on religion in 1978 than in the other two years (but not necessarily a larger share of the total number of pages). In 1958, the tendency was to be aware of modern magic; consequently, the two magazines did not carry horoscopes. In 1978, they both had horoscopes and articles on spiritism and magic. However, *Hjemmet* wrote more on Christianity in 1978 than before, but focused on personalities and extraordinary experiences of faith and not on Christianity as an institution (Lundby, 1985, pp. 189–190).

Ann Kristin Gresaker's research on lifestyle magazines since 1980 confirms a continued tendency toward alternative religiosity and astrology. In 1988, Christianity was still a main theme in a majority of the articles on religion, but it decreased by almost half in 2008. Women's magazines, however, lost interest in Christianity (Lundby & Gresaker, 2015, p. 93).

While the newspaper coverage of religion is geared towards conflict, Gresaker's study shows that the lifestyle magazines rather take a 'feel good' approach to religion to cater to their markets. The mediatization of religion in the magazines appears through the construction of a soft, spiritual media world (Lundby & Gresaker, 2015, p. 104).

12.7.2 Contemporary Survey: Satire, Humour and Entertainment

Ten times as many Norwegians give highest priority to politics compared to religion among a list of eight topical areas in the media. Of the CoMRel study respondents, 30 percent say politics is the area they are most interested in, while only 3 percent say they are most interested in religion. Entertainment is the top priority for 14 percent of the respondents. This is not surprising when 'religion' is singled out as a separate category.

When asked in a different way about which aspects of religion the respondents find most interesting in the media, the picture becomes more nuanced. While 'religion in news' and 'religion and politics' relate to the journalism sphere, the two categories of 'religion and culture' and 'religion in entertainment' refer to the cultural sphere. While 14 percent of the respondents say they are most interested in 'culture' as an aspect of religion in media, no more than 7 percent rank religion in entertainment as a high priority. What connotations do people associate with a predefined category of 'religion in entertainment'? Possibly, many keep religion and entertainment separate. People may not be aware of how bits and pieces from various religious and occult traditions are mixed into films and entertainment programmes on television and radio

and also appear in the print media (Partridge, 2008). Religious imagination is brought into the cultural realm through the use of symbols, citations and metaphors.

Religious satire and humour in the media is a controversial issue. It is enough to remind people of the caricature crisis in Denmark and Norway in 2005–2006 and the terror attack on the satirical magazine *Charlie Hebdo* in Paris in early 2015. Such incidents, of course, become hard news in the journalism sphere. However, religious satire and humour usually relate to the cultural sphere.

The CoMRel study respondents were asked whether they think the media could or should cover religious issues in a satirical or humorous way. While 2 in 3 completely or partly agreed, 15 percent completely or partly disagreed. Those watching television were more positive than those who did not watch television in the ‘last week’. In this case, those who had been on social media were more positive than those who had not.

Religious satire and humour may provoke people who adhere to a religion themselves. However, even among those who to a great degree or to some degree regard themselves as Christian, as well as among those belonging to ‘other religions’,⁵⁰ a clear majority agreed that the media could cover religion in a satirical or humorous way. However, an even larger portion of those with a weak or no sense of belonging to Christianity or to other religions were in support of satirical or humorous coverage of religion (79 and 69 percent, respectively).

12.7.3 Mediatized Public Religion in the Cultural Sphere

The mediatization of public religion follows other patterns in the cultural sphere than in the journalism sphere. Religion as a defined topic per se is not a priority interest in Norwegians’ media menu. Actually, religion is at the bottom of the list. When forced to answer in which media genre they are most keen to encounter religion, entertainment is at bottom of the ranking. This is an indication of the mediatization of religion in two respects. First, there is possibly among Norwegians a widespread understanding of religion as something particular, set apart for those who are ‘religious’. Second, people seem to turn a blind eye to all the references to religious traditions and spirituality in entertainment media. A range of symbolic elements from biblical sayings to kabbalah mysticism is remixed into pop music, films and drama series (see, for example, Halse, 2014). ‘What people want’ (Endsjø & Lied, 2011) of popular culture may turn out to be transformed symbols from Christianity, Judaism and other religious traditions. Such ‘banal religion’ (cf. 12.2.2. above) in popular and entertainment media is mediatized public religion in the cultural sphere (Lied, 2012).

Religious references in popular media are usually indirect. However, satire and humour programmes may also have explicit references to religion. They imply media-

⁵⁰ We had to lump them together due to the number of respondents.

tization through the irony that redefines – and thus helps transform – religious traditions. Conflicts over caricatures of the Prophet Muhammad remind us how provocative such mediatized public religion can be to some religious groups.

12.8 The Religious Media Sphere

The religious media sphere is the extension of religious institutions for in-group and outreach communication. The mediatization of religion in this sphere concerns the changing role and influence of religious authority that is based in religious organizations and institutions, as well as the changes in religious language and the changing interface of religious and secular arguments.

12.8.1 Media History: ‘Christian’ Publications and ‘Religious’ Programmes

Comparing the years 1938, 1958 and 1978, there was an offensive of new religious (Christian) media institutions in Norway after the Second World War. A second Christian daily, a Christian weekly and several Christian publishing houses were established after 1945. Around 1958, Christian organizations established two radio stations transmitting abroad from Norway. When the broadcasting monopoly was broken in 1981, Christian organizations were among those most keen to start narrowcast radio stations.

Still, the main emphasis in the religious media sphere in that period was on small and middle-sized publications. In 1980, 60 magazines with countrywide distribution had a total circulation of close to 1 million copies. These Christian publications doubled the total print run from 1950 to 1980. Parish magazines were also distributed all over the country. This expansion, however, took place in a more or less closed circuit within the religious institution (Lundby, 1985, p. 186).

However, in the context of greater religious and secular diversity and the expansion in media systems, in particular with Internet and digital communication, the said Christian outlets moved to the periphery. This implies secularization as well as mediatization on an organizational or institutional level, that is, as external to the religious media outlets. However, there are also examples of internal ‘self-mediatization’, in particular when religious institutions like the Church of Norway adapt their presence on the web to fit with contemporary modes of communication (cf. Lövheim & Axner, 2015, p. 47; Moberg & Sjö, 2012).

Regarding NRK’s ‘religious programmes’, mediatization has progressed from within. The Sunday worship and weekday devotions on radio P1 have existed since the 1930s (Lundby, 1985; Lundby & Gresaker, 2015). The transformation has been in terms of a gradual shift of authority from NRK’s loyalty to the religious institution

towards a more self-confident editorial stand on these traditional programmes by the media institution. This internal self-mediatization is visible in NRK's experimentation with format and expression within the 'religious' slots in an intended loyalty to listeners in a more diverse society (Lundby, 1974; 2016).

12.8.2 Contemporary Survey: in a Corner of the Public Sphere

As noted above, no more than 3 percent of the CoMRel survey respondents listed 'religion' as the topic in the media they are most interested in. By this category many may think of worship and other 'religious programmes' on radio and television. But of all those who answered, only 1.5 percent reported religion as being their main interest *and at the same time* had worship and devotions as their first priority in terms of religion in the media. Nine percent found worship and devotions most interesting among the listed areas of religion in the media, while 17 percent reported 'religion as moral reflection' as their top priority if they would have to make a choice.

For comparison and as a reminder, no more than 7 percent mentioned religion in entertainment as their favourite topic to the extent that they had to relate to religion in the media. Again, this may signal a distinction among respondents between entertainment in the cultural sphere and serious religious programming and reflection. However, the latter could well be part of the general cultural media sphere.

In Norway, traditional 'religious programmes' – understood as worship, devotions and religious songs and music – are mostly aired on NRK's radio channel P1. Some of these programmes also are given space on NRK television. In the CoMRel survey, we asked whether such proclamation programmes should be kept for the Christian tradition or opened to other denominations and religions. Of the respondents, 1 in 3 said that NRK should not transmit such programmes at all; 1 in 5 found that either all religions should have the same opportunity or they should have access in relation to their membership strength; 1 in 10 would keep all such religious programming for the Christian tradition and 1 in 4 wanted most of these programmes to be related to Christianity, as was the case at the time of the survey. All in all, more than a 1/3 of the respondents wanted to give priority to the Christian tradition; 1 in 10 did not want to answer this question or did not know what to say.

The religious media sphere may last longer in print than in broadcasting, due to the history referred to above. This sphere also extends into Internet-based media. However, the Internet yields rather limited sources on religion. This is confirmed by a specific question on how often people visit various religious websites. While 2 in 3 never visit websites on Christianity, Islam or Judaism, 3 in 4 never go to websites on alternative religion, such as astrology and new age, or Eastern religions, such as Hinduism or Buddhism. The use of such sites is rather rare, with perhaps an occasional visit per year. Six percent go to websites on Christianity, Islam or Judaism at least a few times a month, while no more than 2 percent visit alternative religious websites.

While web pages on Christianity, Islam or Judaism are usually published by religious institutions and are thus clearly part of the religious media sphere, sites on alternative or Eastern religiosity belong to the cultural sphere, as defined above.

12.8.3 Mediatized Public Religion in the Religious Media Sphere

In the specific religious media sphere, institutional change takes place within the more limited or secularized role of the religious institutions in society. However, the mediatization of the religious public sphere in itself adds to the institutional change of this sector.

The mediatization of the religious public sphere occurs via adaptations in two opposite directions. Either the specific media run by religious institutions become even more in-group oriented, as with much of the print outlets of Norwegian pietistic organizations or the religious programmes adopt a soft profile in order to communicate with a broader audience, as with the morning devotions on NRK.

The Internet is a challenge to religious institutions. The religious media sphere may well stretch into this digital, networked realm, but established religious organizations may not be able to communicate beyond their own turf (Lövheim, 2008). Rather, there emerges an individualistic ‘third space’ of digital religion (Hoover & Echchaibi, 2012) with none or very weak connections to religious institutions.

12.9 Conclusion

This chapter has explored, with examples from Norway, how the public sphere is changing in the interplay between religion and media. Various media work within different spheres of public religion – the journalism sphere, the cultural sphere and the religious media sphere. Institutional changes in all three spheres are here understood through processes of mediatization. Within the journalism sphere, distorted representations in the long run will help transform the conceptions of public religion among the population. The news media influences and shapes public religion through its representations. In the cultural sphere, the mediatized transformations take place through the remixing of symbolic elements from religious traditions into popular culture productions. In the religious media sphere, mediatization may occur either by religious institutions withdrawing from the larger public sphere or by adapting to it in ways that eliminate particular institutional distinctions and markers.

Mediatization implies incremental shifts due to the expanding influence of the media within other institutions that over time add up to fundamental transformations. Here, the theory of gradual institutional change (Mahoney & Thelen, 2009) coincides with an institutional approach to mediatization (Hjarvard, 2014b).

The distinction between the three spheres may become more blurred as the repertoire of available media expands. This occurs with the digitalization of ‘old’ media and the emergence of ‘new’ networked digital media, which make multimodal production across text, sound, image and graphics seamless. Audiences may become producers with no more equipment than cell phones, able to add to news media through ‘citizen journalism’. Social media platforms break down strict distinctions between public and private spheres.

Personal digital media also blur the distinction between the three spheres of public religion, as people may take part in debates and exchanges across the three spheres. However, Norwegians rather get information and input on religion from mass media. For the population at large, churches and similar religious sites are very limited sources of religion. This implies that the representation of religion in the media, particularly the mass media, is crucial for people’s interpretation of and interaction with religion. Therefore, the forthcoming institutional changes in public religion must be related to the influences of the media and must be studied and understood across different mediatized spheres.

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