

Religion, Mediatization, and ‘Complementary Learning Processes’ in Swedish Editorials

Mia Lövheim

Department of Theology, Uppsala University

mia.lovheim@teol.uu.se

Abstract

This article analyzes positions and arguments in editorials from Swedish newspapers during the period of 1976–2010 regarding the place of religion in modern, democratic society. Starting from Habermas’ call for changes in European political discourse in a post-secular situation, the article analyzes whether signs of ‘complementary learning processes’ can be found in the editorials, where alternatives to a secularist understanding of religion are expressed. Findings suggest that mediatization through increased politicization of the daily press contributes to a re-articulation of the former secularist discourse in Swedish editorials. A salient theme in this alternative discourse is the tension between religious freedom and other citizen rights.

Keywords

religion – mediatization – Sweden – editorials – complementary learning processes

1 Introduction

In November 2011, the newly appointed Swedish Minister of Integration Erik Ullenhag called a number of representatives for religious organizations, state agencies, and researchers to a counsel about how a democratic society can accommodate religion.¹ In a society like Sweden, where secularity of the state

1 Ullenhag was minister of integration in the coalition of the Conservative Party, the Liberal Party, the Center Party, and the Christian-Democratic Party that governed Sweden between 2006–2014.

has been a key principle for centuries, this is a crucial question, which connects to ongoing discussions in European politics about the place of religious actors and arguments in various arenas of public life. In this discussion, understandings of 'religious' and 'secular' spheres and values inherited from the Enlightenment are being reconsidered.² The notion of the "post-secular society" presented by Jürgen Habermas in his seminal article "Religion in the Public Sphere" (2006) has been an important but also much debated starting-point for this discussion.³ Habermas' article is an argument for how a continuing global vitality of religion also means a necessity of including religious perspectives as a key source in the formation of democratic societies. One of the main points in the debate on post-secularity has been whether this argument for a potential future is also reflected in actual empirical changes within Western societies.

Habermas argued that in a democratic society "all norms that can be legally implemented must be formulated and publicly justified in a language that all the citizens understand."⁴ This condition should, however, not be confused with the "purging of the political public sphere of all religious contributions."⁵ In the name of reciprocity of citizenship, this would be "an undue mental and psychological burden for those of its citizens who follow a faith."⁶ Religious convictions can be part of the public sphere but must be 'translated' from claims based on a transcendent and absolute authority into a generally accessible language if they are to enter the institutionalized political sphere of discussion and decision-making. A post-secular society therefore requires "complementary learning processes."⁷ This concept is based on Habermas' idea of a reciprocal "ethics of citizenship" in a liberal, democratic state. While citizens can dissent on questions of worldviews, they should respect one another as free and equal members of the political community and strive to find ways to reach rationally motivated agreements. In these processes, religious citizens are required to develop an ability to consider their own faith reflexively from the outside and to relate it to secular views. Secular citizens are required to acknowledge the

2 Eduardo Mendieta & Jonathan VanAntwerpen (eds.), *The Power of Religion in the Public Sphere* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011).

3 James A. Beckford, "SSR Presidential Address Public Religions and the Postsecular: Critical Reflections," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 51/1 (2012), 1–19.

4 Jürgen Habermas, "Notes on Post-Secular Society," *New Perspectives Quarterly* 25/4, (2008), 17–29, at 28–29.

5 Ibid.

6 Jürgen Habermas, "Religion in the Public Sphere," *European Journal of Philosophy* 14/1 (2006), 1–25, at 10.

7 Ibid., 3.

possible truth content of religious arguments and their potential to become generally accessible arguments. This process is referred to as “learning” since it involves a cognitive act of adaptation and self-reflection for religious and secular citizens alike. While religious citizens are required to consider their faith “reflexively from the outside and to relate it to secular views,” secular citizens are required to be open to the possible truth content of religious arguments and to transcend a “secularist self-understanding of Modernity” which denies religious worldviews as resources for truth, meaning, and identity.⁸ This form of “militant secularism” is, Habermas argued, no longer valid in a post-secular situation.⁹ Complementary learning processes are, thus, a cooperative act and a key prerequisite for the potentials of a post-secular society to be realized.

2 Mediatization and Religion

In contemporary society, the media is a powerful force in forming various public spheres in which complementary learning processes might be performed. As argued by Stig Hjarvard, the increased mediatization of highly modernized societies means that control over the presence of religion in the public sphere is shifting from religious institutions to the media, as the media, during the twentieth century, developed into an independent institution dominating public discourse.¹⁰ This process is intertwined with how the media’s modus operandi has become integrated into the workings of other institutions. With regard to the institutional forms of religion, actors and beliefs become shaped by the technical, aesthetic, and practical workings of the media over time. The mediatization of religion is strongest in what Hjarvard termed the “journalism on religion,” which refers to how primarily news media, but also opinion journalism, brings religion to the political public sphere. Here, religious actors and content have to comply with journalism’s criteria of newsworthiness and critical inquiry. As previous research has shown, journalism has often ignored religion or treated it as a controversial subject. Coverage of religion, in particular Islam, is likely to focus on ‘problems,’ conflict and scandals.¹¹

8 Ibid.

9 Habermas, “Notes,” 26.

10 Stig Hjarvard, “Three Forms of Mediatized Religion: Changing the Public Face of Religion,” in: Stig Hjarvard & Mia Lövheim (eds.), *Mediatization and Religion: Nordic Perspectives* (Göteborg: Nordicom, 2012), 21–44.

11 Stewart M. Hoover, *Religion in the Media Age* (New York: Routledge, 2006); Kim Knott, Elizabeth Poole, & Teemu Taira, *Media Portrayals of Religion and the Secular Sacred: Representation and Change* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013).

Analyzing the publication of the Mohammad cartoons in the Danish daily newspaper *Jyllands-Posten* in 2005, Hjarvard argued that globalization has instigated a new media structure that changes the conditions for the media as a public sphere for political communication.¹² Media publics become connected across local, national, and transnational levels, and digital media challenges the control of established mass media institutions over the discourse on various events. This situation also has consequences for the separation between two levels of political discourse in Habermas' model of the public sphere: the informal flows of political opinion formation among the broader public of citizens and the formal or institutionalized decision making process in parliament, courts, and state administration.¹³

Hjarvard pointed out that changes in the media landscape, such as the introduction of free, advertisement-financed newspapers and the increasing digitalization of news, have triggered newspapers to influence the political agenda through more independent and opinionated journalism, for example, through comments and analysis of news events, often from a political standpoint. This situation instigates a change in the role of the media from 'translating' political issues and demands raised by interest groups in civil society into taking a more active role in shaping the political agenda.¹⁴

Changes in the political discourse on religion might also affect journalism. Since the turn of the millennium, religion has become increasingly visible on mainstream Western news agendas and is often used as an "interpretative key" for making sense of news stories.¹⁵ This situation poses the question of whether the journalistic stance towards religion might be changing. Mia Lövheim and Marta Axner analyzed tensions between different journalistic values in debates following the TV-program *Halal-TV*, where three veiled Muslim women commented on Swedish culture and politics, which was broadcasted on Swedish public service television in 2008.¹⁶ The findings show a tension between two different ideals of public service media: a factual, objective journalism that emphasizes secularity and a public-journalism-oriented ideal that enhances

12 Stig Hjarvard, "Religion og Politik i mediernes offentlighed," in: Lisbeth Christoffersen (ed.), *Gudebilleder: Ytringsfrihet og religion I en globaliseret verden* (Köpenhamn: Tiderne Skifter Forlag, 2006), 44–71, at 52.

13 Habermas, "Religion," 12.

14 Terje Rasmussen, "The Internet and Differentiation in the Political Public Sphere," *NORDICOM Review* 29/2 (2008), 73–83, at 79.

15 Owen Gower & Jolyon Mitchell, "Introduction," in: Jolyon Mitchell & Owen Gower (eds.), *Religion and the News* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012), 1–3, at 1.

16 Mia Lövheim & Marta Axner, "Halal-tv: Negotiating the Place of Religion in Swedish Public Discourse," *Nordic Journal of Religion and Society* 24/1 (2011), 57–74, at 73.

the voices of minority groups in society. These findings point to a renegotiation of previous models of journalistic treatment of religion, as the media attempts to find their role in more religious and culturally diverse societies. In this situation journalists and religious leaders might need to develop a “clearer understanding of each other’s crafts and callings.”¹⁷

3 Changing Relations between Religion, Media, and Politics in Contemporary Sweden

During the time period covered in this article, 1976–2010, Sweden remained the country with the strongest support for rational-secularist and individualistic values in the world.¹⁸ However, a brief review of relevant social, cultural, and political issues shows a number of fundamental changes in Swedish society over these years. From 1975 to 2015, the proportion of the Swedish population born outside of the country increased from seven to sixteen percent.¹⁹ The largest increase in religious minority groups come from Muslim majority countries; in 2013, 450,000 people or about five percent of the population were estimated to be Muslims.²⁰

Looking at the representation of religion in the daily press during the same period, a comparative Nordic study showed a decrease in the coverage of the Lutheran Church was mirrored by an increase in the coverage of Islam. For example, in Sweden, there was a decrease from fifty percent of all main articles covering the Church of Sweden in 1998 to fifteen percent in 2008, while articles on Islam increased from two to twenty-nine percent in the same time period.²¹ Another salient pattern is how media coverage during the period shifted from presenting religion as international news towards debates on the accommodation of an increased religious diversity.

17 Gower & Mitchell, “Introduction,” 3.

18 World Values Survey. <http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/WVSContents.jsp> (accessed 3 November 2015).

19 Migrationsinfo.se. <http://www.migrationsinfo.se/migration/sverige/> (accessed 12 April 2017).

20 The share of registered members of Muslim congregations as registered by the Commission for Government Support for Faith Communities (SST) amounts to almost 140,000. Nämnden för statligt stöd till trossamfund, SST. http://www.sst.a.se/statistik/statistik2015_4-50877827159454eb8c36207.html (accessed 12 April 2017).

21 Kati Niemelä & Henrik Reintoft Christensen, “Religion in the Newspapers in the Nordic Countries 1988–2008,” *Nordic Journal of Religion and Society* 26/1 (2013), 5–24.

In the political discussion, similar tendencies emerge. In Nordic politics, particularly in Denmark, there has been a marked increase in references to religion from 1988–2008 in parliamentary speeches and debates. In Sweden, this tendency had been less pronounced until the entry of the right-wing nationalist party Sverige-Demokraterna (the Swedish Democrats) into parliament in 2010.²² In the general election of 2014, their share of voters had doubled from 5.7 to thirteen percent. Furthermore, political debates have shifted focus from organized religion to religion as part of broader issues, such as human rights, international relations, immigration, religious diversity, and the use of religious symbols in public settings.

Against this background of changes in Swedish society, media, and political debate, this article analyzes different positions and arguments regarding the place of religion in a modern, democratic society in editorials from Swedish newspapers from 1976–2010.²³

4 Material: Editorials as Political Discourse

In Sweden, editorials have historically played an important role through their close connection to political parties and debates.²⁴ Sixty-seven percent of the population reads a newspaper on a daily basis, and more than half of the population trusts the largest morning paper *Dagens Nyheter*.²⁵ Editorials are written by an editorial board based on ideals concerning the role of the media as mediators between political discourse and public opinion. Common core values are freedom of opinion, a balance between various opinions and special interests, and rational arguments. Thus, there is a strong connection between ideals and formats in the editorial genre and the principles for rational deliberation in the public sphere advocated by Habermas. Based on these characteristics editorials can be considered particularly valuable for a study of continuity and change in political opinion on certain issues. Trends in media consumption

22 Jonas Lindberg, "Politicisation of Religion in Nordic Parliamentary Debates 1988–2009," *Politics, Religion and Ideology* 15/4 (2014), 565–582.

23 Mia Lövheim & Alf Linderman "Media, Religion and Modernity: Editorials and Religion in Swedish Daily Press," in: Titus Hjelm (ed.), *Is God Back? Reconsidering the New Visibility of Religion* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 32–45.

24 Lars Nord, *Vår tids ledare: En studie av den svenska dagspressens politiska opinionsbildning* (Stockholm: Carlssons, 2001).

25 Nordicom. <http://nordicom.gu.se/en/media-trends/news/nordicom-swedens-media-barometer-2014> (accessed 3 November 2015).

among younger generations, as well as changes in the media landscape discussed above do, however, challenge this position held by the editorials.

The material used in this article consists of editorials from the eleven largest daily newspapers in Sweden.²⁶ Most papers are distributed on a national level while four have a more regional profile. A total of 4,865 editorials were selected and of these 481 include references to religion.²⁷ Such references were identified through a quantitative content analysis using search words grouped into larger categories of indicators. These indicators cover a broad spectrum of religion, including the world religions and spirituality.²⁸ A previous analysis of the 481 texts addressing religion revealed three main categories.²⁹ The most frequent way of using religion was as a *description*, for example, ‘Catholic leader,’ ‘Protestant groups,’ or ‘Muslim countries,’ followed by religion as a *metaphor*, through words or expressions such as ‘preaching,’ ‘doomsday,’ or ‘sacred.’ The texts analyzed in this article consist of 104 editorials where religion was discussed as the *main topic*. These texts represent a small portion of the total sample of editorials. However, the previous analysis shows that the understandings of religion expressed follow general tendencies in the material.

5 Method: Critical Discourse Analysis

James Beckford suggested approaching religion as an “interpretative category,” the meaning of which is subject to constant negotiation within the social contexts of which it is used.³⁰ This approach aligns closely with the methodological approach of critical discourse analysis (CDA).³¹ CDA can be regarded as an interdisciplinary approach with varying applications according to the particular

26 I.e., *Aftonbladet*, *Arbetet*, *Expressen*, *Dagens Nyheter*, *Dagens Industri*, *Göteborgs-Posten*, *Göteborgs-Tidningen*, *Kvällsposten*, *Svenska Dagbladet*, *Sydsvenska Dagbladet*, and *Helsingborgs Dagblad*.

27 Sample selected from 30–32 randomized publishing days for each year in the period of 1976–2010.

28 I.e., religion, Islam, Christianity, Judaism, world religions (including Hinduism and Buddhism), new forms of spirituality, and religious metaphor.

29 Lövheim & Linderman, “Media,” 36.

30 James A. Beckford, *Social Theory and Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 4.

31 Ruth Wodak & Michael Meyer, “Critical Discourse Analysis: History, Agenda, Theory and Methodology,” in: idem (eds.), *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis*, 2nd ed. (London: SAGE, 2009), 1–33, at 5.

discipline, but a common starting point is the understanding of language as “social practice,” which “implies a dialectical relationship between a particular discursive event and the situation(s), institution(s) and social structure(s) which frame it.”³² In line with this approach, I see the use of religion in the editorials as conditioned by, but also constitutive of, certain events and the way they connect to beliefs, values, social identities, and social relations in a particular society. Thereby, patterns and changes within uses of religion in editorial texts are related to sociocultural practice for understanding religion and its place in a society.

Norman Fairclough's methodology for a dialectical-relational discourse analysis outlines four steps through which the “semiotic dimension” of different discourses can be found in a communicative event.³³ The social issue or problem identified for this analysis, which constitutes the first step, is how to handle the continued and more complex presence of religion in contemporary Sweden described above. The second step involves identifying the transdisciplinary theoretical context for analyzing this issue. In this article, this context consists of the challenges towards the “militant secularism” discourse on the role of religion in politics described by Habermas and of the theories on mediatization of religion described above. The third step concerns identifying the various discourses that address this issue, for example, various positions taken concerning whether religion can be included in a formerly secular, democratic society. The fourth step concerns identifying various positions regarding whether the social problem can be addressed within the current social order, as expressed in a dominant social discourse, and how such positions are expressed semiotically through reacting to, contesting, criticizing, or opposing the dominant discourse. This step will be connected to Habermas' discussion of requirements for secular citizens to enter into complementary learning processes. In analyzing reactions and oppositions to a dominant discourse, I will look for signs of a willingness to transcend a secularist understanding of modernity and openness to the possibility of religious arguments and actors as contributing to forming a democratic society.

The semantic articulations of a “militant secularist” discourse and reactions and oppositions to this discourse in the editorial texts have been identified on the basis of a selection of analytical concepts suggested by Fairclough, primarily vocabulary and modality, representations of events, constructions of

32 Ibid.

33 Norman Fairclough, “A Dialectical-relational Approach to Critical Discourse Analysis in Social Research,” in: Ruth Wodak & Michael Meyer (eds.), *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis*, 2nd ed. (London: SAGE, 2009), 162–186, at 167–168.

identities, and premises and conclusions in various arguments. The relation between dominant and opposing discourses has been analyzed through the use of intertextuality as expressed in references to other media texts, political policy documents or debates, ‘common sense’ ideas or historical events, and through identifying degrees of homogeneity within or tensions between various discourses.³⁴

6 Analysis: A Dominant Secular Discourse

The 104 texts that discuss religion as a main topic share some general traits regarding the representation of religion. Most of the texts focus on Christianity. Twenty-two texts refer to another, primarily Muslim, religious tradition. The majority of the texts also discuss religion in a national context; twenty-nine refer to an international event.

The analysis shows that the majority of the editorials, fifty-nine of the 104 texts, express a secularist position, meaning that they argue for a neutral state and that religious actors and arguments should be separated from political discussions and decisions. One example is an editorial from *Dagens Nyheter* that commented on “the problematic role of the Catholic Church in Italian politics” when discussing an election on reducing the right to abortion in Italy.³⁵ The use of the adjective “problematic” to comment on instances of mixing religion and politics in other countries is salient and underlines the argument for a secularist position in Swedish politics. Looking at the use of vocabulary, religion is often connected with words such as ‘fundamentalism,’ ‘fanaticism,’ ‘regressive,’ and ‘violent.’ Examples are taken from Muslim regimes in Iran and Afghanistan, the political Christian right in the US, the pope and the Vatican state in Italy, and tensions between religious groups in other parts of the world. The following quote from an article in *Helsingborgs Dagblad* clearly illustrates the rejection of religious utterances in political discussions through a comparison of Swedish and US political discourse:

And when American politicians close with a God bless you and God bless America, well, then it's time to get wary. That is nothing for Swedish

34 Due to limitations of space, a thorough linguistic analysis of the texts will not be presented. This work presents the results of this analysis, illustrated by examples of how the analytical concepts have been used.

35 Anon., “Nej till Påven,” *Dagens Nyheter*, 20 May 1981. Quotations translated from Swedish by the author.

politicians to adopt. Sweden is a secular society and ought to stay this way. People have a right to their faith and religion, but the kind of religious rhetoric that American politicians use is nothing we need.³⁶

The use of modal verbs, such as “ought to” and the pronoun “we,” demarcate the desired Swedish position against the American one: religious opinions should not influence political decision or voting. Following the same theme, an editorial in the tabloid paper *Expressen* commented on the influence of Christian and conservative groups in the re-election of George W. Bush as president: “that people believe in their god is no problem [...] but not least for the sake of the Church the state should be secular [...]”³⁷

A distinct group of articles discuss the Church of Sweden in relation to the Swedish state. As the quote above illustrates the dominant standpoint is to encourage a separation of the Church and the state (which was accomplished in 2000), with the argument that increased autonomy is “an improvement” for the Church as well as for society.³⁸ Religious convictions and arguments are often connected to ‘conservative values’ and double standards, particularly when discussing the Church’s resistance to ordination of women or the rights of the LGBTQ community.³⁹ This view is also salient in shorter notices using irony or sarcasm to comment on the futility of religious involvement in politics, as expressed in *Göteborgs-Tidningen*: “In the largest Swedish mosques, this Friday’s prayer was dedicated to fighting lower taxes on alcohol. The Christian prayers did not help. Perhaps the Muslim works better.”⁴⁰

Describing religiously grounded arguments and values as problematic, dangerous, or irrelevant is one element of the dominant secularist discourse in the editorials. A further element is the separation of religion as individual belief and religion as a political ideology. This position is expressed in the following quote from *Göteborgs-Tidningen*, criticizing the Museum of World Culture for closing an exhibition for fear of religiously motivated violence:

All over the world people are fighting to interpret religion in a personal way, against fundamentalism and extremism. Here the Museum of World

36 Lotta Hördin, “Halmhattar, nej tack!,” *Helsingborgs Dagblad*, 6 November 2008.

37 P.M. Nilsson, “Ett styrkebesked,” *Expressen*, 4 November 2004.

38 Anon., “Chans öka intresset för kyrkan,” *Göteborgs-Tidningen*, 11 March 1983.

39 The Church of Sweden officially accepted the ordination of women in 1958 and same-sex marriages in 2009.

40 Anon., untitled, *Göteborgs-Tidningen*, 7 May 2005.

Culture could have set an example. A Swedish state administered institution that expresses strength to resist. Now it is the opposite.⁴¹

The premise of the argument is clearly that to express religion in a “personal way” is preferred over “fundamentalism and extremism” that indicates a politicized form of religion.

7 Alternative Discourses: Recognizing the Value of Religion

In terms of alternative or opposing discourses twenty-four of the 104 texts react to or challenge the dominant secularist discourse described above. As this example from *Dagens Nyheter* shows, stereotypes and prejudices against religion in general are countered by pointing to a variety within religions: “It should be noted that attitudes to women vary within different strands of Islam and that oppression of women can be found in many other cultural and religious traditions too, also within Christianity.”⁴²

Additionally, this editorial from *Expressen* criticized the tendency to depict certain religious groups, in particular Muslims, as a threat to an open and tolerant democratic society. This editorial expressed concern over how the Dutch politician Pim Fortuyn “defended the open tolerant Dutch society through showing intolerance towards Muslims.”⁴³ Another example is the warning issued in *Aftonbladet* that “Extinction of terrorism risks leading to the extinction of our fundamental democratic values,” as represented by the inhuman treatment of Muslim prisoners in the Guantanamo Bay detention camp.⁴⁴ By highlighting differences between who is and who is not included in ‘tolerance’ and “democratic values,” and by using words such as “risks,” both of these editorials point to the limitations of the dominant, secularist discourse to articulate common democratic values that include the beliefs and rights of religious citizens.

The analysis further shows that this alternative discourse primarily appears during the latter part of the period focused upon: eighteen of the twenty-four texts are published after the year 2000. One editorial in *Dagens Nyheter* opened the new year 2002 by quoting the prime minister’s speech about how

41 Jimmy Fredriksson, “Kryperiet: Sparka chefen för Världskultur-museet,” *Göteborgs-Tidningen*, 2 March 2005.

42 Anon., “Rätt att hävda respekt för kvinnor,” *Dagens Nyheter*, 17 January 2000.

43 Anon., “Populismens ABC,” *Expressen*, 8 May 2002.

44 Helle Klein, “Sorg över västvärlden,” *Aftonbladet*, 15 March 2004.

“the forces of modernization creates a more open society where religions more or less live in harmony with the development of society in general.”⁴⁵ In this argumentation, modernization is described as a ‘force’ that creates a form of religion that is attuned to majority society, rather than portraying religion as a conservative force and a ‘problem’ to modern society. By including religion and the rights of religious citizens as a part of a modern, democratic society, these editorials introduce an alternative to the dominant secularist discourse.

8 Freedom of Religion—with Conditions

A key issue in which the tension between the dominant secularist discourse and the alternative, more inclusive, discourse comes to the fore concerns freedom of religion. This theme also becomes more salient in the editorials from 2000 onwards. The following examples of two editorials commenting on a trial in Sweden in February 2005 against the Pentecostal Pastor Åke Green, who was prosecuted for hate speech against homosexuals, illustrate this tension. The first editorial, published in *Göteborgs-Posten* in 2005, declared that “Freedom of speech and freedom of religion are indefeasible in a democracy. They are worthy of large sacrifices but there are limits. Freedom of speech does not excuse defamation. Freedom of religion does not justify agitation against dissidents.”⁴⁶

The argument is strengthened through the use of intertextual references to the Holocaust as made possible by allowing hate speech against Jews. The second editorial, published in *Expressen*, warned against a development where the police would gain rights to record sermons in churches and mosques in order to arrest and prosecute preachers and concluded: “We strongly dislike their opinions about homosexuals, but the most important thing is to stand up for the fundamental and constitutional rights of freedom of speech and of religion.”⁴⁷

The argumentation in these two texts clearly brings out a tension within the editorial discourses between freedom of religion and other fundamental democratic rights in Sweden, such as freedom of speech and equal rights regardless of gender and sexual orientation. Both articles argued that freedom of speech and of religion are “fundamental” or “indefeasible” for a democratic society, but while the first text argued for the necessity of “limits” to defend certain

45 Carl Bildt, “Nyårstankar,” *Dagens Nyheter*, 2 January 2002.

46 Gert Gelotte, “Hur kan hets ingå i en kristens tro?,” *Göteborgs-Posten*, 31 January 2005.

47 Anon., “Ordet är fritt,” *Expressen*, 19 January 2005.

groups, the second text argued that freedom of religion should be treated as an inviolable right.

The question of the possible limits of the right to articulate and practice of one's religion in Swedish society was further discussed in *Expressen* in 1996. The editorial, entitled "Prayer for Tolerance," welcomed the public presence of Islam in the form of mosques and religious schools and argued:

For the sake of the old and new Swedes, Sweden must leave behind homogeneous standard solutions and become a country where people can develop their specific character. Sweden must in earnest give space to other cultures and ways of thinking—obviously while at the same time maintaining a core of democracy, tolerance, judiciary, and Swedish curriculum.⁴⁸

This editorial clearly expressed the necessity for secular citizens to 'give space for' religious citizens' "ways of thinking" and "specific character." The urgency of this change is directed to "Sweden" as a nation and brought out by the modal verb "must." However, this openness to rethink "homogeneous standard solutions" is, at the same time, conditioned. The editorial noted that it must take place within "a core" of certain democratic values and laws. The use of "obviously" and "Swedish" in this argument underlines how the editorial was appealing to a national collective identity that needs to be 'maintained' in the process.

This conditioning of the space for religious beliefs and values within a "core" of Swedish law and values is even more pronounced in an editorial in *Dagens Nyheter* from 2008, entitled "Not in the Hand of Allah." The editorial commented on two programs shown on Swedish public service television earlier the same year.⁴⁹ In one of the programs, the female host refused to shake hands with a male participant with reference to her Muslim faith. The editorial took this event as the starting point to discuss the rights and duties of individuals of Muslim faith who wish to live in Sweden. Intertextual references are also made to the constitutional right to freedom of religion and to political debates by referring to a polarization between "those who dislike Islam" and those who choose a cultural relativist position for "fear of contact with Sverige-Demokraterna [the right-wing nationalist party]." It went on to argue: "All people in Sweden are entitled to believe in the God they want. They have a right to pray as often as they want. They have the right to wear a wig,

48 Anon., "Bön om tolerans," *Expressen*, 1 January 1996.

49 See Lövheim & Axner, "Halal-tv."

scarf, veil, fez, hat or whatever they wish on the head [...]. They are entitled to all their religious interpretations, ceremonies, and traditions—as long as they do not collide with Swedish law.”⁵⁰

By naming religious symbols and practices from several religious traditions, the article addressed the current religious diversity in Swedish society and embraced religious freedom. But this is primarily a personal freedom to believe, pray, and wear religious symbols, even though “ceremonies” and “traditions” are also mentioned.

The second part of the editorial clarified that it is not only formal law that sets limitations to religious life in Sweden. Referring to the other TV-program, a documentary about Muslim men in Sweden who refuse to let their wives work in places where they interact with other men, the editorial argued that access to societal welfare such as unemployment or disability benefits “can never be justified by freedom of religion.” The editorial finally argued:

This applies also to the refusal to greet someone by shaking hands (for women). Not a crime and certainly something that can work if you live your whole life in a radicalized Muslim context. But undoubtedly an obstacle, not to say impossibility, if you would like to work as a lawyer, dental nurse, medical doctor or journalist in majority society.⁵¹

The final statement clearly outlines the conditions for public expressions of religion that can be tolerated within the right to freedom of religion, set by law but also by moral values and cultural norms. The polarization between “life in a radical Muslim context,” described by value-laden adjectives, such as an “obstacle” and “impossibility” for being part of “majority society,” underlines the conditions for religious citizens to participate in Swedish society.

9 Concluding Discussion: Complementary Learning Processes and Mediatized Religion

The analysis shows that among the editorials that discuss religion as a main topic, a secularist position towards religion dominates. This discourse is articulated by arguing for a separation between religious actors and arguments, on the one hand, and the political public sphere, on the other hand, as necessary for a democratic society. This discourse is also articulated by connecting

⁵⁰ Anon., “Not in the Hand of Allah,” *Dagens Nyheter*, 12 November 2008.

⁵¹ Ibid.

religion with values that are seen as incompatible with a modern democracy, such as gender oppression and fundamentalism. An alternative, more inclusive discourse is emerging over time, which highlights tensions within a radical secularist position and argues for the need to include religion as a significant aspect of a modern, democratic society. Can this result be interpreted as a sign of a self-reflective transcendence of a secularist understanding of modernity, as required for the complementary learning processes advocated by Habermas?

The analysis shows that the polemic stance towards religious actors and arguments expressed in the dominant discourse has become increasingly questioned over time. Using the analytical terms of Fairclough's model, the possibility of addressing the place of religion in society within the current social order is contested by an alternative discourse criticizing or opposing the dominant discourse. In this alternative discourse, secular citizens are, in line with the requirements of complementary learning processes, encouraged to encounter religious citizens as modern contemporaries and to see religious values as contributions to the common good in society. However, this alternative discourse also displays a clear tension regarding when freedom of religion can be combined with what is presented as core elements of Swedish law and culture.

In Habermas' argumentation for the complementary learning processes, the rights of religious citizens in the public discourse are conditioned. Translation of religious arguments is still necessary in the formal political sphere. The analysis of homogeneity within and tensions between discourses shows how both the dominant secularist and the alternative discourse distinguish between religion as personal faith and religion as political claims. Political claims based in religious arguments are not accepted in the dominant secularist discourse. Also in the alternative discourse the freedom to express religious practices and beliefs in the public sphere is conditioned by what the "core" of Swedish laws, norms, and values allows.

In conclusion, the alternative discourse calls for a rethinking, rather than a replacement, of the dominant secularist discourse. The inclusion of religion advocated in this alternative discourse is still framed by an ideal of a homogeneous society, defined according to an imagined understanding of norms and values that hold Swedish society together.⁵² In order to be included in the "core" of this society, religious actors need to abide by and learn to navigate these norms and values.

52 Cf. Jan Blommaert & Jef Verschueren, *Debating Diversity: Analysing the Discourse of Tolerance* (London: Routledge, 1998).

As argued above, mediatization implies that political debates about the public role of religion in society need to be contextualized within changes in the media system. However, changes in the political discourse on religion might also affect journalism. If media actors are taking a more active agenda-setting role in politics, they should be attuned to the new challenges of a post-secular situation that were addressed by Habermas. The analysis shows how discussions of how to balance freedom of religion and other human rights over time emerges as a stronger theme in the editorials than the problems of religious institutions and leaders intervening in political discussions.⁵³ This shift from religion as an issue related to particular religious organizations to religion as a human right can also be observed in Nordic parliamentary debates, as described above.⁵⁴ The emergence of the alternative discourse in the editorials during the latest decades can be seen as an implication of how politicization of the daily press and mediatization of religion are connected. As a consequence of the first process, the traditional role of editorials to report on parliamentary politics is changing into a more active role, calling for political changes. In this process, religion becomes mediatized as an object for articulating various positions between newspaper editors on how to handle current challenges to national identity and citizenship in an increasingly culturally and religiously diverse society. However, this process also gives rise to a contestation of the dominant secularist discourse on boundaries between religious and secular spheres in the political discourse.⁵⁵

This article brings out how the concept of complementary learning processes needs to be contextualized both within processes of mediatization and in a particular national context. Fairclough argued that the degree of homogeneity within or tensions between discourses can reveal signs of a re-articulation of social relations and practices in society. The analysis of dominant and alternative discourses on religion and politics in editorial texts connect, in several ways, to the socio-cultural and political changes in Swedish society presented in the introduction, such as the disestablishment of the Lutheran Church and the increased and diversified presence of religion in Swedish society. The tensions between and within the two discourses address the need to rethink the dominant secularist separation of religion from politics as a condition for democracy that was addressed by the Swedish minister in the introduction. The editorials written during the latest decade analyzed articulate other possible

53 Cf. Hjarvard, "Religion," 66.

54 Lindberg, "Politicisation."

55 Carolina Ivanescu, "Politicised Religion and the Religionisation of Politics," *Culture and Religion* 11/4 (2010), 309–325.

answers to this question, but also reveal new tensions between religious freedom, other civic rights, and Swedish law and culture. In this sense, the editorials reveal signs of complementary learning processes that might “offer an imaginary” for a process of rethinking the place of religion in Swedish political life and society.⁵⁶

References

- Anon., “Bön om tolerans,” *Expressen*, 1 January 1996.
- Anon., “Chans öka intresset för kyrkan,” *Göteborgs-Tidningen*, 11 March 1983.
- Anon., “Nej till Påven,” *Dagens Nyheter*, 20 May 1981.
- Anon., “Not in the Hand of Allah,” *Dagens Nyheter*, 12 November 2008.
- Anon., “Ordet är fritt,” *Expressen*, 19 January 2005.
- Anon., “Populismens ABC,” *Expressen*, 8 May 2002.
- Anon., “Rätt att hävda respekt för kvinnor,” *Dagens Nyheter*, 17 January 2000.
- Anon., untitled, *Göteborgs-Tidningen*, 7 May 2005b.
- Beckford, James A., *Social Theory and Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).
- Beckford, James A., “SSSR Presidential Address Public Religions and the Postsecular: Critical Reflections,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 51/1 (2012), 1–19.
- Bildt, Carl, “Nyårstankar,” *Dagens Nyheter*, 2 January 2002.
- Blommaert, Jan, & Jef Verschueren, *Debating Diversity: Analysing the Discourse of Tolerance* (London: Routledge, 1998).
- Fairclough, Norman, “A Dialectical-relational Approach to Critical Discourse Analysis in Social Research,” Ruth Wodak & Michael Meyer (eds.), *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis*, 2nd ed. (London: SAGE, 2009), 162–186.
- Fredriksson, Jimmy, “Kryperiet: Sparka chefen för Världskultur-museet,” *Göteborgs-Tidningen*, 2 March 2005.
- Gelotte, Gert, “Hur kan hets ingå i en kristens tro?,” *Göteborgs-Posten*, 31 January 2005.
- Gower, Owen, & Jolyon Mitchell, “Introduction,” in: Jolyon Mitchell & Owen Gower (eds.), *Religion and the News* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012), 1–3.
- Habermas, Jürgen, “Religion in the Public Sphere,” *European Journal of Philosophy* 14/1 (2006), 1–25.
- Habermas, Jürgen, “Notes on Post-Secular Society,” *New Perspectives Quarterly* 25/4 (2008), 17–29.

⁵⁶ Fairclough, “Dialectical-relational Approach,” 182.

- Hjarvard, Stig, "Religion og Politik i mediernes offentlighed," in: Lisbeth Christoffersen (ed.), *Gudebilleder: Ytringsfrihet og religion I en globalisert verden* (Köpenhamn: Tiderne Skifter Forlag, 2006), 44–71.
- Hjarvard, Stig, "Three Forms of Mediatized Religion: Changing the Public Face of Religion," in: Stig Hjarvard & Mia Lövheim (eds.), *Mediatization and Religion: Nordic Perspectives* (Göteborg: Nordicom, 2012), 21–44.
- Hoover, Stewart M., *Religion in the Media Age* (New York: Routledge, 2006).
- Hördin, Lotta, "Halmhattar, nej tack!," *Helsingborgs Dagblad*, 6 November 2008.
- Ivanescu, Carolina, "Politicised Religion and the Religionisation of Politics," *Culture and Religion* 11/4 (2010), 309–325.
- Klein, Helle, "Sorg över västvärlden," *Aftonbladet*, 15 March 2004.
- Knott, Kim, Elizabeth Poole, & Teemu Taira, *Media Portrayals of Religion and the Secular Sacred: Representation and Change* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013).
- Lindberg, Jonas, "Politicisation of Religion in Nordic Parliamentary Debates 1988–2009," *Politics, Religion and Ideology* 15/4 (2014), 565–582.
- Lövheim, Mia, & Alf Linderman, "Media, Religion and Modernity: Editorials and Religion in Swedish Daily Press," in: Titus Hjelm (ed.), *Is God Back? Reconsidering the New Visibility of Religion* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 32–45.
- Lövheim, Mia, & Marta Axner, "Halal-tv: Negotiating the Place of Religion in Swedish Public Discourse," *Nordic Journal of Religion and Society* 24/1 (2011), 57–74.
- Mendieta, Eduardo, & Jonathan VanAntwerpen (eds.), *The Power of Religion in the Public Sphere* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011).
- Migrationsinfo.se. <http://www.migrationsinfo.se/migration/sverige/> (accessed 12 April 2016).
- Nämnden för statligt stöd till trossamfund, SST. <http://www.sst.a.se/statistik/statistikz015.4.50877827159454eb8c36207.html> (accessed 12 April 2017).
- Niemelä, Kati, & Henrik Reintoft Christensen, "Religion in the Newspapers in the Nordic Countries 1988–2008," *Nordic Journal of Religion and Society* 26/1 (2013), 5–24.
- Nilsson, P.M., "Ett styrkebesked," *Expressen*, 4 November 2004.
- Nord, Lars, *Vår tids ledare: En studie av den svenska dagspressens politiska opinionsbildning* (Stockholm: Carlssons, 2001).
- Nordicom. <http://nordicom.gu.se/en/media-trends/news/nordicom-swedens-media-barometer-2014> (accessed 3 November 2015).
- Rasmussen, Terje, "The Internet and Differentiation in the Political Public Sphere," *NORDICOM Review* 29/2 (2008), 73–83.
- Wodak, Ruth, & Michael Meyer, "Critical Discourse Analysis: History, Agenda, Theory and Methodology," idem (eds.), *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis*, 2nd ed. (London: SAGE, 2009), 1–33.
- World Values Survey. <http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/WVSContents.jsp> (accessed 3 November 2015).