

‘Stay Awhile and Listen’

Understanding the Dynamics of Mediatization,
Authority, and Literacy in Swedish Religious Education

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Abstract

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The aim of this article-based dissertation is to explore the role media play in Swedish Religious Education (RE). The purpose is to study Swedish RE teachers' practices and how these can be related to various dynamics of mediatization, authority, and literacy. Conducted within the *Teaching Religion in Late Modern Sweden* project at Uppsala University, this study draws on a national survey, as well as semi-structured interviews and classroom observations with 22 RE teachers. Four specific research questions are posed, each addressed separately in four articles. (1) What kinds of media materials do Swedish RE teachers use in their teaching? (2) What kinds of media dynamics are present in RE classrooms where media materials are used? (3) How can RE teachers' and students' engagements with mediated religion be analysed from a multiple media literacies perspective? And, (4) how do RE teachers construct authority on religion in a mediatized situation? The first question is approached through a quantitative analysis of survey material, while the three remaining questions were analysed by the use of qualitative thematic analysis of the observations and interviews. The study finds that RE teachers in Sweden use and relate to various forms of media to a large extent in their daily teaching practices, and that these engagements with mediated religion illustrate the complex balance between the individual agency of the teacher on the one hand, and the media dynamics of amplification, framing and performative agency, and co-structuring, on the other. The teachers' practices in relation to this are in the study viewed as a form of institutional work that is both caused by, and a contributing factor to, an increased mediatization of contemporary Swedish RE. The findings of the four articles are discussed in light of previous research on mediatization of religion in a Nordic context, specifically with regard to literacy and authority. The author argues that by studying these processes within an educational setting – a context that until recently has been under-explored within mediatization of religion research – the study provides new empirical as well as theoretical knowledge not only to the field of sociology of religion, but also to research on authority and religious education.

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For Billie and Onyxia, the loves of my life.

List of Papers

This thesis is based on the following papers, which are referred to in the text by their Roman numerals.

- I Broberg, Maximilian. 2017. 'The Use of Teaching Materials in Religious Education in Sweden. A quantitative analysis of Swedish religious education teachers' reported use of teaching materials in RE classrooms.' *British Journal of Religious Education*. DOI: 10.1080/01416200.2017.1405795.
- II Toft, Audun, and Maximilian Broberg. 2018. 'Perspectives: Mediatized Religious Education.' In Knut Lundby (ed.). *Contesting Religion: The Media Dynamics of Cultural Conflicts in Scandinavia*. Boston: De Gruyter.
- III Broberg, Maximilian, and Anna Wrammert. 'Multiple Media Literacy in Religious Education. A Qualitative Study of Teachers and Students' Thoughts on Critically Engaging with Mediatized Religion.' Under review.
- IV Broberg, Maximilian. 'Authority on Religion in Mediatized Classrooms.' Under review.

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Chapter 1. Introduction

At a breakfast table somewhere in Sweden, Inez is browsing her daily broadsheet. One of the articles is yet another piece on the case of a Swedish politician who, on self-proclaimed religious grounds, refrained from shaking the hand of a female reporter as they met for an interview.¹ A smile lights up her face: ‘this will do perfectly’ she mumbles while reaching for her pair of scissors. She proceeds to cut out the article and folds it deftly. Inez, who is nearing retirement after over 40 years as a teacher of religious education, would not want her students to think her fogleyish, and bringing something hot off the press is in her experience a safe bet. She will use the article as a springboard to discuss public religion, and the possibility of being both religious and a politician in contemporary Sweden. Yes, that will do just fine. Finishing her coffee, she sets off for work.

Inez is heading to work in a society that few could deny has become increasingly diversified during the past few decades. While religious diversification is but one of the many aspects of this process of change, it poses certain challenges for a society where national, cultural and religious identity have traditionally been closely linked. When Inez went to school in the 1960s, for example, her religious education was called ‘Christianity’ (Kristendomskunskap) and her teacher was a priest.² Since then the church and the state have gone separate ways, one step in a long process of managing religion that appears in forms both increasingly complex and diverse. However, despite being formally separated, the state is still involved in various forms of ‘religion-making’ (Lind, Lövheim and Zackariasson 2016, 9). Whether it is by regulating what a proper religious organization should do in order to receive state funding, or managing the syllabus for mandatory ‘religious education’ (henceforth referred to as ‘RE’) in schools, it is clear that the construction and negotiation of the role of religion and religious beliefs are still very much on the agenda.

¹ This refers to the so-called ‘handshake affair’, where the Swedish Green party politician Yasri Khan refrained from shaking hands with a female reporter with reference to his Islamic faith. The incident received extensive media coverage during the spring of 2016, finally culminating in the politician’s resignation. See for example: <https://www.aftonbladet.se/nyeter/a/EombQP/yasri-khan-mp-vagnarar-ta-kvinnlig-reporter-i-hand>

² Teachers of the subject Christianity did not *have* to be priests, but that Inez’s teacher makes her case even more illustrative.

Swedish RE is a mandatory, non-confessional, integrative subject. The subject, *Religionskunskap*, is called ‘Religion’ in the official English translation that is published by the Swedish National Agency for Education (Skolverket 2011a).³ This thesis will cover both lower and upper secondary schools, which have separate course plans but have in common that all students, regardless of personal conviction, take the classes together, and that the general purpose of the subject is to promote tolerance and understanding of others’ as well as one’s own convictions.⁴

While bound to follow the national curriculum in terms of learning outcomes and core content, teachers are in most instances free to choose their own methods and materials. As shown in Article I, a majority of RE teachers in Sweden use a textbook to a certain extent, but in most cases as a form of structure which is then complemented with a variety of self- or collegially-composed materials. Thus teachers are for all intents and purposes free to decide, for example, which media events to focus on in class, which movies about religion are shown, who gets to represent or speak for a certain religion in class, and so on.

Given the above, it is clear that Inez and her fellow RE teachers play a central role in the construction and negotiation of the role of religion in contemporary Sweden. However, as her morning routine illustrates, so does the media. Inez frequently uses news articles, YouTube-videos and other forms of media materials in her teaching. On a practical level she uses them as springboards for discussion, but more abstractly as a sort of compass to guide her towards where in society religion is presently seen as relevant. This ambition to show the students live examples of contemporary religion is elaborated on in Article II. There is nothing inherently wrong with this ambition; indeed, it is in line with both the national curriculum and the RE syllabus, and studies have shown that students enjoy discussing ‘real’, lived religion, especially if there are conflictual or controversial aspects involved (e.g. Dinham and Shaw 2015). However, what appears in the media is influenced by certain media dynamics (Eskjær, Hjarvard and Mortensen 2015), and are likely to accentuate conflict and controversy, especially if the media concerned is any kind of news media (Entman 1989).

The influence of the media, now researched under the broad headline of ‘mediatization’, stretches from conditioning patterns of social interaction to the intricate workings of societal institutions (Hepp 2013; Hjarvard 2013; Lundby 2014). Couldry and Hepp (2017) go as far as claiming that we can

³ Although the Swedish National Agency for Education uses the name ‘Religion’, I will refer to the subject as ‘Religious Education’ (or RE for short) since this is the term employed internationally when referring to both secular and confessional education about, or in, religion.

⁴ In Sweden, the state also funds independent confessional schools. These schools are bound to follow the same course plans as public schools, but can in reality manage their RE in a more confessional way. As these schools are quite few, an active decision not to include any of them in the material was made early in the research process.

now talk about the *mediated* construction of reality, an allusion to, and extension of, the argument Berger and Luckmann presented in *The Social Construction of Reality* in 1966. In a nutshell, this means that mediated interaction now precedes face-to-face conversation as the primary way of constructing and contesting ‘reality’.

The story of Inez is inspired by one of the teachers participating in this study, and while modified for stylistic purposes, it captures many of the questions I have engaged with in this study. I will elaborate on media’s increased influence over, and intermingling with, religious education, and the dynamics that spring from it. How do RE teachers grapple with these dynamics on an individual level, and how can the teachers’ actions be understood as practices that are both the product of, and constituting parts in building, RE as an institution?

Little research has actually been done on how these institutions, the media and the school system, interact in their respective roles as conveyors of knowledge about religion. Sociology of religion, a subject dedicated to studying the relationship between religion and society, has spent much time researching religious socialization in church and in families, but not in schools and in media (Lövheim 2012a). The reason for turning to media and schools here is to study how teachers’ authority and agency is shaped by a situation where the re-creation of knowledge about religion mainly takes place in educational or media contexts rather than within religious institutions. While recent attention has been given to media, for example how different forms of media (blogs, news outlets or popular culture) have come to influence religion in various ways (Lövheim 2018), secular religious education has often been overlooked.

In this study, I will highlight some of the media dynamics that RE teachers are faced with in their classrooms, and how these dynamics play a central role in how RE is conducted in Sweden. The study will contribute to the nuancing of mediatization theory by studying it outside the settings traditionally studied within the field, and will highlight religious education as a place where construction and negotiation of the role of religion in contemporary Sweden takes place.

This dissertation was written as part of the Uppsala-based research project ‘Teaching Religion in Late Modern Sweden’ (TRILS).⁵ Led by associate professor Anders Sjöborg, the project sought to shed light on how teachers of RE in Sweden handle the various tensions they face in their work, particularly tensions related to increased cultural and religious diversity. My focus in the project was on questions related to media, and this part of the project is what is presented in this study. Working in a small project, most of the research

⁵ The research team consisted of associate professor Anders Sjöborg, senior lecturer Malin Löfstedt, PhD student Maximilian Broberg, and research assistant Johan Dynewall. All members of the team were situated at the Faculty of Theology, Uppsala University.

design, as well as its execution in terms of gathering and organizing data, was done collaboratively (see Chapter 3). However, I had the main responsibility for any and all questions on media-related topics, both in the quantitative and qualitative parts of the study. Thus, while the material on which this thesis is built belongs to the TRILS project, the analysis made and conclusions drawn in this text are my own.

Before proceeding to the purpose and structure of this study, a few things need to be clarified. First, a researcher's ontological and epistemological position is an integral part of his or her research, and should thus be spelled out clearly (Miles and Huberman 1994). Thus, I would position myself somewhere between social constructivism and critical realism. In line with Smith (2005), I view all knowledge as socially negotiated, with language being absolutely central to this negotiation. However, since language itself is dependent on spatial and temporal parameters, and can be written down, recorded, and, indeed mediated, language also has a material aspect. This indicates that knowledge is not something that can simply be discovered, but is something that is negotiated in the interaction between the knower and the knowable (or, if you will, between the researcher and the researched). This interaction is necessarily subjective and contextual, indicating that the identity of the knower will highly influence how the knowable is interpreted (that is, negotiated) (Lincoln and Guba 1985, 37; 2013, 40). This is the case with all kinds of materials, qualitative and quantitative, hard facts or a hunch of a hunch. Thus, a survey and an observation alike are subject to these challenges, although one might be better suited than the other, depending on the context.

A common critique of interpretative epistemologies is that they are inherently negative in their approach to knowledge. Thus, whereas for example positivism and critical realism are concerned with positive accumulation of (fallible) knowledge, the various forms of interpretative constructivism are concerned with the (negative) deconstruction of knowledge, instead focusing on the discursive power behind the knowledge. I would argue, however, that a constructivist approach does not exclude the possibility of positive accumulation of knowledge, and that the recognition of, for example, strong institutions, does not contradict a constructivist stance, especially not when considering Smith's view of language as material (2005). Couldry and Hepp's *The Mediated Construction of Reality* (2017) is an excellent example of how a clear social constructivist approach can be used when studying how certain structures influence social change. These kinds of 'blurred genres' or overlapping paradigms are becoming more and more accepted (Lincoln, Lynham and Guba 2018).

Consequently, in this study, I recognize that the Swedish school system, 'the media' and religious institutions all represent social structures that individuals relate to, and that the discursive deconstruction of why these institutions happen to be what they are in society does not change this fact. Institutions are in this study considered as entities that provide stability and meaning

to social behaviour (Scott 1995, 33). Institutions are furthermore considered to have different sets of ‘rules’, ‘logics’, or ‘dynamics’, which in various ways affect how they operate. In line with new institutionalism and the more recent trends within institutional mediatization research (e.g. Hjarvard 2016), these institutional logics are, just like laws, norms, and conventions, socially negotiated. They are the products of human interaction which have been formulated and crystallized over time. Thus, institutions are regulatory by nature, but the relation between structure and actor is still dynamic. John Searle (2010) describes this dynamic between actors and structure as a continuous process of institutionalization and deinstitutionalization, where structural regulation is being constantly strengthened, and questioned, by the actors who in different ways relate to the institution. The actors in this study are the teachers who, in their engagement with mediated religion, simultaneously strengthen and question media dynamics (that is, structures) in the classroom. Their teaching practices with regard to using media are manifestations of institutional structures, as will be discussed further in Chapter 2.

Finally, a few words about the title of this dissertation. Raised in a family who did not go to church, I had my first memorable encounter with religion at the age of 10, through the videogame *Diablo*.⁶ My mentor in the game, a town elder named Deckard Cain, would tell me about the eternal fight between heaven and hell, good and evil, angels and demons. Deckard Cain would implore me to ‘stay awhile and listen’, and his stories are to this day a very real source for me whenever I am faced with concepts such as ‘holy’, ‘sacred’, ‘evil’, and so on. The teachers in this study reveal that they are faced with similarly unlikely and diverse sources of information about various expressions of religion in their daily practice. Various media outlets, ranging from video games to song lyrics to mockumentaries, often offer conflicting views of the meaning of various concepts. Students will talk about reincarnation as a way of ‘levelling up and being reborn at a new level’, or that something the teacher says is ‘just like in *Game of Thrones*’. Thus, to me, ‘Stay Awhile and Listen’ is emblematic for this study in several ways. It is in one sense an encouragement to pause one’s headlong rush and learn from people with more experience. In another sense, it serves as a warning of just how many sources of knowledge are available in contemporary society. Literally millions of clickbait articles, commercials, push notifications and status updates are roaring: ‘stay awhile and listen!’ RE teachers are among all these voices.

⁶ *Diablo* is a Role-Playing Game developed by Blizzard Entertainment and was first released in 1997. Your mission in the game is to defeat *Diablo*, the Lord of Terror. In order to do so you have to develop your character and, occasionally, slay various kinds of monsters. If you run into trouble, or find an ancient artefact you need help identifying, you turn to Deckard Cain.

1.1 Purpose and Research Questions

Am I supposed to let the media control my teaching? Spontaneously it feels like the answer should be ‘no’, but yes, I think so. If the school shouldn’t help the students understand the reality they live in, then who should? (Regina, upper secondary school, May 2016)

1.1.1 Purpose

The quote above illustrates many of the queries I have grappled with in this dissertation. It points towards a certain ambivalence among teachers concerning the role of media in their teaching; that its role is contentious, and far from self-evident. Just like Regina, many teachers I have interviewed bring up the duality of the media; on the one hand it is a window through which the world can be brought into the classroom, but on the other hand, the glass in the window is tinted, and what can be seen through it is shaped according to the *modus operandi* of various media.

The quote also accentuates the question of who has authority on religion in Sweden today. Regina does not view herself as better suited than the media in formulating what aspects of religion are relevant in contemporary society, but at the same time, from her perspective as a teacher of religious education, it is natural that it is her job, rather than the job of religious organizations, to help her students ‘understand the reality they live in’. Central to and embedded in this role of teachers – as guides to the complexities of modern life – is giving students the tools to critically engage with mediated expressions of, in this case, religion (e.g. Skolverket 2011a).

I have chosen to situate these queries within the theoretical context of mediatization of religion, as formulated by Stig Hjarvard in 2008 and continuously expanded on since then (e.g. Hjarvard 2011; Hjarvard and Lövheim 2012; Lövheim 2014; Hjarvard 2016; Hjarvard and Lundby 2018; Lövheim and Hjarvard 2019).

Mediatization of religion attempts to capture a process ‘through which religious beliefs, agency, and symbols are becoming influenced by the workings of various media’ (Hjarvard 2016, 8). While such changes cannot be captured by a single small-scale study such as this one, it is still possible to identify smaller steps in, and aspects of, this process in a particular setting (c.f. Lundby and Thorbjørnsrud 2012). I will, therefore, study some of these steps and aspects in an RE setting in order to further explore how the ‘workings of various media’ come to influence RE in particular. It is thus on an institutional level I study how this would-be influence changes the conditions for authority on religion, and what room can be found for individual agency in this interaction. My focus is, however, *not* on comparing the institutional dynamics of media on the one hand and RE on the other. Rather, the level on which this institutional interaction will be studied is through the teachers’ practice relating to

various kinds of media in the classroom, accessed by surveying, observing and interviewing RE teachers.

Practice is here understood as routinized ‘forms of bodily activities, forms of mental activities, “things” and their use, a background knowledge in the form of understanding, know-how, states of emotion and motivational knowledge’ (Reckwitz 2002, 249). This view of practice supports a ‘dynamic view of institutions and offer[s] a set of concepts to further the understanding of ... “institutional work”’ (Nicolini 2013, 15), which is rather similar to the new institutionalism approach employed in recent strands of mediatization of religion research (e.g. Lövheim and Hjarvard 2019) that suggests that institutions are constantly made and remade through material and discursive work. Separating teachers’ practices from their own theorizing or interpretation of these is not always possible, as reflection in an interview situation is in itself a form of practice (Afdal 2008, 200). I thus view teachers’ practices partly through activities and objects I have observed in the classroom, but primarily through the knowledge, feelings, and motivations the teachers shared with me in the interviews. It is by looking at how these practices relate to, or are influenced by, various media that I study institutional dynamics.

The questions highlighted above by Regina’s reflection on her teaching are central on a practical level in terms of how to develop the best possible religious education in Sweden, but also on a theoretical level, as changes in authority on religion, and the literacy to engage with media dynamics, are two of the most acute topics of contemporary mediatization research. Thus, *the purpose of this dissertation is, through a mediatization of religion perspective, to acquire a better understanding of the role of media in Swedish religious education. This will be done by highlighting quantitative as well as qualitative aspects of how media interacts with religious education on an institutional level, manifested through the practices of RE teachers. Finally, the study will contribute to the field by studying mediatization of religion in an educational context.*

1.1.2 Research Questions

In order to pursue the purpose, several research questions have been formulated. The first, overarching question is:

I What role does media play in religious education in contemporary Sweden?

In order to answer this question, four articles have been written, each targeting a specific aspect of how media and RE are interconnected in Sweden. The questions below correspond to the questions posed in these articles, with question 1 referring to Article I and so on.

1. *What kinds of media materials do Swedish RE teachers use in their teaching?*
2. *What kinds of media dynamics are present in RE classrooms where media materials are used?*
3. *How can RE teachers' and students' engagements with mediated religion be analysed from a multiple media literacies perspective?*
4. *How do RE teachers construct authority on religion in a mediatized situation?*

These questions will, while not in an exhaustive manner, collectively answer the overarching research question. However, although these questions all aim to shed light on the role of media in Swedish RE, they also pose relevant questions to the fields of mediatization of religion, religious education, and authority on religion. Therefore, the concluding question is formulated as such:

- II. *In what ways does the study of mediatization in an educational context contribute to the development and nuancing of mediatization of religion research?*

This will be done by adding an empirically informed discussion of how media in various ways come to influence RE teachers' practices, in terms of what didactic choices they make, what aspects of religion they focus on, what kind of agency they have in relation to various media, and how they construct their authority in the classroom.

1.2 Structure of the Thesis

This is an article-based dissertation, which in this case means that it is based around three journal articles and one book chapter. These texts will be referred to in the text as Article I through IV. As is common within our academic field, articles in peer-reviewed journals are severely limited in length, and thus methodological reflections and theoretical musings are often omitted in order to leave room for results. Therefore, just as it is customary for your typical monograph to have thorough chapters on methodology and theory before the empirical chapters, and an extensive discussion at the end, so too will this dissertation. These chapters, which will be described below, will embrace the

articles like a snug coat⁷, giving them a context to reside in and theories to converse with.

Chapter 2 will serve to contextualize the project, both in terms of previous research and my theoretical framework. In short, why does it matter where the study has been conducted, and how does the project relate to the fields of sociology of religion, media studies, authority, and studies on RE, in Sweden and abroad? Notable here is that, in contrast to what I stated in the previous paragraph, context is one of the things my journal articles *does* contain, hence rather than repeating what I have written elsewhere (that is, in the articles), I will, so to say, put the context sections of the articles in a broader theoretical context. Central theoretical approaches in this chapter will be mediatization, its history and current applications, various models of authority, as well as media literacy. As the theoretical depth and scope of the articles vary, (they are written for different audiences and in varying genres) this is where it will be made clear how the articles relate to each other, and to the dissertation as a whole.

As far as theories go, mediatization theory will act as my conversational partner throughout the text, and it is in a sense the theory on the ‘highest level’ in the dissertation. The project is, after all, in the very broadest sense about how contemporary media in all its terrible beauty changes the conditions of how we understand the world, how we communicate, and how we act. This, to a large extent, is what mediatization theory is concerned with on a societal level.

This study will focus primarily on what implications mediatization has for education or knowledge about religion. Two of these implications are particularly relevant to my material: implications for authority, and implications for agency. For authority, mediatization of religion is likely to change the conditions for who can claim authority on religion, and on what grounds. Drawing on Lövheim and Hjarvard (2019), I will use various models of authority (Kim 2009; Pace and Hemmings 2006; 2007; Weber 1978a) to try and tease out what characterizes teachers’ authority on religion in my material. As for agency, I argue that in order to grasp how individuals, in this case teachers, are able to make sense of a mediatized world, we need concepts that specifically target the interplay between structure and agency. One such concept is media literacy. This concept, true to its name, is a way of studying someone’s ability to interpret and communicate mediated content. While to a certain extent the concept will be used for just that, I will also argue that the concept may offer an opportunity for me to understand how the teachers approach some of the structural influences that media dynamics bring to the classroom.

Chapter 3 will create a coherent methodology for the dissertation. The methodology will be presented with a focus on how my understanding of

⁷ Coat, or *kappa* in Swedish, is a common way of referring to this extended introduction and discussion that complements the articles in article-based dissertations.

knowledge affects what conclusions I am able to draw based on my material, and how the material of this dissertation operates on various levels of generalizability and abstraction, depending on how the material is viewed. How I view institutional change in the interplay between structure and the individual will also be dealt with in this chapter. Included in this chapter will also be a brief description of the methods used in the project (survey, observations, and interviews), accounts of how the different materials were coded and analysed, as well as how the various materials enable me to answer the different research questions and support my claims.

The fourth and final chapter of the dissertation is a discussion that draws on the previous chapters as well as the articles. Here the research questions are answered, and the answers are thoroughly discussed in order to develop certain aspects of mediatization of religion theory, specifically aspects concerning agency and authority. The discussion will be based on the fact that media play a central role in the teachers' daily activities, and that this highlights some of the possible ramifications of a mediatized society. I argue that Swedish religious education is a setting in which the shift in control over information and knowledge about religion from religious organizations to other institutionalised domains should be studied. As such, this dissertation illustrates the dynamics of mediatization and its role in co-structuring authority on religion, as well as media literacy, in contemporary Sweden.

1.2.1 The articles

As stated, this dissertation is based on four articles. In order to make the rest of the text as comprehensible as possible, short summaries of the articles are given below.

Article I is called '*The Use of Teaching Materials in Religious Education in Sweden: a quantitative analysis of Swedish religious education teachers' reported use of teaching materials in RE classrooms*'. In the article, a nationally representative survey answered by 1292 RE teachers was analysed, with the results indicating that apart from the more traditional materials such as textbooks, pictures, and sacred texts, teachers make extensive use of various media materials in their teaching. Based on a factor analysis, I conclude in the article that a familiarity with a certain form of material through personal experiences is a plausible explanation for why some teachers select certain kinds of materials. The article also includes a discussion on the need for further research to explore the potential complexities that arise in the juxtaposition of classroom and media dynamics. The article serves as a springboard in the dissertation, as it shows what materials teachers use but leaves unanswered the questions of why and how these materials are used, and what possible implications this has for teaching RE. The role of this article in the thesis is primarily to answer research question 1.

Article II is a book chapter called '*Perspectives: Mediatized Religious Education*'. The chapter was co-authored with Norwegian Ph.D. Audun Toft as part of the CoMRel project⁸, and is a comparative case study between Swedish and Norwegian RE.⁹ Through classroom observations and interviews with teachers, the authors show that teachers rely heavily on media materials and discourses in their teaching. In the article, we argue that these materials and discourses influence both the choice of topics and how they are presented in the classrooms. The teachers also seem willing to adapt their teaching to what they think the students would want to hear about. In the article, these findings are discussed from an institutional mediatization perspective. The primary role of Article II is to answer research question 2.

Article III is called '*Multiple Media Literacy in Religious Education. A Qualitative Study of Teachers and Students' Thoughts on Critically Engaging with Mediatized Religion*'. This article is also a collaborative effort¹⁰, this time with Anna Wrammert, a fellow PhD-student at the Faculty of Theology in Uppsala. By using the concept of multiple media literacies (Meyrowitz 1998), we sought to develop the understanding of media literacy within RE research. By analysing interviews with teachers and students about their engagements with mediated religion, we argued that teachers and students alike seemed to be well equipped, and rather similar in their approach, to critically engage with mediated religion. While this was certainly the case if media was understood as conduits for information, both teachers and students were less likely to view media as languages or environments (these concepts are elaborated on in Chapter 2). In this thesis, this article will primarily be used to answer research question 3.

Article IV is called '*Authority on Religion in Mediatized Classrooms*'. By conducting an instrumental case study, the purpose of this article was to explore what characterizes RE teachers' authority on religion, and how the construction of authority on religion in RE classrooms is co-structured by various media dynamics. The results show that various media indeed play a role in how the teacher in the study negotiates her authority with her students, but the nature of this influence seems to be highly contextual, and it is more a question of adapting one's authority to larger societal developments than it is about letting particular media institutions set the terms for the teacher's practice. This article will primarily serve to answer research question 4.

⁸ Audun Toft compiled the main draft of the chapter based on a collaborative analysis of the material. The collection of material, as well as the description of cases and contexts in the text, was done individually by the respective authors.

⁹ *Contesting Religion: The Media Dynamics of Cultural Conflicts in Scandinavia* (CoMRel) is a research project funded by the Norwegian Research Council. For more information, see: <http://www.hf.uio.no/imk/english/research/projects/comrel/>

¹⁰ Maximilian Broberg compiled the main draft of the article based on a collaborative analysis of the material. Collection of the material was conducted individually by the respective authors.

Chapter 2. Research Context and Theory

This chapter will place the dissertation into its research context. I will begin with my own field, sociology of religion, in order to make explicit some of the assumptions I make, and positions I take, when approaching this field. This will include a constructivist epistemology¹¹, a working definition of religion, and to what extent I see it as possible to study institutional change in my study. From there I will elaborate on why religious education is a setting where some of the developments of mediatization of religion theory, specifically with regard to individual agency and authority on religion, should be studied.

2.1 Sociology of Religion

Religion in Scandinavian societies is a phenomenon that is simultaneously declining and increasing in social significance (Brewer 2013; Furseth 2018). This realization is reflected in the development within the Nordic sociology of religion, which has moved away from the classical secularization thesis, to a more dynamic view of religious change (e.g. Davie 2007). Furseth (2018) describes these non-linear developments and whimsical expressions of religion as ‘religious complexity’.

My analysis of how this complexity is expressed with regard to Swedish RE teachers’ authority and agency will start out from the position of social constructivism. My position that knowledge about the world is socially negotiated means that the places where religion is engaged with are consequently the places where such negotiations take place and, in turn, places where they can be studied.¹² This understanding is based on, and supported by, recent studies that have shown that, in Sweden, the majority of people encounter religion primarily through media, among friends and family, or in school or at work (Lövheim and Lied 2018). Thus for young people, apart from family and friends, the two main institutions within which religion is engaged with are the school system and the media (Klingenberg and Sjöborg 2015; Löfstedt and Sjöborg 2019; Lövheim and Bromander 2012; Lövheim and Lied 2018).

¹¹ This will be elaborated on in Chapter 3.

¹² To me, this statement highlights that change happens through different forms of social interaction. An alternative view would be that change happens *because* of state regulation, or *because* of de-privatization, and such causal/linear relationships is something I would challenge in this study.

In order to study teachers' practice with regard to the use of mediated religion, I will need a definition of religion that is sensitive to the established institutionalized forms of religion while embracing the fact that these forms of religion are challenged, and their legitimacy questioned, in the wake of increased mediatization (Lövheim and Lied 2018). To clarify, while historical institutionalizations of religion remain in contemporary Sweden, the increased visibility and diversification of religion, partly due to mediatization, is blurring the borders of what is considered as religion, who can claim authority over religion, and so on. In the case of religious education, which is meant to cover all these aspects of religion, a combined analytical approach will be needed.

When identifying religion in the teachers' practice and reflections, for example, a substantial definition will be used, since RE often concerns the teaching of the symbols, practices, and creeds of the major religions of the world (Skolverket 2011a; 2011b; 2011c). For this purpose, Hill's definition from 1973 will serve my purposes:

The set of beliefs which postulate and seek to regulate the distinction between an empirical reality and a related and significant supra-empirical segment of reality; the language and symbols which are used in relation to this distinction; and the activities and institutions which are connected with its regulation. (Hill 1973, 42-43)

This approach to religion specifies religion as a form of meaning-making that can be divided into beliefs, language, and symbols that concern a supra-empirical reality, their organized forms, as well as the social activities involved in maintaining these systems. For the present study, this serves to identify when teachers or students refer to religion, or when media materials of different sorts contain references to religion. The definition also corresponds to what Chaves (1994) relates his concept of religious authority, which will lay the conceptual foundation of my own discussion on authority on religion.

There are also aspects of the material, for example in classroom discussions or in teachers' reflections thereof, where established and substantive forms of religion are challenged or disputed. Often, as will be shown in the material, this is a question of authority; what is more important for the students: What is written in the Quran, or what a fellow student claims? What is broadcast on the news or what a famous blogger wrote? Regardless whether something is formally anchored in institutionalized religious traditions, or highly disputed, it is central to this study if, how, and why the teacher grants legitimacy to that particular expression of religion. Referring to Meyer and Moors' (2006, 7) definition of religion as 'practices of mediation', Lövheim and Lied (2018, 74) state that 'practices of mediation ... [bring] into focus that the meaning and legitimacy of certain forms of religion is an outcome of how – through different material forms and practices – it is mediated'.

In this study, I will use a combination of these two approaches. I use the definition provided by Hill (1973) as a foundation, but recognize that institutional and organizational forms of religion are often disputed, and in being disputed they are also open to change (e.g. Beckford 2003, 3). This becomes actualized in the material when, for example, a teacher asks the class if a particular piece of news about Islam is representative of all Muslims.

2.2 Religious Education in Sweden

As mentioned in the introduction, the articles around which this dissertation is built all contain sections that analyse particular expressions of media use in Swedish RE, but little has so far been said about the subject itself. Swedish RE is a non-confessional, integrative, mandatory school subject throughout the entirety of Sweden's 12-year school system (Alberts 2007). The subject's *raison d'état* is stated by the Swedish National Agency for Education to be that:

People throughout the ages and in all societies have tried to understand and explain their living conditions and the social contexts of which they form a part. Religions and other outlooks on life are thus central elements of human culture. In today's society, characterised by diversity, knowledge of religions and other outlooks on life is important in creating mutual understanding between people. (Skolverket 2011a, 218)

To acquire this knowledge, a rather ambitious curriculum has been formulated. In lower secondary school, RE teaching should contain, and this is just a sample: key ideas and documents of Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Hinduism and Buddhism; interpretations and practices of world religions in contemporary society *and* their historical evolution; new religious and non-religious movements; the relationship between society and religion in various contexts; the relationship between religion and politics and conflicts in various contexts; conflicts and opportunities concerning freedom of religion, gender equality and sexuality; how life-issues such as the purpose of life is depicted in popular culture; how religion in various ways can influence one's identity; ethical questions and concepts, and much more (Skolverket 2011a, 221-2). Although the subject has no explicit bias toward any particular religion, the historical and cultural impact of Christianity in Sweden is highlighted in the national curriculum (Skolverket 2011a, 218). In upper secondary school, RE becomes more analytical and theoretical. The core content focuses even more on individual and societal implications of religion. Intersectionality and interpretation become central concepts, and the relationship between science and religion, and how individual and group identities can be shaped by a variety of factors, including 'sacred texts' and 'social media' (Skolverket 2011c, 2), become more important than the historical facts taught in previous stages.

This being said, there are various reasons why Swedish RE is a setting where the institutional changes proposed by mediatization of religion can be studied. Important to note here is the abovementioned fact that young peoples' encounters with religion occur mainly in school, or through the media (e.g. Minnaar-Kuiper and Trost 2017; Löfstedt and Sjöborg 2019; von der Lippe 2011). The media and the school system are both considered institutions in this study, and although they have much in common, they are also fundamentally different. While the media may, for example, report on religious matters (journalism on religion), or be used by religious actors to communicate their faith (religious media), RE has the explicit task, on behalf of the state, to educate the Swedish population about religious and non-religious worldviews, as well as how such worldviews can be linked to matters of identity, sexuality, ethics, and so on (Skolverket 2011a; 2011c).

Added to this, it is clear that membership and active participation in religious organizations and services are declining. In the last 20 years, the confirmation numbers have dropped by about 50 percent, from 46.8 percent in 1998, to 23.3 percent in 2018 (Church of Sweden 2019). During the same period, RE was mandatory for everyone in lower secondary school, and for most programmes at upper secondary school, thus reaching virtually every young person in Sweden. Why is this significant? While this does not mean the country's youth is becoming less religious, it does mean that knowledge about religion is more likely to come from RE than from a religious organization, and that this shift is likely to continue.¹³ Furthermore, the state, being the benefactor of the school system, takes an active role in managing the contents of these religious encounters.

The control that the state has over RE manifests mainly through the national curriculum and the syllabuses for the different RE courses the students have to attend. What these contain has been discussed elsewhere (e.g. Berglund 2013) and why they contain what they do will be discussed below, but these steering documents provide a certain framework, or language, within which RE takes place. Within this framework, certain traditions of thought, such as the so-called 'world religions', are perceived as more central, and certain opinions, such as racist or xenophobic ones, are not allowed to be voiced.¹⁴ Critical reflection about one's own and others' worldviews are however encouraged, as long as it is done with respect. None of this is problematic in itself, but it does highlight certain normative and performative aspects of RE as a subject.

¹³ Although the church of Sweden is not the only religious organization in Sweden, it is by far the largest. Thus the comparison between RE and the church of Sweden is in a sense the most 'fair' case I could make here. Official religious rites of passage such as the Christian confirmation are however not the only way religious organizations communicate their views, something that will be problematized later on.

¹⁴ This was frequently discussed in the interviews. Swedish teachers are required to react to racist or other forms of expressions from their students. How this is done, however, varies a lot between teachers.

It is a context where religion(s) *should* be presented, compared, discussed, contested, and so on, and by the end of the course, the students *should* (ideally) have acquired a view of religion compatible with contemporary societal and political aspirations, aligning with multiculturalism and religious diversification. This form of RE has been described as ‘critical religious education’ (Wright 2007), meaning that although factual and/or historical knowledge of various religious traditions is still important, the overall approach is to engage students in ‘interpretations’ (Jackson 2004) of religion, rather than dogmatic truth claims (Stern 2010).

Finally, because of the dominant role of RE as a conveyor of information about religion, it also holds a certain authority in constructing what religion is or ought to be in society, and RE teachers become the vehicles of this authority. RE classrooms, then, become sites where a form of authority over the meaning of religion, without any formal ties to any religion or religious institution in particular, is exercised. How this authority is gained and maintained is another matter, however, as the students do not necessarily view their teachers as authorities. Put differently, to be an authority on religion and to have authority in the classroom is not the same thing.

2.3 Media and Mediatization

Thus far, I have argued that RE is a setting where the institutional dynamics imposed by mediatization of religion can be studied. While the basics of mediatization and mediatization of religion have been briefly mentioned, it is time we took a closer look at these concepts, and how they will be used in this study.

2.3.1 Mediatization

Put simply, something is going on with media in our lives, and it is deep enough not to be reached simply by accumulating more and more specific studies that analyze this newspaper, describe how that program was produced, or trace how particular audiences make sense of that film on a particular occasion. (Couldry and Hepp 2013, 191)

Mediatization has emerged during the last few years as a unifying concept within communications research for exploring ‘the long-term interrelation processes between media change on the one hand and social and cultural change on the other’ (Hepp, Hjarvard, and Lundby 2010, 223). As hinted at by the introductory quote, the ‘effects’ of these interrelation processes can be particularly difficult to trace, partly due to the fact that media is so integrated into modern societies that its experimental removal is seemingly impossible (Lazarsfeld and Merton, [1948]1969). According to Couldry and Hepp (2017,

57), this is largely due to the fact that the history of mediatization can be traced back through five or six centuries of overlapping communicative developments.¹⁵ Chronologically, mechanization, electrification, digitalization and finally datafication all interrelate in a complex system of communication. The latest two, digitalization and datafication, are aspects of *deep* mediatization as they represent an embedding of media into social and cultural processes to a much greater extent than did the development of mechanization and electrification (2017, 57).

That mediatization has become the more-or-less-agreed-upon way to refer to research about what is ‘going on with the media’ does not necessarily indicate that there is a conceptual unity within the field(s) where the term is used. In their introduction to a special issue on mediatization, Couldry and Hepp (2013, 195-7) identify two distinct traditions within mediatization research, one institutional, the other social constructivist. The institutional approach takes as its vantage point structural differentiation and understands media as an independent social institution with its own set of rules (e.g. Hjarvard 2008, 2013). The approach relates back to the early works of Altheide and Snow (1979) and the concept of ‘media logics’ as a way of describing the particular ‘rules’ of the media (Couldry and Hepp 2013, 196). The argument is that not only has the media become an independent institution, but media has also become an indispensable part of the workings of other institutions, to the extent that ‘doing politics’ or ‘doing religion’ is hard to imagine without including various media (Hjarvard 2016). In contrast, the social constructivist approach focuses on the role of various media in the social construction of society. The point of departure being Berger and Luckmann’s *The Social Construction of Reality* (1967), this approach attempts to capture the complexities of how certain media processes have consequences for how sociocultural reality is communicatively constructed. From this perspective, ‘media logics’ are too narrow and unidirectional to capture the interrelated and interdependent nature of modern media (see Couldry and Hepp 2017 for an extensive account of this approach).

This being said, in recent years these two approaches have grown closer (e.g. Lundby 2014; 2018). While sprung from rather different theoretical perspectives¹⁶, both approaches would agree on the definition of mediatization by Hepp, Hjarvard and Lundby given above, that ‘mediatization’, both as a field and as a category, is designed to describe change, and how media is involved in this change. As the institutional approach does not deny that various media, in fact, play a central part in the social construction of reality (e.g. Hjarvard and Lundby 2018), and the social constructivist approach agrees that media institutionalize human communicative practices on various levels

¹⁵ Not the concept but the processes it refers to.

¹⁶ Archetypically, critical realism from the institutional side, and relativism/social constructivism from the other.

(Couldry and Hepp 2017, 52), I would argue that one approach does not have to be chosen at the expense of the other in this study. Hence, when referring to ‘the long-term interrelation processes between media change on the one hand and social and cultural change on the other’ I acknowledge both ‘the mediated construction of reality’ that Couldry and Hepp (2017) argue for, and that the formative power of the media has become institutionalized and has direct and indirect consequences for other societal institutions. Indeed, one could even argue that the mediated construction of reality is a prerequisite for institutional mediatization.

Thus, in relation to my purpose and research questions, both these approaches are relevant. I argue that media and religious education as institutions have distinctly different regulatory practices that limit some, and promote other, forms of action. I also argue and will demonstrate that media has come to influence the nature of how religious education is conducted in Sweden. Still, I will study these changes through the social practices of individuals, as I see individual action both as a manifestation and as constitutive parts in the construction of institutions. This will be elaborated in the section on new institutionalism below, but first we will look at how mediatization is likely to affect two of our main institutions in this study: religion and education.

2.3.1.1 Mediatization of religion

The brief account of the broader field of mediatization research given above has remained on a societal, or macro, level. However, the concept is often used in order to explore the aforementioned interrelation processes in more specific settings, for example within an organization, or within a specific institutionalized context (see for example Knut Lundby’s edited book from 2014 for a myriad of examples of mediatized institutions and practices). In this study, the primary focus is on mediatization of religion. This is to be distinguished from mediatization of education, which will be described in the next section.

Mediatization of religion, as it has been developed by Danish media scholar Stig Hjarvard, takes its vantage point in the institutional mediatization perspective and refers to the processes ‘through which religious beliefs, agency, and symbols are becoming influenced by the workings of various media’ (Hjarvard 2016, 8). Developing the concept of ‘media logics’ (e.g. Altheide and Snow 1979), Hjarvard and Lundby (2018), drawing on Eskjær, Hjarvard and Mortensen (2015), have suggested three different media ‘dynamics’: (1) amplification, (2) framing and performative agency, and (3) co-structuring. These are constructed as the ‘dynamics’ of the media metaphors presented by Meyrowitz in 1993, which suggest media can be viewed as conduits, languages, environments. Relating these metaphors and dynamics to religion in particular, viewing media as *conduits* suggests that media have, due to their ability to *amplify* the volume, speed, and reach of religious content, become one of the major sources of information on religion in society. Viewing media

as *languages* indicates that media are involved in the *framing* and have a certain kind of *performative agency*, which results in information on religion being shaped according to the media genre they are presented through, and what positions of agency individuals can realize. Finally, viewing media as *environments* suggests that media have taken over some of the social and communal functions previously held by religious organizations, which in a social-constructivist sense indicates that media practices are ‘both embedded in, and constitutive of, structural relations of power’ (Eskjær, Hjarvard and Mortensen 2015, 10). In sum, a variety of media have become major actors in, and controllers of, the production and distribution of information and experiences concerning religion. As will be elaborated on in the section on authority below (section 2.4), these dynamics ‘co-structure the formation of authority in new ways’ (Hjarvard 2016, 12), prompting religious communities and organizations to look for alternative ways to reassert their authority in mediatized societies. To be clear, the fact that various media outlets are positioned here as actors does not mean that the rest of society is simply acted *upon* by these media. Rather, just as with any societal change, the change in how information on religion is produced and distributed is the result of a wide variety of processes, such as secularization, individualization, development of new technologies, and so on. Furthermore, media seem to co-structure not only the way in which these other processes affect individuals and society, but also their implications (Lövheim and Hjarvard 2019).

2.3.1.2 Mediatization of education

It should come as no surprise that an institution such as the school system has also come to be influenced by the mediatization of society. An Australian study by Rawolle and Lingarn (2014) indicates that a widespread media focus on questions of multiculturalism and pluralization has forced the school system to adapt accordingly, with Ministers of Education adapting to media discourses and consequently changing syllabuses and curricula accordingly. This may well be viewed as an example of how media dynamics come into play, both in the structuring of the news reports, and in how politicians feel compelled to respond to investigative journalism and the following public debate. Hence, the example provided by Rawolle and Lingarn should not be viewed as anecdotal evidence for the power media possesses but rather, as has been argued above, as an example of how media can enhance or augment certain dynamics (this is elaborated on in Article IV). Though Rawolle and Lingarn’s study concerns the top layer of the school system as an institution, it is not only on a structural level that education is influenced by mediatization. Classroom practice is also changing, both quantitatively and qualitatively, as a part of mediatization. As will be shown in Article I, media materials are central in classrooms purely due to their sheer volume, with the majority of the surveyed teachers claiming they often or always use a variety of media materials in their

teaching.¹⁷ Similarly, Lied and Toft (2018) and Toft (2019) have skillfully illustrated some of the qualitative changes various media bring to Norwegian RE classrooms. By using media technology, platforms, materials, and dis-courses, teachers do what they can to keep the attention of the students, which is a substantial task in itself, and made even more challenging as the students in the observed classes had been provided with their own laptops by the school.

2.3.1.3 Mediatization, agency and new institutionalism

Given the rather brief outline of the history and claims of mediatization theory above, it is clear that the theory is primarily concerned with social change, on either a societal or institutional level, or on the level of social interaction, depending on the approach. As much of the material in this study consist of teachers' views on their practice and the role media play in it, this poses something of a problem. In response to this, I argue that social change and institutions alike need to be studied through practice, social interaction, communication, and language.

In this dissertation, I will therefore refrain from considering institutions as the Weberian 'iron cage' (1978b) and instead look towards new institutionalism as formulated by, for example, Thornton and Ocasio (1999) and DiMaggio and Powell (1991). Institutions in this sense denote 'the structuring of resources (material and symbolic) and rules (formal and informal) within a larger social and cultural context' (Hjarvard 2016). Institutions have traditionally, through these structures and rules, been viewed to influence individuals in either a regulative or normative way; that is, actions are based either in a fear of punishment or in a will to conform. DiMaggio and Powell (1991) challenge this view as not sufficiently taking into account a cognitive element, where the social and cultural context of the institution is central to the formulation and re-reformulation of the institutional logics (see also Scott 1995). This cognitive element leaves considerably more room for human agency in the workings of institutional logics. Thornton and Ocasio follow the same line of reasoning when defining institutional logics as the various 'socially constructed, historical pattern of material practice, assumptions, values, beliefs, and rules by which individuals produce and reproduce their material subsistence, organize time and space, and provide meaning to their social reality' (1999, 804).

This take on institutions enables a more dynamic view of the institutional approach to mediatization. Previous criticism of mediatization of religion as a theory (e.g. Lövheim 2014; Lövheim and Hjarvard 2019) has expressed concern about the risk of media determinism, and that the theory was underdeveloped when it came to individual agency. There have been several attempts to resolve this issue of agency within mediatization theory. Schofield Clark

¹⁷ See Article I for details on this.

(2012, 170) suggests that we define mediatization as ‘the process by which collective uses of communication media extend the development of independent media industries and their circulation of narratives, contribute to new forms of action and interaction in the social world, and give shape to how we think of humanity and our place in the world’. Hjarvard himself has in response to such suggestions included agency in the aforementioned definition of mediatization of religion, now formulated as the processes ‘through which religious beliefs, *agency*, and symbols are becoming influenced by the workings of various media’ (Hjarvard 2016, 8, my emphasis). This focus on agency is further developed by Lövheim and Hjarvard (2019, 15), who state that if we view institutional logics as ‘continuous processes of reflexive sense-making that includes collective and individual agency, and cultural aspects such as material practice, assumptions, values and beliefs’, we will be better equipped to analyse the relationship between institutional dynamics and various manifestations of religion. The dynamics formulated by Hjarvard and Lundby (2018) should thus not be considered as some form of invisible one-way impetus that simply overrides human agency or other institutions’ dynamics but, rather, structures and rules that are formed through, and are deeply intertwined with, social practices.

Studying institutions in a particular temporal and spatial context comes with an important caveat. I cannot in this study analyse the full spectrum of the institutional dynamics and practices involved in the production and reproduction of media and RE as institutions. What I can and will do is to analyse how the teachers’ practices, in particular situations, are part of what shapes and re-shapes these institutions. Thus, although I make no claims to being able to identify social change, I argue that breaks and shifts in social structure take place in the ‘everyday crisis of routines’ (Reckwitz 2002, 255), which in this dissertation can be studied in the teachers’ practices.

2.3.2 Media: a multifarious concept

When Couldry and Hepp (2017) claim that reality is a mediated construction, they include a variety of aspects, as they view all forms of communication that are not face-to-face as happening through media. They draw on Schutz's (1967, 163-207) distinction between *Umwelt* and *Mitwelt*, which roughly translates to on the one hand our directly experienced social reality, and on the other hand the more indirect social reality of our contemporaries. This distinction between direct and indirect experiences of reality blurs with the increase of various media. For analytical purposes, it may, however, be fruitful to specify what kind of media one is referring to. A distinction can, for example, be made between media *technologies*, *platforms*, *materials*, and *discourses*. Lied and Toft (2018, 245) present a useful overview of these distinctions, adapted to an RE setting:

- *media technology*, that is, materialized media artefacts and gadgets, such as laptops and cell phones, but also other audio visual equipment that is present in the classroom;
- *media platforms*, that is, online portals that provide access to various categories of media, based on their purpose or function, such as news and entertainment media, as well as social/networked media;
- *media materials*, that is, media products on paper or on screen, mainly, but not exclusively, produced by media professionals and broadcast in the mass media;
- *media discourses*, that is, media language, genres, and frames that shape the way a topic is being talked about; as well as the selection mechanisms that decide the topics that are, in fact, talked about.

Based on this, I want to be clear that, of the categories above, this study focuses on teachers' practices related to the final two: media materials, (such as news articles or entertainment media), and media discourses (which includes both media logics or dynamics on the one hand, and, on the other, particular news stories circulating in various new media which may surface in classrooms). Thus, when stating that a certain medium, for example, amplifies a certain aspect of religion, I remain within these two categories. Similarly, if I claim something is 'circulated in the media', I refer to how stories or narratives are presented in media materials and discourses and not the physical circulation on media platforms or by the use of media technology. Note, however, that I do not claim that the influence of media in our lives can be fully understood without an understanding of all these aspects, only that I cannot account for all of them in a single study.

The reason I make this distinction is to avoid the collapsing of a variety of media-related phenomena into the all-encompassing word 'media'. In the survey and the interviews alike, the questions have been separated between questions regarding the teachers' actual use of media materials and their views on media discourses and their possible implications for the classroom practice.

While both media materials and media discourses are subject to the above-mentioned media dynamics, they are so in slightly different ways. Media materials are media *products* that need to adhere to the logics of their specific genre in order to get, for example, clicks or views, and their presence in RE classrooms signifies both the quantitative spread and the qualitative mix of media with other aspects of society, in this case education. An obvious example is that a textbook on religion and a tabloid news article about religion are two fundamentally different forms of text: one intended for classroom use, the other intended to be (in the best case) newsworthy. Media discourses, on the other hand, signify a certain language by which a subject is framed. They may be present in media materials, but can also be evoked by individuals. That religion is predominantly seen as a problem in Swedish news media is a typical example of a media discourse on religion (e.g. Axner 2015).

2.4 Authority

In this section, I will account for how I view authority in the intersection of sociology of religion, studies of media literacy, and classroom research. I will argue in line with Mark Chaves (1994) for why *authority on religion* needs to be conceptually separated from *religious authority*. I will also discuss different models of teachers' authority, starting with Max Weber (1978a) and ending with Kim Hyun-Sook (2009) and Judith Pace and Annette Hemmings (2007).

2.4.1 Various forms of authority

Before we begin, authority needs to be distinguished from the concept of power. Whereas power can be understood as the ability of an individual or a group to influence the beliefs or actions of others, authority is the recognition by others of this power as legitimate. Thus, the different kinds of authority that will be presented here all concern ways of legitimizing a form of power.

Max Weber was one of the first modern sociologists who wrote on authority. He defined the three 'classical' ideal types of authority: *traditional authority*, *charismatic authority* and *legal-rational authority* (Weber 1978a). These are ideal types, and often work in tandem, hence, they are best understood as analytical concepts, not empirically constructed categories. Traditional authority is based on the established order of things, in routine and conventions; Charismatic authority is based on the perceived exceptional personal qualities of an individual, and legal-rational authority is based in laws and bureaucracy and often involves the ability to administrate rewards and/or punishments. While Weber's ideal types are still useful, since the middle of the 20th century it has been widely recognized that, with the modernization of society, the way authority is gained, maintained, and expressed is shifting in various ways (cf. Arendt 1954; Campbell 2007; Chaves 1994; Giddens 1990; Schofield Clark 2012; Seligman 1990; 2000). Hjarvard (2016), for example, points out that Weber's views on authority were concerned with how authority was exercised within particular institutional hierarchies. Thus, the ideal types are meant to describe ways to legitimize a leader's mandate to demand obedience and to act on behalf of the collective. Weber's categories work excellently when analysing why we should accept our prime minister, the leader of our congregation, or our mother, as authorities in their respective contexts, but less well on how we come to accept the authority of a talk-show host, or a random person on Twitter.

Weber's ideal types in theory work rather well in analysing teachers' authority, and have been successfully used for this in several studies (e.g. Grant 1988; Metz 1978; Pace 2006). Teachers hold a traditional authority in the sense that they have a certain position which students are expected to respect. They may hold a charismatic authority in the form of special personal qualities

that students admire, or connect to emotionally. Teachers certainly also have a legal-rational form of authority in the sense that they can punish or reward students, for example through the grading system.

Following Weber, a fourth ideal-type, *professional authority*, has been developed (Blau 1974; Parsons 1947). While similar to the legal-rational authority, it is based on the expert knowledge needed for a certain profession. It has been argued that this ideal type is better suited for teachers than the other three since it speaks to their pedagogical skills and subject knowledge, as well as their ability to reach educational goals (Pace 2003; Pace and Hemmings 2006).

Emile Durkheim also wrote on what he named teachers' *moral authority*, which he described as 'that influence which imposes upon us all the moral power that we acknowledge as superior to us' (1956, 29). By this, he stresses that one of the most important tasks teachers have is to teach their students how to be good, moral citizens. Teachers are the guardians of the moral order of both school and society, and are themselves morally (and explicitly through the national curriculum) obliged to convey this moral order to the students.

Closely linked to the concept of authority is the notion of leadership. Within classroom management research there is often a distinction made between *authoritarian* and *authoritative* leadership in the classroom (e.g. Baumrind 1971). Both styles rely on a high degree of control in the sense that 'law and order' is enforced in the classroom, but while the authoritarian teacher relies on traditional and legal-rational authority to maintain this control, the authoritative teacher involves the students in a relational way. This relational view of authority is advocated by, for example, Pace and Hemmings (2007), who state that, while teacher-student authority relations are vital to ensure the quality of both the students' education and the teachers' work, the 'actual enactment of classroom authority involves ongoing negotiations between teachers and students influenced by numerous and often conflicting institutional, cultural, and societal factors' (2007, 4-5). These negotiations indicate that authority is a social relationship where some are given the legitimacy to lead while the rest agree to follow (c.f. Friedrich 1958 for a similar argument).

A similar view of authority, building to a large degree on the works of Pace and Hemmings, is the notion of *co-authorship* (Kim 2009). This concept, developed in a South Korean context of confessional Christian religious education, revolves around the dilemma RE teachers face when teaching, on the one hand, normative truth-claims and, on the other hand, promoting individualism and critical thinking. Kim argues that simply demanding obedience will not work in such situations, instead, the teacher has to relinquish the role of 'author' in the classroom and engage with the students on more equal terms (2009). Both Pace and Hemmings (2007) and Kim (2009) are used in Article IV.

Returning for a moment to mediatization of religion, the argument I have made is that who has authority to formulate what should be considered legitimate knowledge on religion is one of the aspects that will change as society

becomes more and more mediatized. One way in which authority within religious contexts has changed is through a shift from religious authority to authority on religion. Chaves (1994) argues that these changes have been brought about by secularization.

2.4.2 Authority and secularization

Chaves (1994) makes a compelling argument that secularization should be understood primarily as a decline in religious authority rather than, for instance, religious beliefs. This is comparable to the thoughts of Bryan Wilson, in that it rejects the notion of individual secularization, but not the structural changes secularization brings as a macro-level process (1982; 1985). I agree with Chaves when he argues that the sociology of religion has tended to flounder within theoretical cul-de-sacs on ‘what religion is’, and that approaching secularization with a Weberian sociologically analytical view on religion may be a way of redeeming this problem (1994, 750). Chaves's argument is based on an understanding of institutional differentiation where religion is understood as one of many institutional spheres (e.g. Hjarvard 2016). He draws on Wilson, who stated that secularization is the ‘process by which religion loses its social significance’ and ‘has lost its presidency over other institutions’ (1985, 15). Notable here is that the presidency that Wilson argues religion is losing is, in a sense, being gained by media due to mediatization, and is thus completely in line with the view of secularization as declining religious authority.

Chaves further draws on Weber, stating that authority is about means rather than ends. Just as political authority is not about a certain political direction but about how to gain enough legitimacy to get there, religious authority is not about a particular religious belief or goal but how the right to formulate, control and legitimize such beliefs and goals are achieved.

When Chaves wrote his 1994 piece on secularization as the process of declining religious authority, he did it as a reaction to what he perceived was a stalemate within the sociology of religion on how to handle the fact that religious belief did not decline at the expected rate. In the decades that have passed since then, the sociology of religion has come to focus less on religious decline (be it on an individual or structural level) and more on religious change (Davie 2007), or religious complexity (Furseth 2018). Thus, while Chaves's argument has merit, I would like to develop it further than simply being about a *decline*, but rather as a *change* of religious authority. Chaves's own definition of religious authority is ‘a social structure that attempts to enforce its order and reach its ends by controlling the access of individuals to some desired goods, where the legitimation of that control includes *some supernatural component*, however weak’ (1994, 755-6, my emphasis). The ‘goods’ Chaves refers to can be access to eternal life, wealth, or deliverance from sin, sickness,

meaninglessness, and so on, and the supernatural component may range between an active god and a completely impersonal remote force. It is easy to see how such a definition is adequate when one's concern is the relative societal power of various religious organizations. However, if we are to take seriously the view of religion as being constantly negotiated in the everyday material and discursive practices of individuals, and wish to study this process in a Swedish RE context, Chaves's definition is not as helpful. Teachers and media producers do not control the access to 'religious goods' in Chaves's definition, nor do they assert their authority by reference to the supernatural, but they are authorities nonetheless, and they play a part in the negotiation of how 'religious goods' and 'supernatural components' are perceived in contemporary Sweden.

Thus, to be clear, I agree with Chaves in his argument that secularization should be understood as a decline of the social significance of religious authority *if* by religious authority we mean that religious organizations have less direct control over peoples' 'desired goods' and that arguments based on 'supernatural components' hold less weight in, for example, public debates.¹⁸

I find Chaves's reasoning on religious authority relevant for this study in a number of ways. It presents a solid foundation on which the difference between religious authority and authority on religion can be asserted (elaborated on below). It also gives a plausible explanation as to why authority on religion is more readily accepted than religious authority in contemporary Sweden.

2.4.3 From religious authority to authority on religion

If secularization is to be viewed as the decline of religious authority but not religious belief, where does the authority go? A likely response might be that religious authority is not declining so much as changing from religious organizations towards institutions that, for various reasons, abandon the religious nature of this authority, and adapt it to suit their own institutional contexts. The institutions studied in this dissertation, religious education and media, are two such institutions.

The work of Lynn Schofield Clark is one example of how our media-saturated society changes traditional religious authority. Schofield Clark has developed the thoughts of Seligman (1990) and has used the concept of consensus-based authority as a possible explanation of who gets to speak for a certain religious group and who does not (Schofield Clark 2012). This concept, also called consensus-based interpretive authority, is not describing a new phenomenon; as Seligman notes in his article *Moral Authority and Reformation*

¹⁸ This would be in line with, for example, Habermas (2006, 12), who argues that political decisions in a late modern post-secular society must be formulated in a way equally accessible to all citizens, and Axner (2013) has previously argued along the same lines by showing that religious actors use very few 'religious' arguments in public debates (see also Broberg 2013).

Religion (1990), this kind of interpretive authority dates back at the very least to the puritans of the 16th and 17th centuries. The puritans refused to accept the traditional authority of the church, believing instead in the fundamental equality of members and ministry before god. Thus, a puritan minister had to rely on the consensus of the congregation, since losing it would mean being replaced (Seligman 1990). What Schofield Clark argues is that this form of authority needs to be taken seriously, especially in the remix culture we live in today. Remix culture, or participatory culture (Jenkins 2006), means that our ‘likes and dislikes’ have become increasingly vital in the shaping of authority. No longer will a small cultural elite decide what is or is not desirable. Instead, digital media has given a vast number of people the ability to not only consume but also to participate in creating and defining cultural systems (Schofield Clark 2012, 118-9). This form of authority is challenging the control of formal authorities. If an official representative of an organization gains the approval of a large group of people, they will be accepted as an authority. If, however, this representative loses the consensus of the people, their ‘official’ authority will become an empty shell, and the people will turn to someone who can better formulate what they hold most meaningful, truthful and valuable (Schofield Clark 2012, 115). This may produce some unlikely authority figures within certain contexts. Schofield Clark’s primary example is how comedian and talk show host Stephen Colbert has become an authority within Catholicism in the U.S. without holding any formal authority within the Catholic community. Schofield Clark uses the term religious authority, rather than authority of religion, since Stephen Colbert is negotiating his authority from an insider perspective, addressing his catholic peers. Colbert is not, however, in a position to withhold ‘religious goods’, nor does he have the capacity to back up his authority with a power invested in him by (a) god, and in that sense his authority would, at least to me, be considered an authority *on* religion. It is along these lines I argue that teachers and journalists can, and indeed have, become authorities on religion within their particular contexts (c.f. Hjarvard 2013; 2016). To a large extent they control what kind of information on religion is made available, or seen as desirable, in society, as well as providing specific languages and environments by which, and where, religion can be discussed.

2.5 Media Literacy

If changing authority presented the first of the two main aspects of mediatization that I focus on in this study, the second is the changing positions from which individuals can have agency in relation to media. While recent developments within the field of mediatization make an effort to include agency and to mitigate the risk of media determinism (as has been shown above), the understanding of how, when, and to what extent individuals are able to interact

with and challenge the structural and conditioning aspects of mediatization remains underdeveloped. In order to approach this in my material, I have opted to use the concept of media literacy, as it is a perspective firmly rooted in the individual and their understanding of, and proficiency at engaging with, media in various forms.

Media and communications scholar James Potter provides a short and to-the-point definition of media literacy as ‘a set of perspectives that we actively use to expose ourselves to the mass media to process and interpret the meaning of the messages we encounter’ (Potter 2016, 24). It is thus clear that media literacy is more than just critically engaging with written text in a media context. Potter argues that it is vital to understand that media literacy is multidimensional (2016, 25). By this, he means that when we think about the information we acquire from reading or seeing something, we typically think of what he labels as cognitive information. These are historical facts, the latest political debate, the review of a new book, and so on. What we often miss, Potter argues, is that there are emotional, aesthetic and moral dimensions connected to these cognitive elements. An understanding of what feels wrong or right, is beautiful or ugly, or makes us feel safe or threatened, is also part of media literacy. The ability to understand that these feelings, or perceptions, can be altered by various media techniques or dynamics, is something one has to learn, but it is not simply something picked up and then ‘possessed’. Rather, media literacy is always a continuum where you learn as you go, and one is never completely ‘media literate’. As Potter’s definition of media literacy above illustrated, media literacy is both a theoretical (‘a set of perspectives’) and a practical (‘that we actively use’) concept. As such, I am able to analyse how the practice of media literacy in an RE context is both shaped by, and is part in shaping, RE as an institution.

It is, as a final point, important to distinguish media literacy from less theoretically grounded concepts of critical media awareness. For example, *The News Evaluator* project is a Swedish project focusing on techniques of assessing the credibility of news media content (Nygren and Bronéus 2018). While both necessary and effective as a hands-on tool, as will be shown below and in the final chapter of this study, media literacy is so much more than assessing the veracity of mediated news.

2.5.1 Multiple media literacies

With the multitude of media outlets and formats currently available, it is useful to distinguish between ways of being media literate. Joshua Meyrowitz (1998) argues there are at least three kinds of media one might have literacy in: media

content, media grammar, and medium literacy.¹⁹ These three forms of literacy are what he calls multiple media literacies. One of the reasons I have opted to use Meyrowitz here is his connection to the media dynamics proposed by Eskjær, Hjarvard and Mortensen (2015) (presented in section 2.3.1.1). The three different media literacies presented here corresponds more or less exactly to their respective media dynamics, which will be made clear below.

The first of Meyrowitz's three concepts is media *content* literacy, which is related to the view of media as conduits (or the media dynamic of amplification). This kind of literacy manifests in the individual's ability to understand, decode and categorize media content. This not only concerns the explicit or implicit messages of the text²⁰, but also an understanding that various cultural or institutional dynamics have influenced the message, and that the message may be received and conceived differently by various groups in society. From this point of view, content elements are constant even when expressed through different mediums. For example, regulations on headscarves is essentially the same 'content' regardless of how it is mediated, although the way this content is expressed is severely altered by the next concept.

The second concept Meyrowitz uses is media *grammar* literacy, viewing media as languages (corresponds to the media dynamic of framing and performative agency). This form of literacy is focused on the specifics, or aesthetics, of a certain medium, and is quite similar to what Potter is referring to by media multidimensionality (2016, 25). Here, more specified knowledge about things like the thickness of paper, font size, and zooming and focus, is needed in order to grasp how the specific medium shapes or enables a certain piece of information. These production variables shape and alter the media content in how it is perceived by the audience, and the ability to distinguish what the producer of a certain piece of media wishes to convey is central in the acquiring of this skill.

Meyrowitz's final concept is medium literacy (the metaphorical view of media as environments, and the media dynamic of co-structuring), and involves the understanding of how the nature of a certain medium come to influence communication on the individual as well as societal level (1998, 103-6). For the individual, this involves an understanding of which medium is suitable for a specific task, and how the choice of medium may come to alter the outcomes of that task. Ending an intimate relationship is quite different if done face-to-face than if done in a letter, or in a text message, to take but one example. On a societal level, medium literacy concerns the understanding of how, for example, the addition of a certain medium to the media matrix 'may

¹⁹ Please note the unfortunate similarity between *media literacy* and *medium literacy*. Media literacy is an umbrella term; medium literacy is Meyrowitz's concept that concerns an understanding of the social implications of certain media developments.

²⁰ 'Text' is used in a broad and metaphorical sense here; just like 'literacy' is not only about reading, media materials are not always textual.

alter the boundaries and nature of many social situations, reshape the relationships among people, and strengthen or weaken various social institutions' (Meyrowitz 1998, 105). For example, social media may have come to challenge previously agreed-upon social conceptions of what it entails to be educated or competent. Or, how the use of the internet as a way to access information generally left out of mainstream media has forced corporate media to adapt their practices in order to remain credible to the public (Meyrowitz 1998).

Meyrowitz's concept of medium literacy, especially the understanding of various mediums as social forces that can challenge patterns of authority, is theoretically close to mediatization theory and hence of particular interest for this study. Indeed, medium literacy serves as a link between mediatization, shifting authority, and media literacy, as it neatly summarizes how the three interact. Furthermore, it delicately balances the border between agency and structure, as it recognizes the significance of media institutions but focuses on how individuals socially negotiate the meaning of these institutions through their everyday practices.

While media literacy, or more specifically multiple media literacies, is an apt way of conceptualizing someone's ability to critically analyse various media materials, it has certain limitations. Most central of these limitations is that without a previous understanding of a certain subject (economics, politics, religion, etc.) media literacy can only get you so far. The media-literate person may well be aware of the suggestive zooming, the click-baiting headline or the sensationalist tone in a piece of media material, but such knowledge has limited use without insight into the particular subject. Thus, the ambitions of RE teachers to relate their teaching to wider society by using media material (as explored in Article II) entails a mix of teaching media literacy and teaching more factual knowledge about religion. The conceptualization of this mix will be described below, but first, something on factual knowledge on religion, or *religious literacy*, will have to be said.

2.5.2 Religious literacy and religious media literacy

A theoretical way of viewing the ambitions of Swedish religious education is by using the concept of religious literacy. Definitions and applications of the concept vary (see for example Carr 2007; Dinham and Jones 2010; Graham 2012), but the *Harvard Religious Literacy Project* defines it as:

[T]he ability to discern and analyze the fundamental intersections of religion and social/political/cultural life through multiple lenses. Specifically, a religiously literate person will possess 1) a basic understanding of the history, central texts (where applicable), beliefs, practices and contemporary manifestations of several of the world's religious traditions as they arose out of and continue to be shaped by particular social, historical and cultural contexts; and 2)

the ability to discern and explore the religious dimensions of political, social and cultural expressions across time and place. (Moore 2006)

Though ambitious to a fault, Moore's definition corresponds well to the equally ambitious goals stipulated for RE in Sweden. It stresses factual and historical knowledge of religious traditions while, at the same time, placing analysis and intersectionality at the fore. In contrast to, for example, Dinham and Jones' definition (2010, 6), this definition refrains from claiming religion *has* a legitimate place in the public discourse, which serves to make it less normative.

If we accept the proposition that the ambition of Swedish RE is to give young people a decent religious literacy while also connecting to wider society by using a myriad of media material, the step towards a possible combination of the concepts of religious literacy and media literacy is not that big. Sociologist of religion Mia Lövheim has suggested the concept of 'religious media literacy' and defines it as knowledge about 'the process through which religion is communicated through various media forms in contemporary society and to develop an ability to analyse and evaluate various outcomes and implications of this process' (2012a, 164).

Thus, in Article III the concept of multiple media literacies is used to explore how teachers view their own and their students' media literacy. This will help in shedding light on the agency teachers of RE have in relation to the regulatory nature of media as an institution, as well as identifying instances where media dynamics have become an integrated part of the RE practice. This will also, by the use of Meyrowitz's concept of medium literacy, allow me to explore some of the possible shifts in what, or who, is considered as educated or competent in an RE context. The possibility of incorporating the concept of religious media literacy in this particular context will be discussed in Chapter 4.

2.6 Summary

In this chapter, the research context and theoretical foundations of this dissertation have been presented. Before proceeding I would like to repeat the research questions posed in this study, and make clear how they relate to the theories presented above.

2.6.1 Research questions revisited and explained

The first overarching question posed in the introduction of this study was:

1. *What role does media play in religious education in contemporary Sweden?*

As I have argued throughout the chapter, media play a central role in RE in contemporary Sweden. By drawing on recent research in sociology of religion in general, and the increased interest in authority and agency within mediatisation of religion research in particular, I have also argued that RE is a context where the changing conditions for religion in Sweden ought to be studied, and that this can be done successfully by studying RE teachers' practice, and their reflections thereon. In the four articles, and in the subsequent discussion, trains of thought and specific concepts presented above will be used to relate my material and findings to previous research and current developments within the field. One specific research question was formulated for each of the four articles. Here I will repeat these questions, and connect them to the presented theories.

1. *What kinds of media materials do Swedish RE teachers use in their teaching?*

This question is directed to Article I. It primarily serves to map RE teachers' use of media materials in an exploratory, rather than theoretical, sense. It does, however, lay the foundation of my view of 'the mediatized classroom' that is explored further in Article II, and it relates directly to the quantitative aspects of mediatisation discussed by Couldry and Hepp (2017), and the fact that media seem to have become 'part of the very fabric' of culture and society (Hepp et al 2010).

2. *What kinds of media dynamics are present in RE classrooms where media materials are used?*

This question is directed to Article II and is theoretically informed by the media dynamics presented by Eskjær, Hjarvard, and Mortensen (2015). Institutional mediatisation is central to this question as it concerns how dynamics

from one institution (media) come to be influential to, or even integrated in, the workings of another institution (religious education). This is studied at the level of teachers' practices with relation to various media materials and discourses, as these practices are part of what constitutes institutional change (Reckwitz 2002; Thornton and Ocasio 1999).

3. *How can RE teachers' and students' engagements with mediated religion be analysed from a multiple media literacies perspective?*

This question is directed at Article III. Building on the insights from Articles I and II, this question makes use of Meyrowitz's (1998) take on media literacy in order to highlight differences in media use between teachers and students, and to explore how a deeper understanding of media (or media literacy) can create room for agency in mediatized settings.

4. *How do RE teachers construct authority on religion in a mediatized situation?*

The final question is directed at Article IV and focuses on the changing conditions of authority as a consequence of mediatization of religion. Using the concepts of relational authority (Pace and Hemmings 2007) and teachers as co-authors (Kim 2009), I explore how authority can be constructed in contemporary Swedish RE, and how media in various ways is an integral part in this construction.

Having answered these questions, most of the final chapter will be dedicated to answering the second overarching research question:

II *In what ways does the study of mediatization in an educational context contribute to the development and nuancing of mediatization of religion research?*

Here, the contribution of the study will be made clear. What were the main benefits and drawbacks of studying mediatization in an RE context, and what new insights did the study bring to mediatization of religion research? Particular focus will be given to authority on religion and media literacy, as these are the concepts to which this study is most likely to contribute. Finally, I will discuss possible theoretical and empirical gaps in the study that calls for further research.

Chapter 3. Methodology and Methods

In this chapter, I will be elaborating on the previously mentioned design of this study: why it was constructed in the way it was, and how that affects the results of the study. However, because of some of the epistemological standpoints I have made, there is a need to establish how I view my material, and what kind of conclusions one can reasonably draw, based on it. To avoid confusion, this will be done first, followed by the research design and the actual methods used.

3.1 Methodological Considerations

The ontological and epistemological assumptions declared earlier place certain limitations on what kinds of claims can be made based on certain kinds of materials or based on the use of certain methods. As has been previously mentioned, the methods used in this study are observations, interviews, and a quantitative survey. In the articles, these methods and the material derived by their implementation have been used separately. In the dissertation as a whole, however, these different methods are part of a methodological triangulation that attempts to shed light on a certain case from a variety of angles (Stake 2003, 148). This leaves us with two questions. The first is what a case is and what conclusions can be drawn based on one. The second is how the three different kinds of materials relate, and what kind of knowledge these materials (separately and collectively) can contribute.

3.1.1 What is a case?

Following Stake (2005, 1), a case is ‘a noun, a thing, an entity; it is seldom a verb, a participle, a functioning’. Thus, RE teachers may serve as a case, while their teaching lacks the specificity to be called a case. However, Stake states that ‘even when our main focus is on a phenomenon that is a function ... we choose cases that are entities’ (2005, 2). This gives the researcher the opportunity to use the case as a ‘fulcrum’ or a ‘host’ for the study of a variety of phenomena and functions.

The phenomenon on the table in this study is the role of media in Swedish RE. The aim is to improve our understanding of media within RE by linking it to what Stake (2003, 152) calls *abstract dimensions*. These dimensions

would, in this case, be secularization, mediatization, media literacy, and various theories on authority, as well as the relations between these dimensions. While it is not always clear where the case ends and these abstract dimensions begin, the attempt at boundedness is still useful in specifying the case (Stake 1995). The selection of a particular case is essential, as it will shape the very foundation of the study. Put differently, the entity we chose to host our inquiry will be central to what kind of knowledge we are able to attain. As I have selected RE teachers to host my inquiries into this matter, the results of this study will be based on the negotiation between me as a researcher (knower) and RE teachers as researched (knowable). I hold this to be true for all the methods used in this study.

The reason for expanding on my conception of what a case entails is linked to the claims that are possible to make based on my material. To accept Stake's view of a case as, for example, a fulcrum, is to accept an approach where theory takes a kind of presidency over the material, albeit not in a completely deductive way. Concretely, this approach allows me to look at my material and ask both how a variety of theories can help me understand what I am seeing and how what I am seeing can be used to challenge or develop the very same theories. The approach does *not* allow me to generalize or give causal explanations of why I am seeing what I am seeing in the material. In the section that elaborates on the material, the reason for this will be made evident. First, however, I will discuss how the various materials the case is based on are viewed and handled in this study.

3.1.2 Multiple methods give multiple materials

Above I concluded what a case study is, and that several methods can be used when studying a certain case. However, with this kind of multiple-methods approach, one has to be aware of certain epistemological and methodological hazards. Consider for example the distinction Peräkylä and Ruusuvuori (2011) make between the two most common empirical materials in qualitative research: on the one hand, interviews, and, on the other, 'naturally occurring' materials (for example observations).²¹ The argument for the distinction is that while interviews allow the researcher to access parts of the empirical world otherwise inaccessible to them, naturally occurring materials are in a way closer to a perceived reality, since the unit of analysis is 'the world' rather than what an interviewee tells us about the world. However, the divide between materials that are naturally occurring and those that are not should not be exaggerated (e.g. Potter 2004; Speer 2002), and Silverman (2001) argues that rather than a dichotomy, the natural/non-natural division ought to be

²¹ A similar concept is 'unobtrusive measures' which distinguishes between methods that involve direct elicitation, and those that do not (Webb et al. 2000). I did however find Peräkylä and Ruusuvuori's 'naturally occurring materials' more appealing.

viewed as a continuum. From this perspective, our observations would be closer to ‘naturally occurring’, while the survey, which consists of ‘from a scale from 1 to 5’-questions, would be further away, as it is the most constructed (or obtrusive) type of material in the study. However, contrasting this argument with our interpretivist/constructivist epistemology renders certain problems. If we consider researcher and researched, knower and known, as interactive and inseparable co-creators of subjective beliefs (Lincoln and Guba 1985), then the distinction is moot, as the notion of naturally occurring materials is in itself an impossibility.

It is, however, not only on epistemological grounds that I reject the notion of naturally occurring materials. On the side of the researcher, preliminary research questions and theoretical interests inevitably shape not only the conclusions drawn based on certain material, but the material itself. On the side of the researched, in this case the RE teachers, various aspects of social desirability and researcher effects (e.g. Brink 1993) undoubtedly influenced their answers in both the survey and the interviews, as well as their behaviour during the observations. Since secretly videotaping people is considered a rather clandestine activity in Sweden, the observed teachers knew exactly when and why they were being observed, and while their participation was voluntary, several indicated that they were nervous beforehand, had prepared something special, or that their students were unusually quiet or loud because of the foreign presence in the classroom.

If one is to take the implications of the above seriously, what is possible to study is not ‘what teachers do’ or ‘what teachers think’, but how they act and talk when they know they are being subjects of a research project concerning their professional role. This is not to say the material is flawed or inaccurate, it is simply a methodological concern that has to be considered.

During the observations, the teachers knew that their use of, and connection to, various media materials and discourses would be looked at in detail. A few teachers explicitly said that they had re-arranged their planning to include media rather than, for example, just working with textbooks or studying for a test. Thus, whether RE teachers in general use media materials to the extent that the observations would indicate is impossible to answer, but how they decided to use it when they knew they were being observed is still highly (or even more) interesting, as in a sense it expresses the teachers’ ideal use of media. This is one of the main reasons why the material cannot be used in a positivist sense.

Thus, while I claim that the different forms of material in the study are similar in the sense that they are all negotiated in the interaction between the knower and the knowable, they are far from identical. Below, the respective methods will be described, followed by a discussion that connects the respective methods to the previous argument.

3.2 Methods

What has been stated so far is not meant to say that different methods do not have their strengths and weaknesses, only that some are preferable in certain contexts. Equally constructed and subjective is not to be equated with equally desirable in all cases, if that was the case there would have been no reason to triangulate in the first place. Below I will describe the three methods used in this study, why they were selected, and how the material derived from it was approached.

3.2.1 The survey

When a researcher becomes interested in a particular group in society, the typical modus operandi is to contact that group, perhaps with a humble question concerning the possibility of them participating in a study. However, when the group is something as geographically dispersed as RE teachers, there is really no one to contact, unless, of course, you want to do a qualitative case study.

However, Statistics Sweden (Statistiska centralbyrån), a government-funded agency dedicated solely to statistics about Sweden, has a register of teachers that each headmistress/headmaster in Sweden has to update on a yearly basis. Who teaches, to what extent, and in which subjects, are part of this register. The TRILS project saw this register as a perfect way to reach teachers of RE, and a survey was created and distributed by the project in cooperation with Statistics Sweden during the spring of 2015. The sampling frame was restricted to practising RE teachers in compulsory school (grades 7-9) and upper secondary school. In dialogue with the analysts at Statistics Sweden, it was decided that the inclusion criteria for the sampling frame would be that the teacher should have a degree in education, that at least 20 percent of their teaching should be within RE, that they should have taught RE for two consecutive school years, including the year that the survey was conducted, and finally that they should not be over 60 years old. These criteria were pragmatic rather than theoretical in nature as teachers with at least some experience of working with RE was required, and to secure as good a response rate as possible was essential. Unfortunately, this excluded both the very youngest and oldest teachers, but it gave us the opportunity to send the survey to the entire population within the sampling frame. The response rate was 65 percent²², which rendered 1292 answered surveys. The high response rate is likely to produce a robust material. In order to compensate for low response rates within some of the subgroups in the material the material was weighted.²³

²² See Article I for more details on the survey, its participants and what a response rate of 65 percent indicates.

²³ Put simply, the survey was sent to the entire population of interest, but since, for example, men are less likely to answer surveys than women, men were given a coefficient making their answers 'weigh' more to compensate for this.

The more technical details of the survey can be found in Article I. Having received the answered surveys, Statistics Sweden subsequently compiled the material into an encrypted raw data file, suited for analysis in a quantitative software program.

3.2.2 Analysing the survey

Having received the data file from Statistics Sweden, the first thing the project did was to create frequency tables for all the questions in the survey and study these in detail. For the articles in this study, I selected the questions concerning media (what media materials the teachers use, whether they trust the media, and so on) and started investigating how these variables related to relevant background variables such as the teachers' age and gender, which school form they teach, as well as a selection of other variables, such as religiosity. This was done in an abductive manner, mixing hypotheses from previous research with my own intuition of what variables were relevant for my theoretical scope.

There were plenty of correlations in the material that could be referred to as 'spurious correlations', which are variables that correlate but are highly unlikely to have a causal relationship. For example, the use of textbooks correlated with all other materials the teachers could select in the survey, but it is unlikely that the high use of textbooks is caused by the use of documentaries, or vice versa. Through a series of regression analyses, it was possible to tease out that (in this case) school form seemed to predicate the use of textbooks, and the correlation between textbooks and documentaries were likely caused by the fact that both are popular materials that teachers use frequently.

Even if the example above with textbooks and documentaries not having a causal relationship, the question remained whether teachers who use a certain type of material also tend to use other types of material. This question was not about causality but about finding ideal-types or groups of teachers who approach RE materials in different ways. In Article I, this question is explored by the use of a Principal Component Analysis (PCA). The technical details of this form of factor analysis can be found in the method section of Article I. While a PCA is a quite complicated mathematical procedure, I found that conducting a PCA was a rather qualitative endeavour. In layman's terms, the question is: if a respondent answered that they used a certain material to a certain degree, how likely is it that that same individual also used another material to a certain degree? As a researcher, you are free (within limits of course) to work qualitatively with the number of groups you want to create, how strong the correlations between your variables have to be, and if the results of a particular iteration of the PCA feels representative of the material as a whole. Put differently, the programme I used to analyse the material (*SPSS*), does the calculations correctly, but it is not an artificial intelligence, it does not know what it is calculating. This is the reason textbooks were excluded from the

PCA; since they are so frequently used, they tended to be grouped with all other materials and thus adding nothing to the equation. The most illustrative result gave two neat categories that also corresponded well to the (at that time) preliminary insights from the fieldwork. This is the PCA result that is presented in Article I.

3.2.3 The observations and interviews

All three members of the TRILS project are qualified teachers and, to varying degrees, knew of teachers that could either participate themselves or, more importantly, could provide us with names of teachers that were likely to consider participation. To complement this form of snowball recruitment, a number of schools were contacted by e-mail to the headmistress/headmaster, asking permission to conduct the study at their school, and for names of RE teachers that would want to participate.

This process of recruitment had fundamental consequences for how the material has been viewed. While the quantitative material basically consists of the entire population of interest and, thus, is representative on a national basis, the qualitative material is rather limited in size (22 teachers) and area (about 250 km radius around Uppsala). The biggest problem for representativeness is the voluntary participation; that is, all teachers who participated wanted to participate, and without having recorded the actual number of refusals, more teachers declined our invitations to participate than those who accepted. This has a few implications. First, the material cannot be said to represent RE teachers in general. Second, the material probably consists of teachers who are, if not more competent, at least more secure and comfortable in their teaching than their colleagues who declined to participate.²⁴ It is also likely that the teachers who agreed to participate found the project interesting and/or important, possibly because their approach to teaching was in line with the topics expressed in the presentation of the project they received together with the invitation to participate.

Having gained permission from both teachers and headmistress/headmaster (see section 3.5 below), it was time to conduct the observations and interviews. The observations were conducted by direct observation, with two researchers present in the classroom during each lesson, taking notes. Most teachers were observed three times, though some deviations from this occurred. The main purpose of the observations was to give a glimpse of the teachers' daily practice in order to inform and supplement the interviews. Since teachers and lessons were not selected randomly²⁵, and the total number

²⁴ Most teachers gave lack of time as the reason for not participating, and while I do not doubt the honesty of these teachers, the teachers who agreed to participate also voiced that they were stressed about their situation at work, but still chose to participate.

²⁵ To the extent it was possible, we tried to make sure we got to observe various aspects of the RE subject: the various major religions, religion and science, ethics, and so on.

of observations is about 50, the observations can at best serve as examples of what an RE lesson *can* look like, and excerpts from the observations can be used to illustrate or complement what the teachers said during our interviews. They should however not be viewed as ‘proof’ that RE teachers in Sweden do or do not engage with certain topics.

The interviews were conducted using a semi-structured interview guide (Creswell 2007) after the final observation of each teacher had been made.²⁶ The interviews were between 50 and 70 minutes long. After the interviews, some teachers were also asked complementary questions by email.²⁷ The interviews were recorded, transcribed and coded using the qualitative coding software Nvivo 11. In connection with the writing of Article II, three teachers (two of which were already part of the study) were interviewed by email concerning their approach to teaching about Islam in particular.

3.2.4 Analysing the qualitative material

As stated above, the primary reason the observations were conducted was to gain an understanding of the context in which the teacher in question worked, what the class looked like, the teacher’s particular style in terms of teaching methods and materials, and so on. Therefore, the observations have not been systematically analysed as a whole. There are several reasons for this, the main one being that since the observations were used as springboards for discussion with the teachers during the interviews, and the teachers were asked to reflect on the lessons, the two methods in a sense merged to form a single material. Another important reason is the format of this dissertation; with an article-based dissertation, it is simply not possible to include lengthy descriptions of all aspects of the material. With Article I being quantitative, Article II and III being comparisons between my material and Norwegian RE teachers and Swedish students respectively, and Article IV being an instrumental case study of a single teacher, it has simply not been necessary to systematically analyse *all* the observations. They were however contributory to the quality of the interviews, gave inspiration to many of the questions I have sought to answer in this study, and played a part in the abductive approach of using the best information available to form preliminary hypotheses and explore these further (Stake 1995).

The interviews, on the other hand, have been systematically analysed. The audio recordings were transcribed and imported into the qualitative research software NVivo 11 for coding and analysis. The coding was conducted in two broad steps. The first step classified each interview by gender, age cohort,

²⁶ See *Appendix I* for the interview guide.

²⁷ See *Appendix II* for the e-mail interview guide.

school form, and location, and each teacher was given a pseudonym.²⁸ Following this, a qualitative coding process (thematic analysis) was conducted, using some concepts and categories derived from the TRILS theoretical setting (didactic choices, teacher professionalism, public religion), but primarily allowing the categories to grow inductively. This is in line with what Ryan and Bernard (2003) discuss as the distinction between an a priori approach and an inductive approach: some themes will be decided beforehand, while others will be induced by the material. This step was conducted in a collaborative manner, with a number of interviews being coded by all three members of the project to assess the inter-coder reliability (e.g. Sandelowski 1995), and then the remaining interviews were divided between the researchers.

In the second step, I analysed the material specifically in relation to each of my articles (except Article I, which is based on the survey). For example, Article II was a comparison between a Swedish and a Norwegian school, and the theoretical focus was, in broad strokes, institutional mediatization. Hence, the four interviews with teachers at that particular school were thoroughly re-read and analysed through that theoretical lens. Again, the basic thematic question of ‘what is this expression an example of?’ was applied to the material in order to form new, more pointed, themes (Ryan and Bernard 2003, 87). The same procedure was repeated for Article III and IV. The categories from the first step of the analysis was helpful in this, but the results in the articles are based on my (and in the case of Article II and III, my co-authors’) analyses of the material.

3.3 Why this Design?

There are several reasons for combining quantitative and qualitative materials in a study of this kind. In this case, my interest was in how RE teachers, in their professional role as conveyors of knowledge about religion relate to a variety of media materials. To shed light on this, I found it interesting to know who these teachers were, both in terms of background variables such as age and gender, but even more so what they thought about a number of theoretically interesting questions, such as whether they view themselves as religious, if they trust the media, and so on. In addition to these personal traits or preferences, I wanted to know about their use and views of media materials.

This is where a combination of methods really shines. For obvious reasons, it is easier to reach a huge proportion of RE teachers through a survey than by contacting thousands of teachers and asking them all for interviews. Thus, a

²⁸ The same list of pseudonyms is used in this comprehensive summary and in Articles III and IV. In Article II, the Swedish teachers were given pseudonyms alphabetically: Anna, Beatrice, and Christine. While the overlap of names is stylistically unfortunate, it has not in any way impeded the analysis.

survey was constructed and distributed, and the first article of this project, Article I, was based on the results. The results of the survey were interesting in themselves, as these types of national surveys of RE teachers are rather rare, and being able to establish, for instance, that RE teachers are no more religious than the general population is a result in itself. In this sense, the survey stands apart from the rest of the material: it is descriptive where the qualitative material is analytical, and it claims generalizability where the qualitative material and the dissertation as a whole make no such claims.

As the survey confirmed that RE teachers claim extensive use of different media materials in their daily teaching, the ambition to observe and interview a selection of RE teachers about their use of materials remained. This mitigates the problem described above concerning the fact that some teachers actively chose to use media materials because they knew the researchers in the classroom would be looking for just that during the observations. The survey had also offered plenty of background information that was useful when visiting schools and talking to teachers; and it had provoked a number of questions that the qualitative material, especially the interviews, would be able to answer, including why it is that social media material is seemingly underused by teachers, even though it is likely that students make extensive use of social media in their daily lives (explored in Article III).

Describing the study in this chronological way is very similar to what Creswell (2003) calls a *Sequential Explanatory Design*, where a qualitative data set is used to delve deeper into a quantitative material. However, considering the research questions in this study, which concerns the agency and authority of RE teachers in a mediatised society, it is clear that the quantitative part of the study does little to answer such theoretical questions. It would, therefore, be more accurate to describe the research design as a *Concurrent Nested Design* (Creswell 2003), where the qualitative material is given priority, and the quantitative material is nested, or embedded, in the project and plays more of a supportive role. I would also argue that this approach is better suited for the project since it aligns well with my epistemological stance. The supportive role of the survey in establishing the sociodemographic composition of RE teachers and the frequency with which they use media materials works as a foundation for the study, but the qualitative material takes precedence, and it is primarily this material that is constructed between the knower and the knowable, between researcher and researched.

3.4 Trustworthiness

Validity, reliability, and generalizability are key considerations of any research. These questions are usually associated with the positivist empirical paradigm (Golafshani 2003) and are often challenged by qualitative researchers (Folkestad 2008; Shenton 2004). Qualitative researchers tend not to make

claims about the validity or reliability of their research, understanding that there is a unique researcher-researched dynamic at play that makes these considerations questionable. While the data produced from qualitative research can tell a story, qualitative researchers tend not to make assumptions that this story, or the themes generated, are representative beyond the sample chosen (Leung 2015).

Instead of the focus on validity and reliability, Lincoln and Guba (1985) offer an alternative approach for assessing qualitative research, which is to establish the trustworthiness of a study. Their criteria for trustworthiness are *credibility*, *dependability*, *confirmability*, and *transferability*. These criteria are not always easily separated, and certain aspects of a study may strengthen or weaken more than one of them at once. I will argue for how this study fulfills these criteria, but also acknowledge when it does not.

Credibility is perhaps the most important criterion (Polit and Beck 2014) and concerns the confidence in the truthfulness of the results. Several aspects of this study strengthen its credibility. First, the methodological triangulation is a well-established way of conducting qualitative research, and while the survey may be a bit niche in a qualitative triangulation, a combination of observations and interviews is the cookie-cutter setup for this type of study. This also extends to the way participants were recruited (contacting gatekeepers and snowballing from there), how the material was organized and analysed (thematic coding using qualitative coding software), and so on. Second, the abductive approach opens up for what is sometimes called negative case analysis (Allen 2017), which can briefly be described as a procedure where preliminary hypotheses are constantly revised when deviant cases arise. Findings were not forced into theoretical categories, and temporary categories or themes were added and removed in the process of analysis as new information became available. Third, due to the fact that this is an article-based dissertation, at the time of publication Article I and II had been through processes of double-blind peer review and accepted for publication by respected scientific journals or publishing houses. This is to me a validation that people who have greater experience than me in the field agree that my results are credible.

Another aspect of trustworthiness is dependability, which concerns the stability of the data over time. RE is not likely to disappear, nor will the challenges presented by various media to various aspects of the RE teachers' practice. They certainly did not change during the time of the study, and it is therefore likely that the conditions for RE teachers remained unaltered throughout the study and will remain so at the time of publication. However, over longer periods of time, course plans and syllabuses do change, and so does the media landscape. However, the study is not focused on a particular phrasing in the RE course plan, or how a particular Social Network Site (SNS) affects RE. Hence, the data should be considered dependable, and not particularly time-sensitive.

Confirmability concerns neutrality and to what extent the results could be repeated by another researcher (Polit and Beck 2014). In this study this is ensured by the fact that the TRILS project had weekly project meetings and/or workshops during the early phases of the project, had international advisors who have continuously been giving input and feedback to the research design, and have presented the project and its preliminary findings to a number of national and international conferences between 2015 and 2019. In my case, I have attended two workshops with RE teachers and presented my preliminary results, and while these were not the same teachers who participated in the study, it serves as a sort of member-checking in the sense that I got feedback from other RE teachers indicating that they have experienced similar issues.

Finally, it is up to the reader to determine the transferability of the study; that is, how useful the results are in their own situations (Polit and Beck 2014). Generally, this is achieved by being transparent about how the analysis has been made, in combination with fulfilling the other trustworthiness-criteria. By being as transparent as possible, as well as linking comprehensively to previous research, I have shown that my results are transferable to other contexts that include teaching in mediatized societies.

3.5 Ethical Considerations

Special consideration always has to be taken when sensitive personal information is involved in the research process. In a Swedish context, religion and personal beliefs are viewed as such sensitive information. The material of this study was gathered within the TRILS project, and the regional ethics review board in Uppsala approved the project's ethics review application in its entirety. In Article II and III, material that was not part of the TRILS project was part of the collaborative analyses. In these cases, the responsibility for the ethical treatment of the material lies with my respective co-authors, and I was only given access to selected and anonymized segments of the respective materials. As shown above, the material gathered by TRILS consists of three parts: a survey, observations, and interviews.

The survey was conducted in collaboration with Statistics Sweden, and while using their registers, the TRILS researchers never had access to the participants of the survey; upon completion, Statistics Sweden delivered an anonymized and encrypted data file containing the results of the survey. Participation in the survey was voluntary and an information letter clearly stating how and for what purposes the results would be used was attached to the survey.

For the observations and interviews, participating teachers were presented with a letter of consent which they all signed before any fieldwork began. This letter also clearly stated that consent could be withdrawn by the teacher at any time. In accordance with ethical guidelines, the material has been anonymized and stored in a restricted area at the department, and any sensitive information

will be destroyed at the end of the project. However, most teachers stated that they enjoyed participating in the project, and the interviews in particular seemed to be viewed as opportunities to reflect upon their own teaching. My primary concern has therefore not been to ensure the teachers' absolute anonymity but to make sure I conduct a fair analysis of their practices and reflections. The instances where I am critical towards Swedish RE or the role media play in it have in no way come about due to faults on the teachers' part. On the contrary, I am deeply impressed by the teachers who wanted to contribute to this study, and I hope I do them justice.

Finally, although the project focused on teachers, classroom observations inevitably include students – in the case of lower secondary classes, they were under the age of 18. Apart from Article III, where focus groups with students from another project were included, RE teachers were the sole focus of this project. This was explicitly stated at the beginning of each observation to make sure the students were comfortable with the situation. Therefore, only when directly relevant to the observed teachers' practice were students' actions even included in the observation protocol, and when that was the case, only referred to as 'boy', 'girl', or 'student'.

Article Abstracts

Article I

The Use of Teaching Materials in Religious Education in Sweden: a quantitative analysis of Swedish religious education teachers' reported use of teaching materials in RE classrooms

Abstract: Recent studies show that religious education (RE) and various media outlets serve as increasingly important arenas for religious socialisation among Swedish youths. At the same time, it has been shown that media material, for example in the form of various news media, often makes their way into RE classrooms to be used as materials alongside the more traditional textbooks. However, little quantitative research has been conducted in order to map RE teachers' selection and use of materials in their classrooms, and what factors are involved in this selection. A nationally representative survey among 1292 RE teachers was conducted, and the results clearly show that textbooks are the most popular form of material, followed by pictures, sacred texts, documentaries, television news and news articles. Out of the relevant background variables it was primarily school form, age, gender and religiosity that seemed to influence the teachers' choices of material. The author concludes that familiarity with a certain form of material through personal experiences is a likely explanation for many of the correlations found, and that further research is needed in order to explore the potential complexities that arise in the juxtaposition of classroom and media logics.

Keywords: religious education; religious socialisation; teachers; teaching materials

Article II

Perspectives: Mediatized Religious Education

Abstract: This chapter presents two empirical case studies of religious education (RE) in Norway and in Sweden. In addition to introducing the *Upper Secondary School* section of the present volume, the chapter explores how media materials and discourses are being extensively used in a similar fashion as part

of RE in both countries. Media materials and discourses serve to both contextualize the content of the subject and to legitimize RE by showing why religion is relevant for contemporary Norwegian and Swedish society; thus, they form an important part of the RE lessons. Applying a mediatization perspective, we argue that this use of media impacts both the choice of topics addressed and the way they are presented, as it inserts various media dynamics into the pedagogical practice of religious education.

Keywords: mediatization; religious education; representations of religion; media materials

Article III

Multiple Media Literacy in Religious Education: A qualitative study of teachers' and students' thoughts on critically engaging with mediated religion.

Abstract: This article takes as its point of departure the view that, in Sweden, media in various forms act as one of the main settings where young people encounter religion, both in schools and elsewhere. With a seemingly ever-expanding development of communication technology, researchers and politicians alike are arguing for the need to educate our citizens in media literacy. By applying the concept of multiple media literacy, the authors of this article argue that depending on whether media is viewed as (1) conduits, (2) languages, or (3) environments, the skills needed to critically engage with various kinds of media differs. Using Swedish Religious education as an illustrative example, the authors conclude that increased focus within RE on the production variables, and on the complex nature of social media, would likely result in a richer media literacy for students and teachers alike.

Keywords: religious education; multiple media literacy; mediatization; media materials; Sweden

Article IV

Authority on Religion in Mediatized Classrooms

Abstract: This article explores how teachers of religious education in Sweden construct their authority on religion. Employing the conceptual understanding

of teachers of religious education as co-authors, and their authority as relational, the author discusses how authority on religion can be gained and maintained in a society characterized by the intersection of secularization, multiculturalism and media saturation. Through an analysis of a particular case, the author concludes that various media play an integral part in the construction of the teacher's authority on religion and that the concepts of co-structuring, amplification, and framing and performative agency are well suited for exploring the relationship between authority and media in this context. In exploring a setting often overlooked in previous research on the interplay between media, religion, and authority, this article contributes to the field by adding an empirically informed discussion on shifting authority on religion outside religious institutions or organizations.

Keywords: religious education; authority; mediatization; media dynamics; Sweden

Chapter 4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Results

In this study, I have striven to gain a better understanding of the role of media in Swedish RE. Empirically, this has been achieved by highlighting quantitative as well as qualitative aspects of how media materials and discourses have become integral parts of Swedish RE. RE teachers' practices, understood broadly as routinized activities, knowledge, feelings, motivations and reflections, have been the central focus of this study, as well as the main way through which I have been able to study 'institutional work' (Nicolini 2013, 15). Given this, I have analysed these practices from a mediatization of religion perspective, in order to develop an understanding of how media, in all its diversity, can come to co-structure these practices in particular situations (Lövhelm and Hjarvard 2019).

Below, the research questions will be answered separately, and then be discussed further in order to show how the study of mediatization in an educational context can contribute to the development and nuancing of mediatization of religion theory.

4.1.1 What kinds of media materials do Swedish RE teachers use in their teaching?

This question, and the corresponding article, in several ways laid the foundation of this study. It provided a strong indication that a variety of media materials are used in Swedish RE classrooms on a daily basis. In order to establish a frame of reference, the teachers in the survey were not only asked about media materials but other materials as well. Because of this, the results show that textbooks and pictures are the most commonly used forms of material in RE. However, as I stated in section 2.3.2, my focus with regards to media materials is primarily on mass media and news; that is, materials not directly intended as teaching materials. Thus, the kind of media materials that were focused on in this study were documentaries, television news, news articles, fiction films, and social media. I was therefore delighted to see that the Principal Component Analysis (PCA) conducted in Article I showed that these five kinds of material (or items, to use PCA terminology), clustered together, while the rest of the materials (images, sacred texts, artefacts, and music) became a cluster of their own. In the article, I labelled these *linking to wider*

society (component 1) and *culturally immersive* (component 2). Essentially, this means that teachers who claim that they frequently use documentaries, for example, also claim that they frequently use the other materials in the *linking to wider society*-category, while teachers who claim that they frequently use images also claim that they frequently use the other *culturally immersive* materials, and so on and so forth. The PCA also showed some indications as to which teachers use which materials. The correlations are quite weak but indicate that teachers who are familiar with a certain type of material will use that material to a higher degree, but not at the expense of other materials. For example, teachers who view themselves as religious will use more religious artefacts, and young teachers will use more social media.

The PCA was central to the article on which the answer to this question is based, and as far as factor analyses go, the results of the PCA gave sound and significant data on the use of teaching materials by RE teachers in Sweden. However, from a qualitative standpoint, the relevance of background variables such as gender, age, as well as various socio-cultural differences, was actually quite small. Apart from a huge difference in the use of textbooks between lower and upper secondary school (85 and 60 percent respectively), little can actually be said on what materials a certain teacher is likely to use. Adding the fact that the results are based on self-reported data, I am content with stating that most RE teachers in Sweden claim that they quite often use a variety of media materials, and that this makes the use of media materials in RE worth studying. More specifically, if one wants to study the kinds of media materials that see the most frequent use within RE, focusing on documentaries and news media over fiction and social media would be preferable.

Relating the results of Article I to the first overarching research question of this study, we can see that at least one role media materials play in Swedish RE is as teaching materials. Indeed, media materials seem to be just as prominent as sacred texts, and news media, in particular, is used much more than, for instance, religious artefacts. This is definitely relatable to the quantitative mediatization described by Couldry and Hepp (2017). Furthermore, this supports my argument that Swedish RE has seen similar developments with regards to media influence as other more traditional conveyors of information on religion, but that the consequences of these developments are not necessarily the same. Based on these insights, new questions arose. In what ways do the institutional dynamics of the RE classroom change if media materials are so frequently used? To what extent are teachers and students equipped to critically engage with media materials? And, does the presence of media materials influence the nature of RE teachers' authority on religion? These are the questions I proceeded to answer in the following three articles.

4.1.2 What kinds of media dynamics are present in RE classrooms where media materials are used?

If media materials are so frequently used by RE teachers, how do they influence the RE teachers' daily practice? Article II specifically focused on the media dynamics identified by Eskjær, Hjarvard, and Mortensen (2015), which states that media influence can be characterized by *amplification*, *framing* and *performative agency*, and *co-structuring*. Article II showed that aspects of all these media dynamics were present in the observed RE classrooms, as well as in the teachers' reflections on their teaching. The results of Article II concerning this can be viewed on various levels. Following the media materials track from Article I, it was clear that the media materials brought to the classroom by the teachers contained certain media dynamics that would probably not have been present in the classroom otherwise. The teachers would highlight things that had recently received a lot of attention in news media; that is, a certain piece of content that had been *amplified*, for example by being shared extensively on social media, and then *framed* in accordance to certain established discursive categories, for example that 'terrorism' and 'Islam' are closely linked (Hjarvard and Lundby 2018). Finally, by the time a certain news story (or equivalent) reaches the classroom it has already become a debate in which various media have already been part of the *structuring* of the debate, privileged voices have been given room to speak, a politically correct standpoint established, and so on. Thus the actors who possess the ability to pass, say, an editorial process of a major newspaper can express themselves in what is considered highly credible media (e.g. Axner 2015), while others, with less sociocultural capital, will have to use, for example, social media. Given that the teachers' in the survey answered truthfully, such media materials are much less likely to end up in an RE classroom (see Article I). In Article II, this is illustrated by, for example, how the teacher Anna leads a discussion on the so-called 'handshake affair'.²⁹ The story of the Swedish politician who refused to shake hands with a female reporter would hardly have reached the classroom without it being amplified by various media, and as soon as the topic is brought up, the teacher and the students are already referring to established frames of freedom of religion: Islam as a threat to gender equality, and so on. The discussion in the classroom is thus co-structured by the opinions of media-savvy journalists and high profile politicians who are able to get their voices heard in various media, rather than people who have direct experience of, in this case, gendered greetings.

However, these media dynamics were not only present in media materials that were brought into the classroom. As reflected on in the article, while the world has become smaller and more accessible due to a highly developed information society, the vast majority of what one perceives as reality is only

²⁹ See the first paragraph in Chapter 1 for more information on the 'handshake affair'.

accessible through the media. As media dynamics are involved in the production and construction of this mediated reality, even when teachers and students make no mention of a particular piece of media material, the dynamics are present, influencing the classroom practice. This is manifested by, for example, teachers making decisions on what to focus on in their teaching based on how easy it is to link it to current events, or taking for granted that students want to talk about extremism, Islamism, and Daesh when it is time to teach them about Islam (as the teacher Beatrice indicated during one of the observations). The reoccurring connections between Islam and a range of societal problems are not of course only anchored in news media. However, while there are problems over how Islam is depicted in textbooks, or how much room is allotted to various aspects of religion in the curriculum, the distinct focus on conflict in news media (e.g. Entman 1989) seems to have become highly influential in Swedish RE. Indeed, the insistent focus on conflicts and news value is perhaps the most concrete way in which media co-structure Swedish RE since, when teachers ask their students if they have encountered religion in the media since last time they met, it is very likely that what they have seen or heard has something to do with conflict. This, in turn, sets the agenda, or the tone, for what to focus on in class. The teachers are, of course, aware of this. Tuva³⁰, a lower secondary teacher, puts it like this:

I believe their prejudice about Islam definitely comes from the media. ... I want to show them that the Islam we see on the news is not mainstream Islam. (April 2015)

Even though the results presented above indicate that media in various forms have certain co-structuring influence on Swedish RE, the article also showed that teachers reflect upon these media dynamics, and attempt to find ways of using media materials and discourses that challenge their students to think critically, and as examples of narratives they are likely to come across in their daily lives, rather than representative examples of 'religion'. This is central if we are to understand the role of media in Swedish RE. None of the teachers used news media in order to present their students with 'facts' about religion; that is much more likely to be done by the use of a textbook, or by lecturing with the support of, for example, a PowerPoint presentation. On the contrary, various media materials are used in order to avoid what the teacher Christine in Article II referred to as the 'facts-trap'. Various media materials give access to both lived religion³¹ and the instances where religion in different ways becomes relevant in the otherwise rather secular Swedish public sphere.

³⁰ Tuva's interview was not included in Article II since Article II only concerned a single Swedish school, but her approach to mediated religion is well in line with the results of the article.

³¹ Christine's own words, as far as I could tell a direct reference to the theoretical concept (e.g. McGuire 2008).

Thus, media dynamics may be highly influential but do not determine how teachers conduct their teaching. I argue that the teachers' reflections on, and use of media material are manifestations of how media has become part of the institutional dynamics, and practice, of RE in Sweden.

4.1.3 How can RE teachers and students' engagements with mediated religion be analysed from a multiple media literacies perspective?

This question, and Article III to which it is directed, sought to capture several of the topics related to agency and structure that I have grappled with in this project. It took as a point of departure the hypothesis that an understanding of the *modus operandi* of various media, often conceptualized as 'media literacy', is one way to handle, and provide nuance to, the materials and discourses various media provide, in this case in RE classrooms.

The question builds on the insights from Article I and II; RE teachers make frequent use of media materials in their daily practice and, due to this, various media dynamics have become an integral part of teaching RE in Sweden. Multiple media literacies (Meyrowitz 1998) became an excellent concept for studying how teachers and students alike relate to these media dynamics.

The results of Article III indicate that teachers and students both view media primarily as conduits and thus seem to be aware of the media dynamic of *amplification*. As far as *framing* and *performative agency* goes, both the studied groups were aware of the tendency of various media to focus on conflicts, but the specific media *grammar* Meyrowitz holds central to understanding various media as having their own *languages* was largely missing. Typically, social media was seen as unreliable, and the quote from Carina, one of the teachers in the article, illustrates this point:

Well where do you get your news from? 'Facebook', they say. 'Alright' I say, but can you trust all that? 'No', they say. (May 2015)

In this way, different media were discussed in terms of their credibility and reliability, but only in terms of the content, not in terms of how the specific medium operates. This would indicate that within an RE context the media is primarily seen as something that is used to bring the outside world into the classroom.

Perhaps most relevant for the scope of this study was what the concept of *medium literacy* gave when applied to contrast the teachers and students in the article. The teachers recognized that various mediums, particularly social media, have given them more competition in terms of where their students get their information about religion. The students, on the other hand, recognize that the rise of social media gives them much more performative agency than would have been possible if they were limited to traditional media. Meyrowitz

(1998) states that medium literacy, on a societal level, includes the knowledge of how new media may come to disrupt the power balance in the established media matrix. He further states that such disruptions may cause shifts in who or what should be considered reliable, educated, and so on. This is where the reasoning of for example danah boyd (2014; 2017) comes in to highlight some of the possible downsides of media literacy. boyd states that contemporary youth have learned that Wikipedia cannot be trusted, and that they should instead do their own research. While a laudable notion, the result, boyd claims, is that they would ‘turn to Google and whatever came up first’ (2017, 4). Furthermore, basic media literacy tenets such as ‘follow the money’ and ‘*cui bono?*’ are equally double-edged when there is no universally agreed-upon authority to turn to.

Situating this critique in the context of RE, and more specifically in the material studied in Article III, it is easy to see boyd’s point. The students are taught not to trust Wikipedia and Facebook, and to check their sources. But what is a reliable source? As has been shown elsewhere, blogs (Lövheim 2012b) or computer games (Schaap and Aupers 2017)³² can act as authoritative voices on religion, and if that is the case perhaps the question is less about what is a ‘reliable’ source and more about what kind of narratives one subscribes to, and can relate to. From a mediatization of religion perspective, boyd’s critique, and by extension Article III itself, shows that media do challenge traditional notions of who or what should be considered an authority on religion, even within an educational context. How the teachers cope with this is the focus of the next research question.

4.1.4 How do RE teachers construct authority on religion in a mediatized situation?

This question sprung from what I perceived as a research gap within contemporary mediatization of religion research. One of the more recent foci within mediatization of religion is the role media has in changing the conditions for who can speak with authority about religion (Hjarvard 2016; Lövheim and Hjarvard 2019). The underlying assumption is that the reproduction of religion becomes unpredictable when left in the hands of media institutions rather than in the hands of more established or regulated forms of religion (Hjarvard 2016). However, as stated in Article IV, the study of these changing conditions has largely left out the educational context, which in the Nordic countries has a central role in educating the population about religion. Furthermore, schools are one of the places where a majority of the young population in Scandinavia is most likely to encounter religion (Löfstedt and Sjöborg 2019; Lövheim and Lied 2018). Thus, research on how authority on religion in an educational context is influenced by various media would serve to fill a gap in both RE

³² I would like to thank my colleague Linnea Jensdotter for telling me about this study.

research and mediatization of religion research. The question, as posed in Article IV, had two parts. First, how authority on religion can be constructed in a Swedish RE setting, and second, what role the media play in said construction.

To answer these questions I chose to conduct an instrumental case study (Stake 2005), and thus focused on one particular teacher. The teacher, Beatrice, was a highly experienced lower secondary teacher who was observed three times and then interviewed. Beatrice's authority could be described as relational (Pace and Hemmings 2007) as she viewed learning as a collaborative process, and her role in this process was to guide the students. She did not take her authority for granted but seemed to view it as something negotiated between her and her students. An illustrative example of this is her reflection on why she did not tell a student that he was wrong when he claimed that Muslims hold a privileged position in Swedish media. As she stated:

I do not have to respond to his opinions, and I cannot say 'no, that is not the case', because I do not have evidence for that either. (May 2015)

She was quite clear in the interview that she did not agree with the student's statement, but she applied her principle that you need concrete evidence to support your claims to herself as well as the students. Therefore, she asked the class to respond and another student argued rather well for a more nuanced perspective. I interpret this as a way of not using her authority when it risks alienating the students.

Another theoretical concept that proved useful when analysing this particular case was the concept of the teacher as 'co-author'. This concept, originally used by Kim Hyun-Sook (2009) to analyse authority in confessional RE settings in South Korea, is meant to capture the complexities of trying to teach certain facts while simultaneously teaching the students to be critical evaluators of all kinds of information. Kim thus proposes an approach to teaching where the teacher eschews the role of sole author in the classroom and, instead, engages the students in what aspects of religion should be focused on, and embraces the students' experiences of religion as just as legitimate as sacred texts or religious artefacts. Other examples of this were frequent in the material; for example, upper secondary teacher Christine stated the following when asked how she planned her lessons on Islam:

[W]e can delve into the questions the students often find interesting. It can be views of sexuality, prejudice about Islam, living as a practising Muslim in a mostly secular society, or focusing on dress codes. *I usually let the students decide* [my emphasis]. (May 2016)

The second part of the question was to what extent media play a role in influencing how the teacher in the case constructed her authority. I argue in the article that various media indeed seem to challenge the teacher's authority, or

at least make her situation in the classroom more complex. The teacher stated in the interview that the discussion on Islam at the beginning of the lesson would not have come up if it were not for the media reporting on Daesh and the war in Syria, which, in the article, I view as the media dynamic of amplification. She also states that in order to get the students' attention, she sometimes has to use entertaining material, which occasionally either exaggerates or exotifies certain aspects of religion. This is well in line with what Lied and Toft (2018) say about teachers battling boredom among the students, or what Chados (2012) writes about popularity being more important than authenticity when it comes to establishing authority.

However, the teacher's use of a television interview with the Dalai Lama proved to be an example of how the situation for RE teachers is much more complex than simply adhering to media logics. The teacher used the clip because 'the Dalai Lama is a real hit', a popular figure that the students enjoy watching. However, he is also an example of an authentic and traditional authority on Buddhism, to which the teacher quite comfortably can outsource her authority. The use of the Dalai Lama can thus not be explained only by his popularity, and is not a case of exotification in order to grab the students' attention. Put differently, in a mediatized society the competition for students' attention is fierce, but just getting the attention of the students is not enough, the material still has to be relevant for the topic in question.

Arguing in line with Lövheim and Hjarvard (2019), it is unlikely that the societal changes proposed by mediatization theory would be directly and linearly applicable to the actions of individuals (c.f. Furseth 2018 and her work on religious complexity). There are clear indications of this in Article IV. In the RE classroom in question, it is not simply the case that the reproduction of religion is dependent on media. The tendencies are certainly there, and media in various forms do influence the classroom practice, but so does the curriculum, the composition of the class, the materials the teacher has access to, time restrictions, and much more. The rise of social media and other information-technological developments may well have added yet another facet that teachers have to take into account, but it is unlikely that media is the main aspect teachers in general think about when planning their lessons. Beatrice, for example, viewed the students' background as more influential on their prejudices about various religions than the media, and although she made frequent use of media materials, she focused more on the diversity in her classroom as challenging than she did on handling various media events. On the other hand, in Article II, upper secondary teacher Regina³³ claimed that the media play a huge part in her teaching:

³³ In article II it actually says that it is Christine who said this. This was an error on my part that unfortunately slipped through the reviewing and editing process.

Should you let the media control the lessons? Instinctively perhaps it feels like ‘no’ should be the answer, but, yes, I think so. (E-mail interview, May 2016)

These seemingly contradictory positions are well in line with what Lövheim and Hjarvard (2019) argue when they state that although mediatization theory can point towards certain trends, there are always situational and contextual aspects that alter how these trends play out. This article has thus shown an example of what authority on religion can look like in a specific mediatized context.

4.2 Discussion

In this section, the second overarching research question will be answered: In what ways does the study of mediatization in an educational context contribute to the development and nuancing of mediatization of religion? There are many ways to approach this question. I would like to begin with how the combined results of the four articles could serve to verify some of the underlying assumptions of mediatization of religion, followed by a discussion on authority and media literacy. Finally I will highlight a few points for further research that would build on and complement the findings of this study.

4.2.1 Studying mediatization of religion in an educational setting

One of this study's main contributions to the concept of mediatization of religion is the fact that it was conducted in a setting not typically explored in mediatization of religion studies. Without excessively repeating myself with regard to the claims of mediatization of religion, it is clear that the theory in itself is well suited, if not exclusively developed, for highly secularized and media-saturated societies, such as those of the Nordic countries. It is therefore somewhat remarkable that a theory meant to describe how various media influence religion has not been applied to RE to a greater extent. The reason I find it surprising is that RE holds such a central position in terms of conveying knowledge about religion in these countries, and an account of how media influence religion is simply not complete without accounting for this fact.

I have previously argued that studies using a mediatization of religion perspective typically focus on religious organizations and institutions, or on various media outlets. A combination of these is also common; that is, how a certain religious actor uses, or is portrayed in, a certain media setting. This is to be expected, given that mediatization of religion concerns the processes 'through which religious beliefs, agency, and symbols are becoming influenced by the workings of various media' (Hjarvard 2016, 8). Typical examples of this are that religious organizations have to adapt to the modus operandi of the media in order to reach a broader audience, or that issues of religion are only brought up if they are somehow in conflict with secular values, for instance on topics such as freedom of speech, freedom of religion, gender, sexuality, and so on (Hjarvard 2013; Reintoft Christensen 2012). I am certainly not questioning the legitimacy of these studies, but they do in a way take a rather *direct* approach to the relationship between media and religion, especially if we take into consideration recent developments in the field that focus on co-structuring, dynamic processes, and contextualization. Furthermore, if we consider recent surveys asking people where they encounter religion in contemporary Sweden, we notice that encounters with religion often occur in settings that are neither explicitly religious nor media produced, such as within families or in schools (Löfstedt and Sjöborg 2019; Lövheim and Lied

2018). Thus, in an attempt to show that mediatization of religion can be more complex than one might think at first glance, I decided to focus on education, and for several reasons.

As I have stated before, both in this text and in the various articles, RE is a mandatory subject in the Swedish educational system. In this case, this means that the state, through the Swedish National Agency for Education (Skolverket), decides what Swedish youth should be taught about religion, and RE teachers have the responsibility to conduct this teaching. What I have asked myself through the various stages of this study is whether and how this teaching about religion is also influenced by various media. I have shown that, to varying degrees, this is the case, both since media content and events can influence the teachers' choice of material and methods (Article I and II), and since students' media habits impose certain challenges teachers have to deal with (Article III and IV). One of the ways these results serve to nuance mediatization of religion research is that, on an institutional level, RE is rather different from institutionalized religion and institutionalized media.

First and foremost, students are expected to trust their teachers' expertise. Secularist movements like Humanists Sweden³⁴ typically target religious organizations or institutions, and nationwide campaigns for critical media awareness such as The News Evaluator³⁵, target the population in general. Therefore, few people expect a priest or an imam to be completely neutral on religious issues and, given recent debates on fake news and algorithms on social media platforms, people generally learn not to believe everything they read or hear in the media. But teachers are expected to be neutral and objective, and to provide their students with the knowledge they need to become functioning citizens. This is at the very foundation of education as an institution in Sweden, and is stressed in several places in the curricula for both lower and upper secondary school (Skolverket 2011a; 2011b). Combined with the fact that schools seem to be the place where most 16 to 19-year-olds in Sweden encounter religion (Löfstedt and Sjöborg 2019, 149) makes RE a more influential, and to an extent less controversial, conveyor of knowledge on religion than many other institutions.

If we accept this reasoning, I would argue that the effect that mediatization has on religion is enhanced when entering an RE context. A news article focusing on some hypothetical controversy related to Islam is just another proverbial brick in the wall, but when the same news article becomes the main topic of an RE lesson on Islam (as exemplified in Article II), the potential influence of media dynamics on the reproduction of information on religion is multiplied. This is an example of just how influential co-structuring can be in

³⁴ Humanists Sweden is an organization that according to their webpage actively works to protect the secularized society. See www.humanisterna.se for more information.

³⁵ The News Evaluator is a Swedish project aimed at the development of a tool for teaching digital source criticism.

an educational setting, not only for the teachers and students but on a societal level as well, in terms of how religion is taught and maintained in Sweden.

4.2.2 Authority on religion in Swedish RE

As I have argued in Chapter 2 and in Article IV, I view RE teachers as authorities on religion, conceptually distinct from ‘religious authorities’ (Chaves 1994). In Chapter 2, I argued that a central aspect of authority on religion is the ability to control ‘what kind of information on religion that is made available, or seen as desirable, in society, as well as to ability to provide specific languages and environments by which, and where, religion can be discussed’ (section 2.4.3). This implies that the teachers’ practices in terms of their didactic choices, their values, the ‘things’ they use in their teaching, and so on, are expressions of their authority on religion. Linking back to my two-pronged definition of religion as being disputable and open to change (Beckford 2003, 3), the teachers, in their daily practice, are not only part of the institutional ‘work’ within Swedish RE but also, indeed, religion in Sweden at large (Nicolini 2013). Although the impact of such institutional work on a societal level should not be exaggerated, in a Swedish context RE is a central environment (a time and place, supervised by a teacher), and provides a certain language (secular, academic, and respectful in accordance with the core values stipulated in the national curriculum) where religion is discussed. In Article IV, I delved deeper into what characterizes the teachers’ authority on religion, arguing that the teachers often take the role of co-authors (Kim 2009) in the sense that, to a large extent, they include the students’ experiences and values in their practice. The environment RE provides is thus one where authority is relational, shared, and negotiated between the teacher and the students.

This study has shown many examples of how teachers, as authorities on religion, in various ways relate to, or are influenced by, media materials and discourses. One of the main findings of Article II was the fact that the media materials teachers use when teaching Islam were generally set within a discourse that related Islam to conflict and terrorism (see also Toft 2018 and 2019 for elaborations on this). In Article II, Toft and I viewed this as an instance of where the media dynamics of religious conflicts (Eskjær, Hjarvard, and Mortensen 2015; Lundby 2018) came to influence the RE teachers’ practice, and in a recently published study Toft (2019) delves deeper into the intermingling of the institutional dynamics of media and education. I still largely agree with our findings in Article II, and that this is one of the main ways media co-structures RE in Sweden. I would, however, like to problematize the implications of the teachers’ practice when it comes to these materials.

Teachers in this study often made a point of telling the students that media images of various religions were wildly inaccurate. While true, following Lakoff’s (2014) argument concerning the rejection and invoking of frames, we can see that even when we negate or deny a certain frame (or discourse),

for example that all religious people are backward, we still evoke that frame in the sense that we grant the language and arguments of that frame legitimacy. A teacher's hypothetical statement that 'religious people are not backward' thus still makes it sound like the would-be backwardness of certain religious groups is an important topic. While this may be perfectly applicable to political debates, which is Lakoff's particular context, it is not quite as clear-cut in an RE context.

Let me illustrate with an example from one of the interviews discussed in Article III. Prior to this interview, a lesson where the students got to study the Quran had been observed. I was struck by the fact that all the passages the teacher (Tuva) had selected were sections that were completely in line with modern secular values, which was a stark contrast to how Islam is often depicted in Swedish media (Steiner 2014; Axner 2015). I waited for a 'twist', that Tuva would smirk and say something like 'and here are 10 more passages, let's compare!', but this never happened. In this passage from the interview, I attempt to summarize what we had talked about concerning this topic:

Interviewer: ... do you think there are already enough negative things concerning Islam in the media, and therefore decide to bring up the positive sides?

Tuva: Yes, I think so. Yes. (April 2015)

This could be considered an example of a teacher who followed Lakoff's line of reasoning and refused to accept, or even negate, the frame of Islam as a problem, and the classroom thus became less influenced by frames depicting Islam as problematic. Relating back to my view of practice as 'forms of bodily [and] mental activities, "things" and their use, a background knowledge in the form of understanding, know-how, states of emotion and motivational knowledge' (Reckwitz 2002, 249), I argue that Tuva's actions in this example can be viewed as a form of institutional practice. Based on her background knowledge of media discourses and dynamics, and her feeling that Islam is unfairly treated in the media, she uses verses from the Quran as a pedagogical tool with the intent to give the students a more positive picture of Islam. She stays within the confines of the RE subject as she uses a sacred text as material and thus adheres to the course plan with regard to teaching historical aspects of various religious traditions, but her motives for selecting these passages in the text are clearly influenced by contemporary media discourses. It is clear that she is resisting, or at least negotiating with, the way news media are focusing on conflict and sensationalism. Mediatization is thus not only granting new foundations for agency by offering possibilities to express oneself through various media, it also creates space for negotiating with dominant

meanings of religion. Tuva is actively shaping her classroom to be a counterpart to media discourses on religion, rather than conforming or adapting to the *modus operandi* of the media (c.f. the conclusions drawn by Toft 2019).

The downside of Tuva's choice is of course that, outside the RE classroom, the world remains unaltered by her decision, and the students are left with two conflicting images of (in this case) Islam. Furthermore, while Tuva strives to 'balance' the negative images of religion circulating in the news media, she is hardly neutral and objective when she elects to withhold certain aspects of some religions, just because of a perceived media bias against them. Tuva stated that she had a similar, but reversed, approach to Buddhism and Hinduism; since she felt that these religions have a better reputation than they deserve, she made sure to give plenty of attention to their downsides.³⁶

My point here is that teachers do not *have* to relate to media materials or events in their teaching; they are free to do as they choose. Most teachers who participated in this study actively *chose* to relate their teaching to current events, manifested in the classroom through a variety of media materials and discourses. As far as I can tell, this was because they thought this approach was the best way to make their teaching relevant for their students. As teacher Regina put it: 'if the school shouldn't help the students understand the reality they live in, then who should?' From what I have seen, many teachers actively work to help their students interpret expressions of religion they encounter in their daily lives.

These teachers' practices are part of what constitutes RE as an institution, and their didactic choices, values, knowledge, and reflections are, on a daily basis, through a continuous process of institutionalization and re-institutionalization, shaping the RE subject to be influenced, to varying degrees and depending on the teacher and the context, by various media dynamics. In the case of Tuva, the co-structuring influence of news media took the form of her focusing more on positive aspects of Islam, while other examples from the material, such as when Anna devotes most of a lesson to discuss the 'handshake affair' in Article II, is an example of a rather different approach to similar media materials and discourses.

Because of this, I have come to view some of the conclusions Toft and I drew in Article II in a new light. We stated that media have a certain co-structuring effect on RE, and institutional dynamics typical for certain forms of media have been integrated into the RE subject. However, it is not as simple as saying that media materials impact how topics are addressed. It is the *teachers* who do this; by using their values, skills, and experiences they decide on the topics and how the topics are addressed. The fact that Inez, the teacher who would cut articles from her morning paper to bring to the class, does what she does is not because she has to do it, it is because she actively links her

³⁶ The likability of the Dalai Lama came up in this interview as well, but this time as something somewhat problematic.

teaching to current events and believes it will be better for her students than if she focused more on ‘facts’. This is a step in elaborating on both the reason for, and the consequences of, the apparent overlap between how religion is represented in the media and in the RE classroom. Media is integrated into RE on an institutional level in the sense that media in various ways (popular culture, critical media awareness and so on) are part of the national curriculum, but individual teachers also make media part of their daily practices as ways of gaining the students’ attention, start discussions, show the relevance of the subject, and much more.

Thus, rather than simply being subsumed under media logics (Hjarvard 2008), RE classrooms are unique in the sense that mediatized religion can be thoroughly discussed and reflected on, under the watchful eye of an authority on religion. This not only indicates that teachers have a certain agency, and ability, to challenge and problematize mediated religion, it also gives the students an opportunity to develop the skills necessary to critically engage with religion in the media.

4.2.3 Religious media literacy: a way forward?

A considerable proportion of this dissertation has been devoted to the concept of media literacy. Media literacy became a way to conceptualize the classroom practice with regards to various media, and thus make explicit the particular practices I focused on when, in line with both practice theory and new institutionalism, I stated that the teachers’ practices are part of institutional work (Nicolini, 2013).

I have been working from the viewpoint that a certain degree of media literacy among individuals in any given context can mitigate some of the co-structuring influence of media dynamics. Relating this to my material, had the teachers (and students) in Article III expressed a complete lack of media literacy, I would have drawn different conclusions about the structural implications various media have in RE classrooms. As it were, and as has been shown in Article III and the answer to research question 3 above, some of the central aspects of media literacy were very much present among the participating teachers and students. However, inspired by the critique from boyd (2017) mentioned above about the risk of media literacy ‘backfiring’, I wanted to go beyond the view of media literacy as synonymous with a critical media awareness that focuses on ‘checking your sources’.

There are several reasons why I view the typical critical awareness towards media, as promoted by for example Nygren and Bronéus (2018), as insufficient in this case. First, Nygren and Bronéus state that there are three primary techniques for assessing the credibility of a piece of news: the sender and their intentions, the amount of evidence supporting the story, and how it relates to other independent sources. The effectiveness of these techniques decreases significantly unless the majority population have similar conceptions of what

or who should be considered trustworthy, and this is indeed becoming increasingly acute as certain groups in contemporary Sweden lose faith in media institutions that used to be more or less unanimously viewed as trustworthy (Nordicom – Sweden’s Media Barometer 2018).³⁷ Second, critical media awareness does not include factual knowledge of the mediated topic, and without such knowledge it becomes much harder to judge the veracity of a piece of news. Third, critical media awareness typically does not include an awareness of how certain media developments cause changes in terms of who has authority on a specific topic.

Linking this reasoning to the present study, I view RE as a context where a more developed form of critical media awareness can, and to a certain extent already is, being developed. From what I have been able to discern, with help of the material and analytical input from my colleague Anna Wrammert, teachers and students agree to a large extent about what sources are trustworthy when it comes to religion. We made the case in Article III that the claim that Facebook cannot be trusted is somewhat unproblematized, but in general, the view of established newspapers and television news as being more trustworthy than social media, and experts being more trustworthy than laymen, is something I view as positive. Combined with this is the fact that the students are exposed to mediated religion in tandem with factual knowledge supplied by the teacher, and get the opportunity to engage in discussions about anything they find problematic as these two meet.

This is where I believe that the concept of *religious media literacy* (Lövheim 2012a) can be useful. Although Lövheim suggested this combination of religious literacy and media literacy when grappling with religious socialization, I argue that it is also applicable to an RE setting. Consider how Lövheim defines religious media literacy:

[H]aving knowledge about the process through which religion is communicated through various media forms in contemporary society and to develop an ability to analyze and evaluate various outcomes and implications of this process. For researchers this means to develop concepts and theories to understand the mediation of religious content through a variety of media forms, as well as mediatization as the long term implications of how the logics of these forms may shape both content about and interaction around religion. (2012a, 164)

To me, my study has shown that RE can contribute with the first part of the definition (knowledge about, and skills to engage with, mediated religion), due to how infused it is with media materials, discourses, and dynamics. RE is certainly about religious literacy as well as media literacy (separately), but it is in the combination of these concepts that the real potential of the subject

³⁷ I am referring specifically to the correlation between voting for the Sweden Democrats (a nationalist value-conservative political party which got about 18% of the votes in the 2018 election) and a decreasing trust in Swedish Public Service media.

can be found in contemporary Sweden. As for the second part of the definition, I believe that research on RE from a mediatization of religion perspective is an excellent way to begin the development of theories and concepts that can complement and nuance the role mediatization has in a myriad of aspects concerning religious change. Studying RE allows us to distinguish that, in order to have religious media literacy, different competences are needed in different contexts. These competencies do not only include an understanding of how media content on religion is potentially altered by media dynamics, but also, borrowing from Meyrowitz (1998), aspects of religious media *grammar*, and religious *medium* literacy. This expanded view of religious media literacy thus concerns content on religion, how specific mediums have different ways of mediating such content, and what broader societal implications this mediation has for, among others, religious organizations, authority on religion, the role of religion in the public sphere, and much more.

4.3 Further Research and Final Thoughts

This dissertation has been a large project for me. From an outside perspective, though, this study is just a small piece of a much larger puzzle, seeking to add just a little bit more empirical material and theoretical nuance to the fields of mediatization of religion, religious education, and authority on religion. While I feel that I managed this task rather well, I still wish I could have done more.

I would have liked to study more concretely how teachers and students work with media materials in practice. I have glances and snippets, but not the whole picture. With a clearer focus on practices, much more attention could have been given, for example, to material aspects of the classroom practices. I have touched briefly on this throughout the dissertation. Indeed, in Article I the question is raised of how ‘journalistic resources are ...transplanted from the impermanence of being tomorrow’s chip wrapper to the permanence of the classroom wall’ (Conroy et al. 2013, 162), but the practical part of how this happens remains largely unanswered. Therefore, while I have used the concept of practice as described by, for example, Nicolini (2013), I realize that I have explored but a fragment of the practices that constitute Swedish RE.

I would also have liked to make a more elaborate comparison between how teachers and students reflect over and engage with *the same* mediated expressions of religion, or interview teachers about their students’ media habits, and then ask those very students the same questions. As it happened, this was one of the main analytical restrictions in Article III: the teachers and students in the material were not from the same schools and had not been asked exactly the same questions. Wrammert and I argue in the article that discrepancies in the views of various media pose a potential problem when media materials and discourses are used in classrooms, and that this would be best studied by closely observing and interviewing RE classes, teachers as well as students.

It would also, I believe, have been fruitful to further develop the concept of religious media literacy. As it is, the definition by Lövheim (2012a) lacks specific reference to factual knowledge on religion, which is a central part of religious literacy, as well as RE. Factual knowledge does not indicate comprehensive knowledge of all religions imaginable, rather, as Dinham (2016) has argued, it concerns an understanding of how and when various aspects of religion become relevant in one's own daily practices, as well as the ability and motivation to acquire more knowledge if necessary. There are clear indications in this study that the teachers keep the 'facts' to a minimum, and focus on the factual knowledge they believe is essential to engage with contemporary, often mediated, expressions of religion.

As a final remark, I would like to go back to the quote by Regina that introduced the purpose and research questions of this dissertation:

Should you let the media control the lessons? Instinctively perhaps it feels like 'no' should be the answer, but, yes, I think so. If the school shouldn't help the students understand the reality they live in, then who should? (May 2016)

I remain fascinated by this statement; it illustrates in such a neat way the intricacies of teaching RE in a country like Sweden. Because, one of the possible conclusions of this entire study is that media influence on RE is deeply problematic, and I will be honest, this was the approach I entered this project with. But is it really that problematic? If various media tend to focus on conflict and controversy, terrorism and sensations, then it is within those frames that most young people in Sweden will encounter religion, and most teachers in this study actively worked to help their students critically relate to these frames. Could it be that, in the kind of society we live in today, education *has* to be mediatized? Because it is in the context of various media outlets, through news and social network sites, through popular culture, that a majority of young Swedes encounter religion, and it is therefore in these contexts they need to learn to be critical interpreters of religion. This is why Regina's words have been such a reoccurring theme in this study: *If the school shouldn't help the students understand the reality they live in, then who should?*

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Appendix I: Interview guide

The interview guide translated into English. Media-specific questions in bold.

Warm-up questions

Career choices, views on the teaching profession/religion teaching profession

How long have you been teaching?

What types of schools and what stages?

How did it happen that you became a teacher? (and why religion?)

What other subjects do you have? How do they go together?

General questions

How do you view the purpose of RE? (Syllabus versus own thoughts)

Do you think RE differs with regard to other subjects? If yes, how?

Is there a difference between teaching religion and teaching other subjects? (if applicable) .

What do you think is your most important task as teachers of religion? Both in relation to the pupils and the community in general.

What is your view of students' knowledge and interest in religion? Is there something they are particularly interested and engaged in? Why, do you think?

Didactical choices

Is there something/some specific areas of the subject that you think should be given priority over others? If so, what? Why?

Are there areas that are easier to skip or give less attention than others? What and if so, why?

Are there any methods that are more preferable in RE? Which and why?

**Are you using media in RE? What forms of media, in what way and with what purpose?
Please give some examples!**

Do you have any experience of students' media habits, and how this affects their view on religion?

Challenges and tensions

When you teach religion, do you experience the emergence of challenges, tensions and/or conflicts that do not arise in other subjects? Why/why not?

About which questions arise such tensions often, in your opinion?

What is your strategy to prevent/resolve these tensions/conflicts?

How do you experience that students generally relate to their own beliefs, experiences, and prejudices in relation to religions? Transparency/introversion? Curiosity? Respect and tolerance?

How do you perceive the challenge of having students who belong to the religions you teach?

Does that mean that you do 'something special' in the planning of the different areas when you have students with experience of the relevant religion in the classroom? What?

Appendix II: Email interview guide

Questions in original language (Swedish):

1. Hur lägger du vanligtvis upp undervisningen om Islam?
2. Islam är och har under en längre tid varit väldigt omtalat i media, ofta i relation till konflikter, terror, radikaliserings och liknande. Hur påverkar det din undervisning om Islam?
3. Påverkar denna mediabild diskussionerna i klassrummet på något sätt?
4. I klassrummet, skulle du säga att det finns en dominerande diskurs om Islam, eller finns det flera konkurrerande diskurser?
5. Olika medier har olika logik för hur information presenteras, väljs ut, vem som kommer till tals och så vidare. Är detta något du reflekterar över när du väljer ut mediematerial, och är detta något som du diskuterar med eleverna?
6. Skulle du säga att det är annorlunda att undervisa om Islam jämfört med andra religioner?
7. Slutligen, skolan du jobbar på har gott rykte när det kommer till religionsundervisning, något som styrks i och med våra observationer. Har du någon tanke om varför just ni lyckats så bra med detta?

Questions translated to English:

1. How do you usually conduct your teaching on Islam?
2. Islam is and has for a long time been very present in the media, often related to conflict, terror, radicalization and so on. How does that influence your teaching on Islam?
3. Does this media image influence classroom discussions in any way?
4. In the classroom, would you say there is a dominant discourse on Islam, or several competing ones?
5. Different media has different logics for how information is presented, selected, who gets to speak and so on. Is this something you reflect on when you select media materials, and do you discuss this with the students?
6. Would you say teaching Islam is different from teaching other religions?
7. Finally, this school has a good reputation as far as RE teaching goes, which is something we find justified based on our observations. Do you have any thoughts on why you succeed so well?¹

¹ ...dary. Legendary.

