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GENDER, RELIGION AND THE PRESS IN SCANDINAVIA

Mia Lövheim

Introduction: media, gender and religion – the Scandinavian context

In the eyes of the world, the Scandinavian countries might seem like a peculiar case. Denmark, Norway and Sweden are small in size: In 2017 the total population was around 21 million. At the same time, these countries, in international studies such as the World Values Survey (Institute for FUTURE STUDIES n.d.), rank secular-rational and self-expression values higher than other participating countries, as well as trust in other people and in core institutions of society. Furthermore, Iceland, Norway, Finland and Sweden are ranked among the top five countries with regard to gender equality (World Economic Forum 2017). This combination of individual self-expression, social trust and gender equality is mirrored by a model of organizing society where states provide public services in return for relatively high taxes, such as free public education through the university level, a national health care system and paid leave from work for both parents of infants (Engelstad, Larsen and Rogstad 2017). An important backdrop for this model is a history of cultural homogeneity and relative stability in terms of political and economic conditions during the 20th century (see further Lundby and Repstad 2018).

These particularities of Scandinavian societies with state intervention and subsidies include all areas of the public sphere. Norwegian media scholars Trine Syvertsen, Enli, Mjøs and Moe (2014, 17) argue that the Scandinavian welfare state models the media system in several ways. The media are considered as communication services that offer public goods. This legitimizes extensive subsidies to stimulate and ensure a diversity of political opinions in the media. Editorial freedom is secured through self-governance by the media professional associations and by law. Freedom of expression has been enshrined in the law in all of the Scandinavian countries for more than 150 years, with Sweden’s law from 1766 being the first of its kind in the world. Government policies for public service media secure diversity and quality of media productions. In sum, the media is considered a main stakeholder in democratic deliberation.

This chapter will focus on journalism in the daily press. The Scandinavian media model has contributed to a relatively strong position for the daily press. In 2017, 56 percent of the Swedish population read a newspaper daily, on paper or digital media (Nordicom 2018). High levels of readership and the role of the media in the democratic system have also
contributed to maintain a significant position for the daily press in political deliberation, in particular the editorial pages (Nord 2001). This position of daily newspapers is, however, rapidly changing due to the increasing use of digital media in the populations, particularly among youth.

Religion: increasing diversity and contestation
The Scandinavian countries have since the 16th century been predominantly Christian countries. The institution of Evangelical-Lutheran state churches formally supported and regulated by the state has only recently changed through a formal separation in Sweden 2000 and Norway 2017 (Furseth 2018). Thus, despite high levels of secular-rational values among Scandinavian populations strong collective cultural-religious traditions are present. Membership in the former state churches still encompass between two-thirds and three-quarters of the population. This historical cultural and religious homogeneity has, however, changed toward a larger religious diversity, primarily visible through the entry of immigrants from Muslim majority countries. Sweden, in particular, received high numbers of refugees from the war in Syria culminating in 2015 (Swedish Migration Agency 2018).

As in other European countries, tensions over immigration have increased in Scandinavia during the last decades. The public visibility of Islam gives rise to new political conflicts, primarily over issues of migration and integration, but also concerning the role of religion in society. There is an increased tendency to politicize religion in Nordic parliamentary debates, which started in the late 1990s (Lövheim et al. 2018). In these debates, primarily the right-wing nationalist and populist parties criticize Islam as a threat to security and to national identity and culture. Issues concerning national culture and values are increasingly thematized through a selective embracing of Christianity as civilizational identity, connected to modern, progressive and liberal values such as gender and sexual identity (Brubaker 2017, 14). The growing diversity of the Scandinavian religious landscape is also mirrored in changes in press coverage of religion over time. As will be discussed further below media debates have primarily come to focus on the accommodation of increased religious diversity, where issues such as the use of headscarves among Muslim women in public spaces and gender equality is a prominent theme.

Religion and gender in the press
In studies of how gender is depicted in the media, representations of women has been a strong theme (Gill 2007, 11). Semiotics analysis building on the tradition of structuralism and second wave feminist theory were until the late 1980s dominant approaches for analyzing how texts produce meaning and reproduce dominant ideologies of femininity and masculinity. Since the early 1990s, a broader variety of theories and topics has emerged, aiming to understand the diversity and complexity of gender as expressed in society and culture. Studies drawing on theories of intersectionality and performance have brought up the significance of race and heterosexuality for understanding normative portrayals of gender in media texts. Furthermore, studies of gender in the media have also been enriched by research focusing on normativity and complexity in the representations of men and masculinity in media (see further Kearney 2012).

This chapter will focus on representations of women and religion. Previous research in this area has uncovered three salient themes. These are the underrepresentation of women, stereotypical representations of men and women as well as representations that reiterate
asymmetrical power relations between men and women. Gail Tuchman (1978) used the concept of symbolic annihilation to describe patterns of omission, trivialization and condemnation of women in the media. Despite the fact that women have gained a stronger representation in several public sectors of society, such as politics, these aspects are still applicable to studies of representations of women within news journalism. A report requested by the European Parliament’s Committee on Women’s Rights and Gender Equality (Fondazione Giacomo Brodolini 2013, 20) concludes that in the European countries, only a fourth of the subjects in the news are female. To some extent, coverage of gender in the media has moved beyond simple or crude stereotyping to account for more nuanced and complex expressions of gender identities in society, but there is still a need for more subtle models of analysis (Ross 2010).

The pattern of omission and stereotypical representation of women as subjects and sources is also salient with regard to the covering of religion in the daily press. It might seem odd that even if most church attenders in the Western world are women (Pew Research Center 2016), women are largely missing in the news. Joyce Smith (2013) presents several reasons for why this might be the case. One reason for this fact is that journalists are trained to seek out the official point of view and since most recognized official representatives of religion tend to be men, men dominate media stories involving leadership, authority and accountability. Another reason for the underrepresentation of women and religion in news media has to do with practices within journalism that develop over time with reporting on a particular issue or area (a so-called beat) and the status assigned to various areas covered in journalistic practice. One example is the division between hard and soft news stories (Smith 2013, 75). Religion tended for a long time to be a marginalized area in journalism, along with so-called women or family issues. Furthermore, religion tended to be associated with issues that has been regarded as soft or light, both with regard to content and styles of reporting. Soft stories are contrasted to hard news stories that focus on immediate events with serious consequences, such as accidents and crime, often written in a straightforward manner. Soft news stories are not as immediate and may be written in a less formal style focusing on personal experiences and emotional aspects (Smith 2013, 75). When religion is covered in soft stories topics such as family life, sexuality, emotions and personal relationships are frequent. This kind of journalism thereby builds on and reiterates stereotypical conceptions of the position and interests of men and women in society, as well as of masculinity and femininity. In the case of news on religion, conceptions of religion as soft news in terms of content and style of reporting, along with religion being a marginalized area, contributed to making stories of women in religion a marginalized topic. This coverage also reflects a secularist understanding of religion as belonging in the personal and private, domestic sphere rather than in the public and political sphere of society.

As other chapters in this volume show, religion as a theme in journalism has during the last three decades changed from being a marginalized topic to pervade reporting in domestic politics and foreign affairs, areas that represent hard news (Mitchell and Gower 2012). This change implies that reporting on religion become shaped by news valuation criteria of immediacy, conflict and economic or political consequences. Does this shift also change the reporting on gender and religion?

During the latest decades, European media discourse on religion and gender has been dominated by coverage of Muslim women wearing the hijab or other forms of head coverings such as niqab or burqa (Reilly 2011). Most studies of this increased visibility of religion in newspaper coverage confirm previous patterns of stereotypical representations of gender and religion (Morey and Yaqin 2011, Ahmed and Matthes 2017, 233). An example is Elisabeth Klaus and Susanne Kassel’s (2005) analysis of the representation of women in Germany’s two
leading news magazines Der Spiegel and Focus before and after the war in Afghanistan 2001. As will be further discussed below, their analysis shows how Muslim men are presented as violent perpetrators and Muslim women as mute victims of oppression in need of liberation from a patriarchal and violent religion (Klaus and Kassel 2005, 345, 350). These patterns are confirmed in several later studies of, for example, news reporting in the USA (Mishra 2007, Byng 2010) and in the British (Williamson 2014) and Flemish press (Broos and Van Den Bulck 2012, 118). This quote from an opinion article by Ghena Krayem, senior lecturer at Sydney Law School, the University of Sydney, published by the Guardian in May 2018, illustrates the experience of misrepresentation by news media among Muslim women.

For some, we are a caricature to be shaped and moulded to fit an image already constructed. For others, we are the nameless victims in a saviour story where the saviour – a hero or heroine – is more important and consequential than the supposed victim. For yet others, we are academic subjects analysed within a theory designed to validate conclusions already reached. All too rarely are Muslim women acknowledged as living breathing beings, with real voices of our own. Voices that are often raised but rarely heard, let alone listened to. For many Muslim women, to be the understudy in your own story, to be relegated to the wings of life’s stage while others say your lines for you, is our reality. (Krayem 2018)

Theory: representation, framing and mediatization

Why does coverage of religion and gender in the daily press seem to follow and repeat these patterns? A key concept to understand this process is representation; the process by which meaning is produced and exchanged between members of a culture through the use of language, signs and images which stand for or represent things (Hall 1997). As this definition shows, the use of language and images in the media to give meaning to things is a process that involves production of information as well as exchange of meaning between members of a culture. Both of these aspects are important to understand similarities as well as differences and possible shifts in press coverage of religion and gender.

Mitchell and Gower (2012, 7) describe four approaches to the coverage of religion in news: focusing on the story, the context, the journalist and the audience. Framing is a useful concept to understand how news journalism works to produce information through constructing a story. Framing can be described as the process to “select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient” in order to “promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation” (Entman 1993, 51–52). Frames can be identified through the use of certain keywords, phrases, stereotyped images, sources of information, etc., that “provide thematically reinforcing clusters of facts or judgments” (Entman 1993, 51–52). Frames produce particular meanings through representing things in particular ways, but also through connecting them to a “repertoire of themes and stories” (Ettema 2005, 133) exchanged among members in a culture.

Mediatization is a theory that focus on 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). Mediatization theory places instances of representation and framing in particular media texts in a larger context. A key concept in theories of mediatization is media logic. Media logic on a general level refers to the technological but also institutional and aesthetic ways of working in particular media institutions (Hjarvard 2012). The focus on
the institutional level means that media logic shapes media reporting on a more general level than the choices and practices of individual journalists. Media logic in news journalism consists of practices of framing, but also of shared professional norms, values and standards that “…reduce uncertainty and provide an overall structure that shapes the behaviour of both the news organizations and individual news journalists” (Asp 2014, 259).

Mediatization, furthermore, is a theory focusing on the relation between media and other social institutions in a society. It works from the premise that, in highly modernized societies, technical mass media increasingly come to dominate public discourse and all forms of social interaction. Mediatization of religion, then, describes the processes through which the use of religious symbols in society becomes increasingly influenced by the ways in which various media operate. This implies that, in a society where few individuals have a first-hand experience of religious practice, media framing determines the kind of information that ultimately contribute to public knowledge about particular religions (Stout and Buddenbaum 2003, 2, Lövheim 2012). In what Stig Hjarvard terms journalism on religion (2012), religious content becomes represented by the standards of news journalism, such as newsworthiness, rather than by prescriptions from religious authorities. In this chapter, mediatization theory will be used to connect processes of framing in particular media texts with the logic of journalistic genres such as opinion journalism and feature journalism, and to discuss how media logic intersects with religious, social and political changes in contemporary Swedish society (see further Hjarvard and Lundby 2018).

Representations of religion and women in the Swedish press

The particular religious landscape of the Scandinavian societies as dominated by a historical relation between the Lutheran Church and the state, low levels of regular practice of religion in the population and high levels of secular-rational values is mirrored in research about the coverage of religion in the Swedish press. There are few available studies that aim to cover changes over time and that use a comprehensive, quantitative approach. Data from two recent studies that have produced such data about coverage of religion will be used here: a Nordic comparative study¹ of coverage of religion in four major newspapers in each country (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden) between the years 1988, 1998 and 2008 (Lundby et al. 2018) and a longitudinal study of the use of religion in editorials from 1976 to 2010 in 11 Swedish daily newspapers² (Lövheim and Linderman 2015, Linderman and Lövheim 2016). These studies used a similar set of keywords to identify references to religion in the newspaper articles, aiming to cover a broad spectrum of traditions: religion, Islam, Christianity, Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhism, new forms of spirituality, secularity and religious metaphor. The findings show an increase in references to religion over the period, particularly between 1998 and 2008. Furthermore, there is an increasing diversity in what kind of religious traditions are covered in the press. While articles about protestant Christianity dominate the coverage throughout the period, the number of such articles decrease from the early 1990s while the coverage of Islam increase. In Sweden, this increase in references to Islam is most prominent in editorials, where the number of editorial pages referring to Islam rise from about 3 percent in the period 1976–1980 to almost 12 percent in 2005–2010 (Linderman and Lövheim 2016). Protestant Christianity and Islam are by far the most covered religious traditions. The coverage of Judaism, Buddhism, Hinduism, Sikhism and New religious movements is marginal and does not display any significant tendencies of change.

The findings from studies focusing on a more limited time period show that the coverage of religion is more often negative and critical than positive. In a study of 14 daily newspapers
between September 2008 and March 2009, the majority of articles that were coded as depicting religion in a positive way concerned Protestant Christianity, while less than 10 percent of the articles covering Islam were positive (Engstrand and Nordlander 2009, 15). A later study in 2015 focusing on images of Islam and presumed Muslims in Swedish news media (Axner 2015) categorized the majority of articles in the press as appearing in foreign news coverage and representing Islam in a generalizing manner connected to themes of terrorism, violence and extremism.

These studies also show that the representation of religion is gendered. The findings from the Swedish studies follow the patterns identified in international research where men dominate the coverage of religion, mostly in articles about Islam, Catholicism and Judaism. News reporting repeatedly uses certain frames in order to bring out the news value of an event, such as conflict, economic consequences and the attribution of responsibility. These frames are often constructed as narratives, in which actors are assigned oppositional roles such as perpetrators and victims (Figenschou, Thorbjørnsrud and Larsen 2015, 130). In her study of the coverage of Islam in Swedish media, Axner (2015, 47) used a categorization of individuals or groups portrayed as perpetrators of violence, victims of violence or as actors contributing in a constructive way to a situation. She found that Muslims or presumed Muslims were often represented in a generalizing manner, as a group, and more often portrayed as perpetrators than as victims or as having constructive agency. Men are more often categorized as perpetrators and women as victims.

**Framing of religion, women and equality in Swedish editorials**

In order to illustrate how theories of representation and framing can be used to analyze the coverage of gender and religion in the Swedish press, we will now proceed to discuss a couple of examples from the longitudinal Swedish study of editorials. Representations differ according to genre, for example, news media, feature material and opinion articles such as editorials and op-eds. The editorial is a journalistic genre that reviews and critically discusses opinions in national and international politics. It represents the newspapers’ opinion on an issue and is often written by senior editorial staff, and thus not signed by a particular name. The editorial can therefore be described as evaluative rather than strictly following news criteria. These features, however, make editorials an appropriate case for studying framing in terms of interpretation and evaluation of news events in the context of broader social and political issues (Nord 2001).

As described earlier, frames can be identified through certain keywords, phrases or stereotyped images that supply “thematically reinforcing clusters of facts or judgments” (Entman 1993, 51–52). In this study, clusters of connections between religion and gender were identified using keywords referring to various expressions of religion (see above), as well as the keywords *woman, women* and *equality*. Thirty of 481 texts in the study contained a combination of keywords referring to religion, *woman/women* and equality. Four main clusters were identified in these texts. The first cluster focused on religion as threat to women’s rights and to equality. This cluster is the largest one and contains ten articles, of which seven refers to Islam. The second cluster contained seven articles and concerned the theme women as victims or symbols for religious violence. The third cluster, which contained seven articles, focused on gender equality and the role of religious organizations in supporting or resisting such values. The fourth and smallest cluster of four articles focused on religion as a source of women’s rights.

The first three clusters can be seen as thematically reinforcing each other in terms of the events reported and the evaluations of them given in the editorial. These clusters can thereby
be described as constituting a dominant frame with sub frames. The dominant theme is religion as a problem in terms of threatening women’s rights, such as the right to education, freedom of speech and contributing to forced circumcision and veiling. The facts or events used to construct the frame are most frequently taken from various situations of conflict in the Middle East: the revolution in Iran 1979, the Taliban regime in Afghanistan 2001 and the government of the Islamist movement Hamas in Gaza 2006. This quote illustrates this tendency through discussing the possibility of Hamas regulating “(…) alcohol, understandings of gender equality and other things included in a free society” (Kvällsposten 2006). Most of the examples of women becoming victims of religious violence concern Islam, but other religious traditions are also included. Several texts, for example, use the underrepresentation of women in various Christian organizations as an example of the discrimination of women in society.

A second step in analyzing framing of religion and gender concerns identifying problem definitions, interpretations, evaluations and recommendations promoted by media texts. In the dominant frame described above, women’s positions are primarily depicted as victims of religiously infused violence or as symbols of gender discrimination within particular religions. Moving on to framing as prescribing certain evaluations of and recommendations for the handling of a situation, the editorials in the dominant frame describe the situation as a clash between Swedish cultural norms and the values that immigrants from other countries and religious traditions bring with them regarding the position of women. This is exemplified through the following quotes from an editorial in the largest Swedish daily newspaper Dagens Nyheter, 17 January 2000. The editorial (Dagens Nyheter 2000) opens with the following statement: “Respect for cultural difference is central in the encounter with immigrants, but this respect does not mean that every behavior is accepted.” In the following sentence, this argument is further developed: “(…) one area where the Swedish norm system often clashes with that which some immigrants bring with them from their home country: namely the position of women” (Dagens Nyheter 2000). Another example can be found in an editorial in Dagens Nyheter (Hedvall 2001), which argues that women in Afghanistan need to “regain the possibility to work, freedom of movement and proper education and freedom from religious oppression. For this they need the support of governments in other parts of the world.”

**Framing: media logic and shared themes and stories**

In order to understand the role of the problem definitions, interpretations and recommendations offered in the Swedish editorials, we need to move to the third step in framing analysis. This concerns how frames work through connecting particular representations to a repertoire of shared themes and stories in a particular culture. As described in the section on theory, media logic refers to shared professional norms, values and standards or ways of working that over time develop in particular media institutions. These shared values and standards are, however, not detached from the shared ways of making sense of oneself and society that over time become established in a society, in other words the repertoire of shared themes and stories to which particular frames are connected.

Klaus and Kassel’s (2005, 337) analysis of patterns of representing Muslim women in German foreign news reporting on the war in Afghanistan 2005 is an example of such connections between representations and dominant ways of framing that can be identified in particular newspaper articles, and shared themes and stories in a society. As described above, news reporting often works through focusing on conflicts and antagonists. In the case of reporting on a war, this news media logic intersects with the ways in which a society establish
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shared understandings concerning when violent actions such as military operations can be accepted. Such understandings can more easily be seen as legitimate by the public if they are based on a dualistic and simplistic construction of good and evil. In such constructions, dualistic and hierarchical understandings of male and female characteristics and roles are often utilized and might even be reinforced (Klaus and Kassel 2005, 339). Klaus and Kassel find that the veil or headscarf became a key symbol in media reporting from the Afghanistan war through the intersection of what they refer to as three forms of logics or established systems of interpreting the world that are known and shared in a society. These consisted of the news media logic, the logic of legitimizing military actions and gender logic. Images and stories about the veiling of women were used to show how women were oppressed by Muslim men, but also to underpin an image of Taliban as opponents to the ideals and freedoms that were seen as characteristics of Western civilization. Along the same lines, images of unveiled women following the defeat of the Taliban regime were not only used as proofs of their liberation but also served to legitimize the German military intervention in Afghanistan in order to defend the core values of Western civilization. Finally, by portraying the women as in need of liberation from Taliban men by Western military invention the Afghanistan women were represented according to a gender logic where they remained passive victims rather than agents of their own situation. By connecting the logic of news reporting to existing gender relations and to political debates about the involvement of German military in the war in Afghanistan, this kind of analysis anchors an analysis of representation and framing in a particular news event within a wider social and political context. This kind of analysis shows how media representations of religion and gender tend to repeat certain dominant frames in the sense of standardized formats and stereotyped images. It also shows how this media logic interplays with established understandings, shared themes and stories, concerning various religions and nations.

Alternative frames: religion and women’s agency

The study of framing in the Swedish editorials presented in the previous section identified one dominant frame made up of three larger clusters and one smaller cluster of texts, which represented a different theme. Articles in this cluster described religion as a source of women’s agency rather than religion, in general, or Islam, in particular, as a threat to the rights of women. Two of these articles base their arguments on examples of Christian churches as carriers of values that concern and support women’s needs. The other two articles discuss and encourage political decisions about Muslim women’s right to wear a veil or burqa in public. With regard to prescribing certain evaluations of and recommendations to handle a situation, a key argument in this frame is that religion needs to be included as a vital part of a pluralistic, democratic society (Lövheim 2017). As the following quote from Sydsvenska Dagbladet (Carlson 2009) shows, the right of Muslim women to wear a veil is presented as a sign of a pluralistic and safe society for all citizens: “this is what a vital plurality is all about: a veiled Muslim woman, a Jew wearing a kippa and a man in full drag queen gear – all of them must be able to feel safe…”

The representation in the Swedish editorial of veiled Muslim women as symbol of a vital pluralistic society can be interpreted as a different kind of framing than the problem definitions and interpretations used in the dominant frame. The agency of the woman to express her religious identity through a headscarf is encouraged rather than dismissed as an obstacle to a democratic society. However, the way the article uses the Muslim woman’s headscarf as a symbol of a particular political vision is also problematic in terms of the underlying conventions about women and religion to which it is connected.
We can further analyze this situation by bringing in another common news frame, the human-interest frame. This frame focuses on personalization and emotions and often works through presenting a model case, which serves the function of giving a human face to a political issue (Figenschou, Thorbjørnsrud and Larsen 2015). The human-interest frame is also commonly used in feature stories. A feature story is a longer text that can contain and build on news elements but aims to humanize, give color to, educate or entertain the reader. Axner notes that in feature stories about Islam, actors were more often given a face and agency, and various perspectives on a situation were presented. Also, women were more frequently portrayed in this kind of articles than in the regular news articles (Axner 2015, 58, see also Korteweg 2008). Articles using the human-interest frame can thus reduce the dichotomous model of perpetrators and victims used in hard news stories or editorials through giving a more nuanced presentation of, for example, Muslim women’s identities and agency. However, human-interest stories may also construct new dichotomies through their focus on presenting idealized model cases.

In the following section, a feature article published in Dagens Nyheter (Orrenius 2018) will be discussed as an example of this ambiguity inherent in the human-interest frame. The topic of the article is the difficult situation of Swedish Muslims who have lost their faith but cannot exercise their freedom to leave Islam, granted to Swedish citizens, due to fear of punishment. One of the persons interviewed in the article is a young woman who goes by the name Miriam. The article tells the story of how Miriam was brought up in a Muslim family. During most of her childhood, she practiced Islam herself, but gradually she came to question her own faith as well as Islam as a religion. Now she is living a double life, she is secretly a committed atheist but lying to her family and participating in religious practice. Miriam describes her family as not very strict in keeping the commandments of Islam. Still she is afraid of exclusion from her family and even physical violence if she were to reveal her secret. From what she has learnt during her upbringing, leaving Islam is a deadly sin.

The article allows Miriam to tell her story with more nuances than the ordinary news article. She is portrayed as an active, reflecting, independent and sensible young woman. A successful student interested in philosophy who on her own initiative found books critical of religion in the public library. A perfect daughter helping her parents and caring for her younger siblings. These characteristics and her story make her into a person that readers of the newspaper can identify with. She is, in many ways, an ideal model of a Swedish young woman: independent, enlightened, critical of dogmatic religion and patriarchal norms in the family. In a quote, she expresses that she “loves secular Sweden” (Orrenius 2018). She has taken off her veil and is critical to what she has learnt in her family, namely that her Muslim identity is to be put “before being a woman, before being Swedish, before being an Arab… before everything!” (Orrenius 2018). However, the portrayal of Miriam also includes an image of believing Muslims in Sweden as different from the Swedish majority population, as living in “bubbles where freedom of religion is not allowed” (Orrenius 2018). One example is how the article describes Miriam’s fear of hell: “Sweden is one of the most secular countries in the world. Miriam knows that many Swedes find it difficult to take in the idea of hell as a concrete place where people are punished through eternal suffering for their acts during life on earth” (Orrenius 2018). While Swedish people find frightening images of hell surreal, the article (Orrenius 2018) continues, this is “logical and normal in families that interpret Islam in the way Miriam’s parents do.” In a quote (Orrenius 2018), Miriam comments that she loves her family: “…there is nothing wrong with my parents, but with religion.”

This example illustrates how the use of the human-interest frame for telling the story of a young woman leaving her Muslim faith, on the one hand, may challenge common stereotypes.
of Muslim women. On the other hand, this framing repeat stereotypes of practicing Muslims in Swedish society as having beliefs and values that seem alien to the secular majority population. As the story of Miriam shows, this ambiguity is constructed through presenting ideal cases that create sympathy and identification with readers through aligning with experiences and values that members of the Swedish majority population see themselves as upholding. In this case, we see how frames work through juxtaposing an ideal type and a common stereotype of Muslims. The representation of Muslim women as active agents is different from what was the case in the dominant framing, where women remained passive victims to religion. Nevertheless, the article about Miriam is still largely presenting Islam as different from and a problem in Swedish society, based on an understanding of Sweden as a secular society where collective belief in religious dogmas is an anomaly. A similar example can be found in Swedish press reports on the news about the Pakistani activist Malala Yousafzai winning the Nobel peace prize in 2015 (Axner 2015, 58). In most reports, Malala Yousafzai is portrayed as a strong, brave and independent Muslim woman. This image is, however, contrasted against Islam as a patriarchal and violent religion, in this case the oppressive rule of Taliban’s in Pakistan, who in 2012 attempted an assassination of Malala in retaliation for her activism. As with the previously discussed example from the Swedish editorial study, representations of Muslim women that do not repeat the dominant frame can, on the one hand, be interpreted as a different framing where religious women are given agency (see also Korteweg 2008). On the other hand, this kind of framing is also based in and upholding an ideal of gender equality and individual autonomy as core values of Western culture and which is threatened by Islam.

Using topical, individual and often emotionally charged cases in the daily press, such as Malala or Miriam, can thus contribute to as well as reduce the nuances and complexities of Muslim women’s lives and identities. They are portrayed with agency, but also as symbols to argue for political positions concerning how to integrate religious diversity and what is perceived as core values of Swedish culture and democracy, such as secularity, gender equality and individual self-realization. In editorials, the connection between problem definitions of particular events and evaluations that draw on political opinions is more explicit. This is a consequence of the logic of editorials as a genre, closely following and responding to political debates. Framing in editorials thus make explicit the connections between the media logic of the daily press, and the wider political and social context, while this might be more implicit in news and feature articles.

**Mediatization, religion and gender**

The analysis of the frames used in Swedish editorials over time shows that articles that discuss gender in the context of Sweden as a culturally and religiously pluralistic society become more articulated from the year 2000 and onwards (Lövheim 2017, Lövheim and Linderman 2015). There are also indications of an increase in using the human-interest frame for representing Muslim women in Scandinavian media (Abdel-Fadil and Liebmann 2018). Mediatization theory analyses changing relations between the media and other institutions in society from the perspective of media logics as the driving force of this process. If mediatization is approached as a dynamic rather than deterministic process of change, it is possible to discuss various outcomes of how journalistic practice over time come to shape representations of religion as well as gender. As the examples in the chapter has shown, a variety of framings can be found within journalistic genres such as editorials and feature stories. Formats, routines, values and norms within various forms of journalistic genres include newsworthiness but also values of impartiality, truth and of providing nuance and context to topical events.
Furthermore, as pointed out above, the logics of media institutions is not detached from the values, norms and ways of making sense of oneself and society that over time become established in a society, in other words the repertoire of shared themes and stories to which particular frames are connected. From this perspective, the examples of different kinds of framings of gender and religion in editorials and feature stories presented in this chapter indicate changes in journalistic practices and in the role of the press in Swedish society. As pointed out in the introduction, digital media platforms challenge the traditional role of newspapers. In response, newspapers shift from supplying news to the general population to influencing the political agenda through more independent and opinionated journalism (Hjarvard 2006). As pointed out in the introduction to the chapter, religion has become a contentious subject in political discussions within Scandinavia, together with an increased focus on human rights issues such as freedom of religion and gender and sexual equality. The use of individual, emotionally charged examples of Muslim women in editorials and feature articles can be seen as a response to political debates which increasingly frame Islam as a problem representing different values than what is perceived as common Swedish culture. In the Scandinavian media system, this process is also supported by media policies and public expectations regarding the press as an independent and critical voice in the democratic order. These alternative framings may seem to be using a similar format as was previously labelled soft journalism in their portrayals of religion. Nevertheless, soft stories about religion can, due to changes in political opinions in a society, become a starting point for heated public debates regarding the legitimacy of religion and the agency of women in Scandinavian and European societies (Bracke and Fadil 2011).

**Conclusion: contribution and further challenge for studies of religion and journalism**

This chapter has discussed representations of gender, in particular, women and gender equality, and religion in the Swedish press. The visibility of religious diversity in Scandinavian media has increased during the latest decades, primarily represented by increased coverage of Islam. In accordance with previous research, the coverage of these topics in news articles is predominantly negative, representing Islam as connected to conflict, terrorism and extremism, where women more often become passive victims than active agents. By using examples from editorials and feature journalism, this chapter has shown that, despite these general tendencies, attempts toward representing religious, in particular Muslim, women in other ways can be found. Using theories of framing and mediatization, this chapter has discussed how alternative frames like the human-interest frame can produce stories where women are portrayed as active agents. However, these kind of framings have ambiguous outcomes: presenting individual cases that readers in majority society can identify with can challenge some stereotypes about minority groups, but they also risk producing new divisions by contrasting the stories of individuals who comply with dominant values in Swedish society with generalizing depictions of those that express their religiosity and gender identity in other ways.

In theories of the mediatization of religion, the concept of media logic has been used to explain why certain ways of framing religion dominate in societies where the mass media has become the prime source of information about religion. The use of conflictual approaches in analyzing media representations on Islam has been criticized for reproducing divisions and overemphasizing the media’s power to control and maintain unjust social representations. The complexity of media messages and variations and agency among media recipients is thus often reduced (Faimau 2015, 328, Bleich, Bloemraad and de Graauw 2015). This chapter
suggests that a dynamic rather than deterministic understanding of mediatization, focusing on the interplay between media logic and changes in social relations and cultural values in society, can be helpful to contextualize differences within and possible shifts over time in media representations of gender and religion.

Future research in this area should investigate differences within and between various genres of newspaper journalism, in order to provide more knowledge about when and how more nuanced understandings of how religion as one among several, intersecting social forces that can contribute to domination as well as agency for women. Such representations of religion align with studies of Muslim women’s experiences of media coverage of themselves. Deborah Broos and Hilde Van den Bulck (2012, 127–128) found that Flemish Muslim women could not identify with the stereotypical images of themselves in news media, which reduced the complexity of their identities in terms of nationality, religion and ethnicity into false dichotomies. The multiple voices of religious women and the complexities and nuances of their stories need to be acknowledged, as well as the attempts to challenge dominant frames of representation that are present in journalism seeking out new ways of working in a time of increased but contested visibility of religion.

Notes
1 The NOREL project was funded by the Nordic Research Councils for the Humanities and the Social sciences (NOS-HS), 2009–2014.
2 The project “The Resurgence of Religion?! A study of Religion and Modernity in Sweden with the daily press as case” was funded by the National Research Council of Sweden 2010–2014.
3 Quotes from Swedish newspaper articles have been translated into English by the author.

Further readings
This reader provides a large selection of classical and contemporary key texts for studying gender and media, and introduced key concepts and theories within particular areas of research.
This edited volume reviews theoretical and methodological approaches to research on gender within the field of media, religion and culture up until 2013. Case studies give examples of studying the interplay between gender and religion in various forms of media and popular culture.

References
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Gender, religion and press in Scandinavia


