



The Changing Relation Between Sexual and Gender Minorities and Religion in Finland: Some Observations in the Light of Postsecularity

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IN THE WAKE OF THE POSTSECULAR

By early spring 2019, a sudden incident drew public attention to the perceived antagonism between “homosexuality” and religion, the latter being mainly represented in this case by the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland (hereafter ELC). Two ministers in a local Lutheran parish in a small town voiced harsh negative attitudes toward sexual and gender minorities. First, in a closed discussion on Facebook, the vicar condemned homosexuality by using strong language with biblical connotations. These posts generated some debate, and the chaplain decided to publicly echo the vicar with a letter to the press in a local newspaper. The chaplain’s views were considered inappropriate by many. It fueled the public discussion and also received attention on a national level (Toivanen 2019a). As

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a result, reports about the ministers were filed with the police, and the local newspaper became the object of reports to the Council for Mass Media. The cases against the ministers are still open, but the newspaper was acquitted by the council in May 2019. In its decision the council recognizes that the writing is clearly depreciatory of sexual and gender minorities and that it deprives them of human dignity. Yet they conclude that it is in the interest of the public to be informed of the depreciatory views and opinions of the respective ministers (Council for Mass Media 2019).

This event offers an example of how the relation between religion, on the one hand, and sexual and gender minorities, on the other, surfaces in Finland. The example also tells something about how events like these can be viewed in the light of a so-called postsecular condition. The discussion about postsecularity that was initiated by Jürgen Habermas (2005, 2006, 2008) has not, of course, resulted in a single understanding. James Beckford, for instance, points to many uses of the concept and concludes that “it goes without saying that the sheer variety of meanings is a notable feature of discourse about postsecularity [and that] there are tensions between some of the meanings” (Beckford 2012, 13).¹ In this chapter we limit ourselves to the basic heuristic value of the concept. It is helpful in observations related to contemporary religious change in the West.

Habermas’s writings tapped into a growing reflection that was critical toward simplified notions of secularization as a fundamental “incompatibility between some features of ‘modernity’ and religious belief” (Taylor 2007, 543), notions that had become more and more questioned in light of recent empirical research. Already decades ago, José Casanova (1994) concluded that even though many modern societies are marked by a decline in institutional forms of religion, it does not necessarily follow that religion would be losing relevance in society and culture. From this perspective the term “postsecular” makes sense in light of a recent and widespread rise in “public consciousness” regarding religion and religion-related issues in Europe “where peoples’ religious ties have steadily or rather quite dramatically lapsed” (Habermas 2008, 17). This growing consciousness Habermas views as the result of (a) the increasing coupling of religion with global conflicts, which “robs the secular understanding

¹We will not deal with this problem here and refer readers to relevant publications (e.g., Harrington 2007; Molendijk et al. 2010; Beckford 2012; Nynäs et al. 2012; Beaumont 2018).

of the world of any triumphal zest”; (b) the more recent proliferation of religious voices in connection with value-laden civil and political issues and controversies; and (c) increasing immigration, particularly by people “from countries with traditional cultural backgrounds” (Habermas 2008, 20). This view does not question the claim that many processes of secularization continue and that organized religion in the West continues to decline according to many measures of religious behavior and convictions (e.g., Altemeyer 2009).

Our initial example exemplifies that the current situation in Finland can be comprehended with reference to the postsecular in the sense that media debates about rights and recognition of sexual and gender minorities have contributed to making religion a public issue despite ongoing secularization in Finland. Still, Beckford (2012, 17) makes an important point when he addresses the danger involved in talking about the postsecular “like waving a magic wand over all the intricacies, contradictions, and problems of what counts as religion to reduce them to a single, bland category.” In other words, we need to stress in a critical manner that Habermas’s view means a simplification, and we also need to account for critical remarks made with regard to the discussion about the postsecular (Nynäs 2018). The change addressed by Habermas means that religion is gradually shifting from one societal institution to another, from traditional religious organizations to the media. However, this *relocation of religion* is not limited to the media only. Rather, we can see ongoing change as part of current and profound changes in the general nature and social location of religion and how these also involve aspects of consumerism, marketization, and neoliberalism, among others (Gauthier 2020; Nynäs et al. 2015).

We therefore need to make two additional remarks. The first one concerns the distinction between religion and the secular and the second between the public and private. Both are of relevance for comprehending the relocation of religion involved in the postsecular. In order for a rational and inclusive democracy to be achieved, Habermas (2008) argues that both secular and religious individuals and groups must recognize each other’s right to contribute to civic and political life. Moreover, they should engage in a mutual, complementary learning process, each reflexively striving to understand, respect, and accommodate the other’s positions and arguments. It is easy to agree with Habermas’s ideal, but it still contains some fundamental problems. First, regarding this mutuality he

writes that “in a constitutional state, all norms that can be legally implemented must be formulated and publicly justified in a language that all the citizens understand” (2008, 28). In this respect, Habermas maintains a normative secularist position, since it requires religious actors to translate “their religious norms into a secular idiom” when engaging in public civic and political debate (Dillon 2010, 146). The Habermasian ideal remains in a more abstract way concerned with “the dilemmas posed by religious otherness” (Dillon 2010, 141). Furthermore, Habermas’s writing also fails to recognize how the contemporary Western religious landscapes have become diversified, and his juxtaposition of the secular and the religious is especially problematic. Other researchers have underlined that it is not always clear what constitutes a “religious” idea, argument, or actor, as opposed to a “secular” one, and that many actors hardly see themselves as either religious or secular, especially in light of how many religious institutions and communities have long-standing traditions of participation in civil and political life (Beaumont 2018; Dillon 2010). “The terms ‘religious’ and ‘secular’ cannot any longer be regarded as opposites in a way that makes choosing between them necessary” (Illman et al. 2015, 214).

Our second point concerns Habermas’s understanding of public debate. Here, Habermas’s views well reflect his broader social-philosophical thinking, in which the focus has been primarily on the importance of the “public sphere” and inclusive, participatory democracy (Habermas 1992; see also Dillon 2010; Harrington 2007; Martin 2010). Despite acknowledging the relevance of inclusivity, we need again to claim that Habermas fails to account for some significant features addressed by other scholars. In particular, the assumption that we can easily separate the public from the private has become increasingly difficult to maintain, and this is evident when discussing media. Social media often represent a space with a transformative potential, a platform for critical distance from public space that bridges boundaries and enables encounters. Still, one needs to simultaneously recognize the idealization of the social that this might imply, including the risk to disregard how political economies and media logics in fact maintain, structure, and inform social media. All in all, in contrast to received understandings of the public and the private we can emphasize how current social media may be privately public and publicly private (e.g., Papacharissi 2009; Fuchs 2014).

The categories imposed in Habermas’s notion of the postsecular do not necessarily correspond with the rich and diversified reality that they are expected to reflect, and his notion of the postsecular risks reproducing some problematic assumptions rooted in an intellectualized and

rationalized view of religion and the secular (see Nynäs 2017, 2018); or, to put it in Habermasian terms, the postsecular is not necessarily conditioned by separate, distinct voices, languages, and grammars that will have to be conflated into a mutual language as part of a translation process bridging traditional institutions. Still, the contemporary religious landscape in Finland, including how issues related to sexual and gender diversity are located, can be meaningfully framed by referring to the postsecular, especially when we acknowledge the more profound changes in the general nature and social location of religion involved and how these contest distinctions that are taken for granted. Relocation of religion is accompanied by diversification.

In this chapter, we aim to account for part of the complexity the postsecular involves by applying a set of different lenses to the current situation. We start by sketching the more recent history of the relation between the religious landscape in Finland and sexual and gender minorities. Second, we turn to an interview study and give voice to professionals working for NGOs in the area of sexual and gender minority issues. These voices address how religion surfaces on the horizon of these NGOs and contribute insights into how religion is experienced to mark and challenge the lives of sexual and gender minorities in Finland today, in spite of recent legal progress. Finally, we address aspects of how religion and sexual and gender minority issues are publicly played out in the media. These different lenses do not comprise the entire situation but complement each other in a relevant way.

RELIGION AND SEXUAL AND GENDER DIVERSITY IN FINLAND

Some central features of religion in Finland have affected how religion and sexual and gender diversity have come together. To start with, Finland is in many ways a very homogeneous country. Even though the membership rate of the ELC has dropped below 70% of the population in 2019, a clear majority of Finns are still members of the ELC; religion plays a prominent and respected role in areas such as welfare and social work, as well as value discussions. Still, the membership comes with a notion of a religious identity that downplays actual participation and practice. It is characterized by “believing in belonging” or by “belonging without believing”: only 6% attend ELC services once a month or more and there is a lack of conformity to ELC teaching. In contrast to this, however, the many

Pietist-inspired revival-based movements play central roles within the ELC together with the influence of both the Pentecostal Church of Finland and the Evangelical Free Church of Finland. These movements have a long tradition in Finland, often overlap with membership in ELC to a large extent, and have enabled significant spaces for more fundamentalist, conservative, or traditionalist positions in Finland (Salomäki 2010; Ketola et al. 2014; Hovi 2018; Kääriäinen et al. 2005; Mikkola et al. 2007). Therefore, in addition to defining the landscape as rather homogeneous, we may in other words claim that this homogeneity also contains tensions between liberal and conservative voices and that this has had significant implications for church politics, religious identity issues, as well as public debates related to rights and recognition of sexual and gender minorities. This means that the religious landscape in Finland is largely characterized by disagreements within the ELC and that this situation cannot be understood properly if only the conservative voices are noticed (Kejonen 2016; Tervo-Niemelä 2018; Kallatsa and Kiiski 2019). Same-sex couples can be acknowledged with a special prayer, although religious weddings of same-sex couples are not yet formally possible in the ELC. However, a growing majority of ELC members and priests is willing to welcome this change, and some pastors view the legal interregnum as a possibility to perform church weddings (Kirkon tutkimuskeskus 2018; Tervo-Niemelä 2018; Kallatsa and Kiiski 2019).

More generally and as part of the international movement for equal and human rights, the Finnish context has witnessed an increase in the visibility and momentum of various individual and institutional efforts to promote equal rights and security for sexual and gender minorities, fostering individual, cultural, and societal spaces for sexual and gender minorities and contributing to a gradual transformation of social norms (Juvonen 2015). As a result, according to official statistics, we can observe an increase in the numbers of same-sex partnerships and marriages, as well as same-sex families including children, the latter being a contested issue in itself in public (Pietiläinen and Pohjanpää 2019). This progress has evolved over a long time as part of both activism among sexual and gender minorities, political processes, and shifting cultural attitudes and values. The more recent campaign for marriage equality clearly caused a strong division among ELC bishops and ministers, politicians, and the general population. Still, in 2012, the Finnish Ministry of Justice submitted to the parliament an amendment to the Marriage Act which allowed same-sex marriage. This proposal was, however, rejected at a preliminary stage

and it was not put to a vote in parliament. Later, however, a citizens' initiative succeeded to gather public support for the cause: within six months, more than three times the necessary fifty thousand individual signatures were collected to obligate the parliament to take the initiative into consideration. Even though the bill was rejected again by the Legal Affairs Committee, the Finnish parliament voted on it in a plenary session and passed the bill in late 2014. It was signed and confirmed by the president and came into force in March 2017 (Seta, n.d.).

It is noteworthy that the new marriage act was the first law to come into force as the result of an official citizens' initiative in Finland. This was also the first time rights for sexual and gender minorities were directly articulated in relation to religious institutions challenging the taken-for-granted heteronormative view of marriage and intimate partnership mostly upheld publicly by the more conservative Christian movements addressed above. In 2001 the law on "registered partnership" had been adopted and with some exceptions (regarding the right to the spouse's surnames and adoption rights) this law was similar to the law on marriage. Still, the specific secular concept of *registered partnership* did not directly challenge the definition of marriage as a religious institution.

These legal changes were of course the result of a long process stretching many decades back (cf. Juvonen 2015, 32–34, 124–27). The first organization for rights for sexual and gender minorities in Finland was founded in 1969; five years later, in 1974, Setä was founded as the official national umbrella organization of sexual and gender minority associations in Finland, and the abbreviation comes from the Finnish "Seksuaalinen tasavertaisuus" meaning sexual equality. Following the international pattern, this process was on the surface a very secular project, developed in opposition to the views of the majority of religious actors and institutions in Finland (Seta, n.d.). In general, both feminist and sexual and gender minority movements have a predominantly secular bias and have often been antagonistic toward religion, associating religion with forms of heteronormativity and as constraining in relation to variation in terms of gender and sexuality (Braidotti 2008; Bracke 2008; Yip 2010; Graham 2012; Yip and Nynäs 2012; Jenzen and Munt 2012). The everyday reality can still be more complicated. From previous research, a more nuanced view of the history emerges. Some of the activists from the first decade were employed by the ELC or otherwise strongly associated with this or other churches. Their engagement, however, required that their religious identity was not accentuated and that their activism

was not disclosed in the religious contexts that they belonged to (Nynäs and Lassander 2015). In contrast, we have lately seen official authorities within the ELC such as bishops publicly defend sexual and gender minorities and their equal rights (Juvonen 2015, 124ff).

The foundation of the organization Seta was a decisive landmark for the following progress. In 1971 homosexuality was decriminalized, and in 1981 it was removed from the national classification of diseases. Discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation was prohibited in 1995, followed by a new Nondiscrimination Act almost ten years later prohibiting direct and indirect discrimination and harassment based on age, ethnic or national origin, citizenship, language, religion, belief, opinion, health, disability, sexual orientation, or any other grounds in connection to the person, whereas the 2015 Equality Act and Nondiscrimination Act also prohibited discrimination based on gender identity and gender expression. It is relevant to underline that the act from 2005 also applied to discrimination faced by people who have undergone or will undergo gender reassignment. In 1994, a Trans Support Centre had been founded by Seta, and in 2011 transvestism as a diagnosis was removed from the Finnish version of ICD-10 (10th revision of the International Statistical Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems). The law on gender recognition for transsexual persons came into force in 2002 (Seta, n.d.). Still, today, the situation in these cases is far from satisfactory; trans people are, for example, required to undergo forced sterilization as part of their transition process (Trasek 2019).

It is possible to see how the ELC during the past decades has taken a more or less restrictive and conservative stance on sexual and gender diversity (Kallatsa and Kiiski 2019). Still, the antagonism that marked history has gradually relaxed, and more visible networks of religious sexual and gender minority activists have taken shape in Finland and have effectuated several changes. These networks have put emphasis on the folk-church ideal and have been religiously inclusive, engaging people belonging to a variety of religious, spiritual, and nonreligious traditions. This diversity became a tangible asset for turning negative experiences of oppression and positive experiences of progress into a propelling force for value production within the ELC. This was also of a more overarching character and involved a negation of old religious identities, a concern shared by the great majority and not only an issue for a small minority (Nynäs and Lassander 2015). Nevertheless, tension and polarization have lately also been growing, partly as a direct result of how the ELC

has provided spaces for religiously motivated sexual and gender minority activism or how it has otherwise been progressive. Fundamentalist movements in Finland (and elsewhere) adapt to their time and context and always draw attention to new themes (Lassander and Nynäs 2016). We have, for example, lately seen a growing fundamentalist critique of the so-called “gender ideology,” referring to all non-heteronormative views of gender and sexuality. This discourse is far from the most prominent discourses on sexual and gender diversity within the ELC, but even some ELC bishops and priests have embraced this on different occasions (Toivanen 2019b, c). A central role in this respect is, for example, assigned to a more recent campaign and strategy called “Restoring the Natural Order: An Agenda for Europe,” which seeks to change existing laws or hinder human rights progress related to, for example, sexuality and reproduction and equality for sexual and gender minorities (Datta 2018).

ATTITUDES AFFECTING LIVES

In 2018, we conducted an interview study on the challenges, issues, and signs of resilience that sexual and gender minorities are currently facing in Finnish society. We focused on the views of Finnish social workers from different organizations who specialize in sexual and gender minority issues. Fifteen semistructured interviews covered various themes such as family and social relations, well-being and security, legal issues, religion, ethnicity, migration, and education. After transcription, the interviews were subjected to a preliminary thematic analysis. With the help of this analysis we could for this chapter identify some current religion-related issues addressed by the interviewees.

The relationship between the ELC and many pietist and revivalist movements requires special attention. The role of many Finnish Lutheran revivalist movements being a part of the ELC and not an external actor has shaped the situation in Finland and the critical influence of these movements toward the ELC (Kejonen 2014, 2016). These pietist movements still have a decisive influence on the ELC. They have many members that tend to maintain strong contacts with the ELC (Salomäki 2010) and they are often considered as forming a unique Finnish “way” for the local Lutheranism—also when it comes to ethical issues (Kejonen 2016). Many of the adherents of these revivalist movements have of course restrictive opinions about sexual ethics and homosexuality. For

example, within the Finnish conservative Laestadian movement up to 92% of the members rejected homosexuality according to a relatively recent study (Salomäki 2010). This has also fueled discrepancies toward the policies adopted by and discussions within the ELC, and the tensions have been accentuated.

Consequently, one theme that runs through the interviews concerns the impact of fundamentalist forms of Christianity mostly associated with pietist and revivalist movements. The negative impact of conservative Christianity is brought up repeatedly in the interviews, often in words similar to how one social worker puts it: namely, that “these religious and more conservative groups ... are quite discriminating against LGBT people.” The same social worker continues by claiming that “a lot of people who are suffering at the hands of religion” feel that “they are being judged by religious communities” and this imposes guilt and shame. In a similar way, another social worker underlines the influence of negative attitudes and addresses how current debates and discussion feed into this. The following lengthy citation exemplifies the sense of desperation that marks some of the experiences our interviewees voiced:

There are so many negative attitudes discussed openly, and rather often you also face negative attitudes towards yourself and this is not prohibited. In a way the situation is hopeless when people are allowed to say really bad things about gay, lesbian, and transgender people. It does not really help that other people bring up positive sides on the topic, since the undercurrent of negative attitudes is still present and quite openly spoken. These conservative views are allowed in the media, in public places, in communities, and on the local radio. This really hurts people, even though there are positive attitudes as well. When you face these hurting views so often, even one negative message may have more impact than a lot of positive attitudes. And when there is no one around telling you not to talk like that because it hurts people; it all just continues.

As this citation exemplifies, the interviewees see conservative and fundamentalist Christianity as a real problem and underline that this requires attention from NGOs. They also address that persons from sexual and gender minorities might become victims of severe forms of discrimination and social exclusion, such as being subjected to types of conversion therapy or being expelled from their families. In addition, they address the fact that religious views such as these could also affect practices and attitudes in public health care and in social services. As one interviewee

puts it, “one of the problems here in Finland is that in social and health-care professions, people who are religious put their own values before the ethical values of their own profession.” The interviews underline how the prevalence of different forms of conversion therapies is supported by this culture, an issue that has been highlighted in Finland (cf. Mollgren 2011). With reference to discrimination and exclusion, some of the interviewees brought up the situation and vulnerability of children especially and young people belonging to sexual and gender minorities and that this might have been overlooked by the NGOs themselves.

In relation to this discussion it is crucial to stress that conservative positions are usually not reminiscent of a dying culture and cannot simply be understood as echoing outdated views and attitudes. Like many other religious movements and organizations, they tap into and are formed by contemporary issues. Even though alternative spirituality in Finland is a relatively small field, voices from this part of the religious landscape in Finland have also contributed negative views on sexual and gender diversity to the public debate. Maria Nordin, for instance, is a Finnish blogger and activist promoting well-being, healing from symptoms through working with body and mind and in particular what she calls neuroplasticity (Free to Heal, n.d.). She claims that what she calls “the internal light” and “internal consciousness” is fundamentally the same in all of us and that it reflects externally in many ways like the colors in a rainbow. This also constituted an argument for her to publicly reject medical treatment for trans people. On her Instagram account *marianordin.freetoheal*, Nordin claimed that what she calls “internal identity confusion” of trans persons should not be handled with surgery or hormones, but as an “impetus to development” (Nordin 2019). Nordin’s views gave rise to a debate in the media that also revealed that alternative religiosities were expected to be more liberal in general (Körkkö 2019).

Overall, the interviewees predominantly associated religion with exclusion, discrimination, and devaluation of sexual and gender minorities. This was further predominantly associated with fundamentalist and conservative Christianity, and the interviewees did not bring up alternative forms of religiosity and spirituality in a similarly negative light or as a concern for the NGOs. In contrast to this, immigration and Islam together formed a separate topic of discussion, and this requires attention. Over the past years immigration to Finland has been relatively low, and issues related to religions of immigrant groups have not earlier been a very prominent topic in Finnish politics or public debates. As a result of this,

Finnish politics of diversity suffers from some limitations even though it can be considered very multiculturalist (Saukkonen 2013). The recent increase in immigrants and refugees especially from the Middle East and parts of Africa has, however, meant that new topics have surfaced in public discussions. This also exposed some of the lack of an integrated multiculturalist politics in Finland, a circumstance that may be evident from the interviews as well.

The recent increase of refugees coming to Finland was also brought up by several interviewees and gave rise to discussions on Islam and homosexuality. They addressed the difficult situation that many individuals belonging to sexual and gender minorities experience in refugee and asylum seekers' centers, underlining that "we have Muslims living there, as well as a few gay and trans persons, and everybody starts bullying those people [gay and trans persons] and they [Muslims] pressure the people to change themselves and they [gay and trans persons] even get rejected." One interviewee also mentioned "honor related violence" as a potential problem for refugees, but without further substantiation. As a contrast to the problems pointed by the interviewees, some, as in the following citation, also emphasized the relevance of building a community:

If people feel that they do not fit into their community and if they want to keep their faith because it is a resource, then they should also have some queer community to join. This is why we also have networks on a European level, namely to have queer Christians and Muslims and people from different religious groups. I hope to bring some of them to the Helsinki Pride event this year. Atheism is the norm in the queer scene, but that should not be the case, because we should be nondiscriminatory towards all groups of people.

The citation also exemplifies the need for more knowledge about religion, Islam, and sexual and gender minorities in general, which also was expressed by several interviewees. The specific conditions that follow from being a migrant or a refugee and/or belonging to both an ethnic minority and a sexual and gender minority have of course also been subject of research (e.g., Jaspal and Cinnirella 2010; Jaspal 2012; Peumans 2018), as well as the relation between Islam and sexual and gender minorities (e.g., Kugle 2010). There are, nevertheless, some aspects that need to be critically addressed regarding the views on Islam surfacing here. For instance, one interviewee claimed more explicitly that "we need to do

research or new reading of the texts of the Quran for example, because it is done in other religions, but not in Islam”. This claim mirrors the earlier citation where a problematic distinction between “Muslims” on the one hand and “gay and trans persons” on the other was made assuming that these identities are incompatible. One needs to raise the question here if the discussion about Islam is marked by negative associations to the extent that it represents Islamophobia. This is more evident when we understand Islamophobia not as an idea-based position only but as a structural process constituted by social action and practices also related to racialization (cf. Massoumi et al. 2017) and when we take into account the risk that the Finnish NGO context might produce inequalities out of heterogeneities (cf. Faist 2013).

Despite a growing heterogeneity in Finland, the religious landscape in Finland is relatively homogeneous, and the religious networks and communities for sexual and gender minorities tend to center around the notion of an implicitly shared Christian identity. However, overall the interviewees claim that religion still affects sexual and gender minorities people negatively today despite recent progress. Both when talking about the majority religion and when discussing issues that arise from the increasing presence of minority religions, we see the same patterns. Harsh forms of discrimination and even violence are referred to, as well as more general discriminatory attitudes that permeate culture and society. In addition, the right to be religious is underlined. Finally, it is noteworthy that the interviewees did not bring up issues related to spirituality or alternative religious traditions.

The interviewees were aware of their critical tone toward religion in general, and they expressed the relevance of a more nuanced view referring to the importance of having positive and respectful views of religion. In contrast to the critique they voiced, they acknowledged that religion may also be an important source of meaning, resilience, and coping for many individuals belonging to sexual and gender minorities. This also motivated their concern about how problems stemming from conservative or fundamentalist forms of religion tend to nourish and maintain the traditional perception and simultaneously make it hard for people to combine their sexual and gender identity with religion. Overall, they underlined that both negative/traumatizing and positive/constructive impacts of religion on peoples’ lives still require attention on a professional level in order to avoid deeply rooted simplified or stereotypical views of religion as either bad or good.

MEDIA AND NEW ARENAS

As we indicated in the introduction media debates have lately become both frequent and influential in a way that has contributed to the relocation of religion as part of the postsecular condition. Despite a decline in religious belonging and behavior these debates have turned religion into an important subject matter in the media and have engaged a wide range of both religious and secular actors (see Moberg and Sjö 2012). This is a general pattern. Diversification and decentralization of the mediascape during the past decades have had great significance for the new public presence of religion, but they have also altered the character of the religious landscape. Contemporary forms and organization of media, including deregulation, have made it possible for religious ideas to travel outside of institutional borders and their control. Consequently, new technologies have contributed to the deregulation of religious ideas and symbols, to the transformation of previous power relations, and to novel individual and collective agency (Hjarvard and Lövheim 2012; Granholm et al. 2014; Lynch et al. 2011; Moberg and Granholm 2012).

Recent developments in Finland have added fuel to the discussions on a grassroot level. For instance, online discussions have created spaces for group identifications (Haastettu kirkko 2012). These discussions can have positive functions as safe reference groups for religious sexual and gender minorities seeking affirmation (Hintsala and Kejonen 2016). Other kinds of online platforms provide spaces primarily for voicing harsh opinions that might feed both mobilization and polarization (e.g., Nynäs and Lassander 2015; Kejonen 2018). Both may be influenced by transnational processes made possible by the recent globalization of media. In addition to the relevance of the arguments, debates, and associated discourses, we would like to draw attention to how some central aspects have gained more impact. In the wake of how traditional religious authority has lost part of its validity, representatives for political parties can claim this space. Consequently, individual politicians or other actors can play a decisive role with the help of media logics through which single viewpoints, opinions, or attitudes are circulated and amplified in society. The case with the well-being blogger Maria Nordin that we mentioned earlier in this chapter exemplifies this, but there are also other examples.

Tensions between religion and sexual and gender minorities have been played out in media several times over the last decade. One of the more noteworthy examples was the TV program *Homoilta* (*Gay-night*) in 2010. During the program, Päivi Räsänen, a member of the

Finnish parliament, presented conservative views on sexual and gender diversity by referring primarily to the Bible (Haastettu kirkko 2012). Räsänen is known for her connections with the conservative Fifth Revival (Laakso 2013; Mättö 2013), one of the Finnish Christian revivalist movements holding conservative moral views concerning gender and sexuality (Salomäki 2004, 2010). She also had a leading position within the political party Finnish Christian Democrats, a role that connects her even more with official Christianity in Finland, even though she does not have any mandate from the ELC (Hiilamo 2013; Mättö 2013). The views she expressed in the program reflected well the emphases of “traditional values” and a “Christian heritage” that the Finnish Christian Democrats party emphasizes. This is somehow similar to the position created by the Finnish nationalist party the True Finns and taps into a clash of values within which religious discourses have gained meaning outside traditional institutions and despite secularization (Lassander and Nynäs 2016).

Räsänen’s input in the TV program was largely met with outspoken criticism, and the debate got amplified nationally. Räsänen’s opinions came to be associated with official Christianity, and as a result, around forty thousand Finns left the ELC in a short time. This pattern, with many people leaving the ELC because of different actual episodes related to sexual and gender minority issues, has thereafter been repeated several times. The great number is partly explained by how leaving the ELC has been made easy because of an online service (Eroa Kirkosta, n.d.) provided by a couple of secularistic humanistic organization. On several other occasions, the archbishop of the time, Kari Mäkinen, spoke out expressing pro-gay views and positive attitudes toward same-sex weddings (Haastettu kirkko 2012; Repo 2014; Järviö 2017). This indicates that questions concerning sexual and gender diversity have become conclusive and fuel decisions to leave the ELC, apparently among both “liberal” and “conservative” groups (Repo 2014; Kejonen 2016; Seppälä 2019).

An additional example allows further scrutiny of the public presence of religious discourse. In June 2019 news about the ELC officially participating in the annual Helsinki Pride gained attention. Again, the same MP Päivi Räsänen seized the opportunity and tweeted a critical comment claiming that this is against “the teachings of the church” and that “shame and sin cannot be subjects of pride.” She later wrote an open letter to the archbishop voicing her considerations about leaving the ELC herself, whereas the archbishop, Tapio Luoma, replied by underlining that the

ELC supports “all of its members” (Yle Uutiset 2019; Kuusijoen 2019; Rinta-Jouppi 2019; Räsänen 2019a, b). Of particular relevance is how this debate reveals a logic that is new to the Finnish mediascape. Räsänen further underscored her indignation over the situation with a tweet referring to news about how people in Finland have become afraid of publicly affirming their Christian identity, clearly playing on the common image of being a victim. Räsänen’s cause this time mobilized support from the evangelical-charismatic Christian TV channel Taivas TV7 (Heaven TV7). They staged and broadcasted a public praying event against the annual Helsinki Pride in which they used strong and apocalyptic metaphors, which of course fueled the public discussion even more (Vaitinen and Heikkilä 2019). Again, we can see that there is a marked peak in the number of people leaving the ELC (Eroa Kirkosta, n.d.) following the amplification of single views and attitudes, but this time with assistance from the partly immune international media.

This example shows some important features of a more diversified and decentralized mediascape. The fact that TV7 is an international private TV channel shields them to some extent from regular mechanisms for regulation and governance of ethical standards in comparison to more traditional media organizations such as public service companies and established national and local newspapers. If one would like to file a complaint with the Council for Mass Media about the harsh opinions presented by TV7 or their acting, it is not necessarily clear how to proceed and to what extent a decision would be effective. Other relevant features of these cases concern the rhetoric and how this is played out. Räsänen, for example, often relocates the debate to a “war on Twitter” and alludes to Christians being minoritized. In that respect we can recognize some characteristics from theoretical perspectives on “new emotional movements” in how mediatized emotional images of victimization are central to mobilization and attracting public attention challenging established structures of power and authority (Walgrave and Verhulst 2006).

Finally, if we may return to our initial example of a local chaplain uttering religiously motivated negative views on sexual and gender diversity in a local newspaper, we can raise the question if the exception has become the rule. The decision of the Council for Mass Media to acquit the newspaper with the motivation that, irrespective of the disrespectful content, it is in the interest of the public to become aware of the views and opinions of the respective ministers, seems to demonstrate that opinions clash publicly, and debates are given platforms more or less regardless

of whether the content is disrespectful or not. Does this indicate that the idea of an ethically and legally regulated public media space that serves democratic cohesion is downplayed in favor of a free media market? This question means a direct critique of Habermas's assumption or ideal about a shared language. In the cases we have addressed in this chapter, opportunities for such univocal or shared horizons have fallen apart. The current public does not exist as a shared space where discourses are fused. Rather, the current public space seems to follow a very complex structure where the private is public and the other way around. Forms of social media and transnational private media actors represent ambiguous spaces that are not subject to negotiation in the same way as previously assumed based on the idea of a democratic parliamentary discussion developing toward some form of consensus. The media has stretched and migrated out of the reach of public control or influences, and it may continue to grow immune toward them. The fact that value-laden issues bring religion into the public consciousness seems to be a result of the growing diversification in the media sphere, but this process also seems to put possibilities for a participatory democracy aside in practice.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The intersection of religion and sexual and gender diversity in Finland has shifted in relevant ways over the last decades reflecting, we suggest, the complex relocations and diversifications we have associated with postsecularity. To start with, this has been manifest in progress in terms of equal rights for sexual and gender minorities. This development has been paralleled by an attitudinal change evident from public opinions and from a growing normalization of sexual and gender diversity in Finland. It should however be kept in mind that the progress and normalization discussed here is mainly a valid observation from a certain perspective, that is, when progress for sexual and gender minorities is mapped based on predominantly heteronormative perspectives. Yet, since the 1960s, discriminatory legislation has been abolished and gender and sexual minorities have gained access to and recognition and visibility in societal and cultural institutions, including the ELC, even though full marriage equality is yet to be achieved. Christian activists were in reality engaged in 1960s and 1970s sexual and gender activism, but they were largely invisible during these decades in the sense that their Christian identities were usually neither publicly expressed nor recognized. Overall the development in Finland

has been marked by a view that religion is incompatible with sexual and gender diversity. The development has therefore up till more recently also been understood as progress in stark contrast to Christian values, represented primarily by the ELC seen as a folk-church even though this means a simplification.

Growing diversification of the religious landscape has played a decisive role in the development. To a certain extent the change over the last decades has meant that the antagonism between religion and sexual and gender minorities that has marked the history has gradually dissolved. Changing legislation and public opinion have been accompanied by official actors within the ELC who more and more have expressed public support of sexual and gender minorities. Further, we have seen the emergence of networks of religiously affiliated sexual and gender minority activists that have established independent spaces within the ELC. These networks have been even more inclusive, engaging people belonging to a variety of denominations, as well as different religious, spiritual, and nonreligious traditions. The earlier relationship between sexual and gender diversity on the one hand and religion and secularity on the other has been reconfigured.

Majority religion in Finland today seems to primarily be upheld by a Christian folk-church ethos best captured in a declining “believing in belonging” combined with an emphasis on liberal values. Still, the last decades have not meant a liberalization only. The progress during this time has challenged and involved religion in Finland in ways reflecting the specific role that fundamentalist, traditionalist, and conservative Christian movements have played in Finland historically and for the ELC. The homogeneous landscape has lately come to involve a marked demarcation line between liberal and conservative positions. In the interviews we conducted with professionals working with sexual and gender diversity it is claimed that in contrast to, for example, legislative progress, fundamentalist, traditionalist, and conservative influences still render individuals vulnerable subjects of discrimination and violence. In addition, it was indicated that these forms of Christianity seem to maintain a kind of immunity that makes space for them to extend into and influence, for example, public health and social services. Similar ways of addressing religion as a threat to sexual and gender minorities were associated also with religious diversification stemming from migration and mainly discussed in relation to Islam. Such observations had stereotypical and Islamophobic connotations. Diversification seemed to be synonymous with the presence of

Islam, which in public discourses—such as those echoed in our interviews—is often considered categorically incompatible with gender and sexual diversity. Other forms of religious diversification such as alternative religions were not acknowledged.

In spite of secularization being a major trend in Finland, depriving institutional religion of its public relevance for issues such as legislation, our chapter has exemplified a contrasting tendency characteristic of post-secularity, namely, that religion is simultaneously relocated and brought into public consciousness in conjunction with debates over value-laden questions. This tendency seems to provide an opportunity for conservative groups in Finland to revitalize religion on a societal level. From their perspective, the growing recognition and rights of sexual and gender minorities is considered part of a longer process through which gender roles have been secularized and weakened earlier, for instance. Not many decades ago these same actors fought against allowing women's ordination as ministers. Still, the current development cannot be seen only as a clash of old and new values and authorities. It is also a result of a more profound process—that is, the development of new media technologies such as Twitter and transnational media. These have contributed to the deregulation of traditional forms of authority and transformed previous power relations, making space also for novel individual and collective agency and forms of mobilization. In this new context opinions by single actors can be amplified and have effect beyond what would normally be expected.

In this chapter we have linked diversifications and relocations to postsecularity. This has been relevant in order to acknowledge how received assumptions about given distinctions (e.g., religious/secular, private/public) are continuously challenged and negotiated. It is important to note that media provide platforms for this process, and public actors might see a value in this. For instance, the decision by the Council for Mass Media that we referred to in the introduction was explicitly made in favor of the right of the public to also receive derogatory information and how this was argued points in this direction. Of relevance for our interest in this chapter is the fact that this process clearly influences both the interplay between religion and sexual and gender diversity and other involved actors and institutions in general. Examples of this include the extended and negative effect on the well-being of sexual and gender minorities, the circulation of stereotypes and Islamophobic sentiments, and the avalanche-like resignation of ELC membership. Habermas has

emphasized the need of a mutual language. However, it might be that the emergence of such a “language” involves conflictual processes and tensions. In light of this, one might also therefore raise the question if the ongoing debate on rights for and recognition of sexual and gender minorities has become a battleground where more profound issues are at play, such as authority in general in contemporary Finnish society, or power over life-views and religious positions. The possibility that such issues are at stake might shed additional light on why the ongoing debate is relevant not only to conservative actors and people belonging to sexual and gender minorities, but also to majority groups not affiliated with either of these groups. It might also raise the question if this renders the fight for rights and recognition of sexual and gender minorities only a means to an end.

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