Interfaith Dialogue in Christian Norway: Enactment of Inclusive Religiosity as Civilized Behavior

Abstract:

Despite sparse scholarly attention from non-activists, Scandinavian interfaith fora are gaining momentum as a response to societal transformations of increased migration, world conflicts, and politically motivated violence. Combining theories of interaction, ritual performance, and civilizing processes, the article conducts a case study of public interfaith meetings held by a local interfaith forum in Kristiansand in Norway. Analyzing the meetings as organized cultural encounters, the study explores the transformative aspects of the events and it points to how the enactment of civilized forms of cross-cultural religiosity created within and by these public interfaith meetings is interlinked with formations of citizenship.

Keywords: interfaith; minority religion; civilizing events; citizenship; multiculturalism; Norway

1. **Introduction**

In the context of a growing number of religious minorities in Europe, interfaith platforms are gaining momentum and are taking a leading role as policy partners in the governance of religious diversity in many contemporary European countries.[[1]](#footnote-1) In this perspective, Norwegian interfaith organizations, networks, and fora constitute a response to societal transformations in which ethnic and religious differences have come to play a significant role.[[2]](#footnote-2) In Norway, as part of a wider European trend, tensions and potential opposition between religious groups and individuals have gradually been politicized and political conflicts have been “religionized.”[[3]](#footnote-3)

The changes have taken place during the last thirty-five years, which have seen increased migration, world conflicts, and politically motivated violence. Demographic changes in a hitherto relatively homogenous nation in ethnic, linguistic, religious, and cultural terms have, partly, resulted in resistance to immigration, which is often configured as being in opposition to the religion of Islam, as the lifestyle of Muslims is repeatedly depicted as incompatible with liberal and democratic values symptomatic of ‘the West.’[[4]](#footnote-4) Such configurations of identity politics enhance, exaggerate, and distort differences and contribute to processes of essentialization and ‘Othering.’

One response to these societal changes and, not least, the often dramatic outcomes of subsequent cultural encounters is interfaith work. Those involved with interfaith work consider their work against stereotypical representations as peacemaking activities, and they link prevention of conflicts on international and national levels with bridging activities in local society.[[5]](#footnote-5) As stated by a member of a locally run Norwegian interfaith network, Forum for Religious and Life Stances in Kristiansand (Forum for Tro og Livssyn [FTL]), during our conversation on the topic: “If we are not able to have a sound dialogue in this town [Kristiansand], how, then, are they supposed to have a sound dialogue across countries? How are we supposed to be able to collaborate and have respect for one another and work together?”[[6]](#footnote-6) The statement testifies to the importance local interfaith members ascribe to their work and with which they perceive their activities. As this article illustrates, the activities of FTL are not solely concerned with finding practical solutions to concrete problems, tensions, or conflicts across religious divides for the local and civic society. The forum is as much concerned with carving out proper interaction formats, that is, cultivating, and thus conducting, appropriate religiosity in a secular and mediatized age. To this end, positions of religious and civic multiculturalism seem to be taken as the answer to the embedded societal threats.

1. **The Study, Methodology, and Theory**

In recent years, academics and politicians alike have paid considerable attention to the role of ‘public religion’ in Scandinavia, that is, the relations and positions of religion to, and as parts of, the public sphere such as within politics, the media, the state, and civil society.[[7]](#footnote-7) Rather than focusing on the positions of public religion as such, this article conducts a case study of FTL open interfaith meetings, as these meetings are of regular regional occurrence and provide an interesting lens through which a case analysis of how aspects of public religion, such as rituals, often serve as technologies of normalizing integration that are essential in producing responsible members of a community.[[8]](#footnote-8) STL, the mother organization of FTL, constitutes a well-known interest group in Norway, with nine local branches across the country, plus a youth fora, and are, to an increasing degree, frequently approached by the media when policies on religion are debated or conflicts around religious issues need commenting and contextualization (c.f. interview with STL chairman, September 2016). As STL has gained a noticeable public voice within the last twenty years, and additionally cooperates with authorities on national matters, FTL has been chosen as a case study due to its parallel visibility and significance in local and civic society.

As a civil society network that is ever more popular within local society, mirroring similar initiatives domestically and abroad, and that is financially supported by the municipality, the county, the state, and by its mother organization STL, FTL constitutes an illustrative case of emerging trends of counter initiatives to rapid societal transformations and cultural encounters. FTL is a Norwegian interfaith forum based in Kristiansand in Southern Norway that is comprised of both religious and secular member organizations and perspectives and which explicitly deals with religious minority issues in an ethnically transforming society. Introducing interreligious dialogue initiatives as a field of interest to religious and cultural studies by analyzing FTL public interfaith meetings as organized cultural encounters, the article investigates the meetings as social activities whose ultimate objectives are to create transformation through certain pre-structured intervention strategies.[[9]](#footnote-9) Taking inspiration from theories of interaction, ritual performance and civilizing processes, the article is situated by a theoretically informed exploration of the governance of religious diversity, probing the performative-constitutive roles of public formations of religion in a secular, yet increasingly multiethnic, society with a substantial Christian heritage.[[10]](#footnote-10) The analysis revolves around the public ‘ritual work’ of FTL and the ensuing public—religious and secular—positions afforded by the forum to local citizens, and it explores the religious-secular formations that are produced from the organized cultural encounters that FTL sets up. The main argument advanced here is that the enactment of certain forms of cross-cultural religiosity created within and by FTL public interfaith meetings is interlinked with the formation of moderate and liberal citizens.

Qualitative in its scope, the article is based on ethnographic fieldwork conducted at public FTL interfaith meetings held in Kristiansand during 2015 and 2016 and twelve interviews with FTL members, one with the STL chairman, and interviews with integration employees in the Kristiansand municipality, along with a range of informal conversations with local citizens and journalists. Organizational documents and media representations are also included in the analysis.

* 1. *Presentation of Forum for Religious and Life Stances in Kristiansand*

While Southern Norway from the 1970s and onward has seen a religious pluralization due to an influx of immigrants and refugees—mainly from Pakistan, Chile, Vietnam, and, more recently, Poland—Christianity clearly continues to dominate the religious landscape.[[11]](#footnote-11) Especially the coastal area of the region in which Kristiansand is located constitutes an important part of the Norwegian ‘Bible belt.’ From the second half of the nineteenth century and onward, the region has been dominated by strong conversionist Christian movements. Some of these movements still exist within the Lutheran Church of Norway, but vital minority churches also pervade the region, most of them Lutherans that are skeptical toward the state church, as well as Pentecostals.[[12]](#footnote-12)

FTL was established in 2007 in Kristiansand as an independent and locally run forum to the domestic Council for Religious and Life Stance Communities in Norway (Samarbeidsrådet for tros- og livssyn [STL]).[[13]](#footnote-13) Kristiansand is the municipal and county capital of the Vest-Agder region in the religiously rich Sørlandet(the Southern County). According to STL, its objectives are:

- To promote mutual understanding and respect between different religious and life stance communities through dialogue;

- To work toward equality between various religious and life stance communities in Norway based on the United Nations covenants on Human Rights and on the European Convention on Human Rights;

- To work, internally and externally, with social and ethical issues from the perspective of religions and life stances.[[14]](#footnote-14)

The FTL objective is, in line with those of STL, to enhance mutual understanding and respect between people, to contribute to a sense of safety and tolerance between faith and life stance organizations in Kristiansand, and to create awareness of ethical issues in a faith and life stance perspective.[[15]](#footnote-15) In 2007, FTL was initiated in Kristiansand, the fifth largest city of Norway with approximately 90,000 inhabitants, and, today, it focuses on dialogue across religions and life stances and is comprised of twelve local member organizations: the Norwegian Humanist Association, the Catholic Church St. Ansgar, the Norwegian Church, the Muslim Union in Agder, the Norwegian Sotozen Buddhist Order, the Advent Church, the Methodist Church, the Church of Jesus Christ and the Latter-day Saints, the Kristiansand Free Church, the Quaker Society, the Ahmadiyya Muslim Jamaat, and the Al-Rahma Islamic Centre. These member organizations are all represented in the management, to which the part-time employed coordinator also reports. An informal leader forum comprised of leaders from the member organizations has also been established to provide feedback to FTL and cultivate relations between the member organizations, which proved significant in the aftermath of 22 July 2011, as the social contact between the members increased significantly.[[16]](#footnote-16)

FTL is financially supported by the municipality, the county, and the state and through STL annual funding applications for specific initiatives, such as counter radicalization initiatives. To FTL, though, STL primarily serves as a formal umbrella organization that provides counsel and feedback when needed.[[17]](#footnote-17) As such, FTL considers itself to be an independent interfaith network that primarily takes inspiration and advice from STL.

1. **Enactments of Proper Cross-religious Conversation**

The monthly open FTL interfaith meetings are held at a public place, usually the local library, and they are free of charge. Typically, open meetings take place on a weekday evening and may last for up to two hours. At the meeting, rows of chairs for about 100 attendants are organized in front of tables with microphones, which set the scene for the ensuing dialogue. The atmosphere is lighthearted and relaxed; occasionally scattered laughter is heard. The attendants, most of whom are middle-aged or elderly ethnic Norwegian citizens from middle to upper-middle class backgrounds, are quiet and attentive during the event. Many of the attendants are regulars from other FTL events, some of whom are also members of the informal leader forum. The FTL speakers are also well mannered, carefully listening to each other and awaiting their turn to respond to the, sometimes vaguely posed, questions or comments from audience members. The FTL speakers, nevertheless, always seem cheerful and open. Neither speakers nor audience members raise their voice at any point during the event.

As seen next, the meetings consist of different segments, each of which is carefully crafted to enhance transformative aspects.

The meetings roughly fall into three or four sections. First, the evening’s moderator, a member of the FTL leader forum, introduces FTL, the selected topic of the evening, and the invited speakers. Second, if a particular keynote speaker is invited from out of town (s)he is given up to an hour to present thoughts and ideas on the chosen topic. The presentation is then succeeded by panel presentations on the same topic by three local FTL representatives from discrete religious and life stance organizations. Third, if no external keynote is invited, the FTL panel members will, in turn, address the topic and present their views. Fourth, after this section, questions or remarks from the audience to the speakers are directly encouraged and the FTL speakers take turn in responding and sometimes urge each other to answer specific points that come up. The moderator occasionally asks the speaker(s) to elaborate on or address certain issues that surface during the event. Usually, members of the audience will ask a few questions, but comments and memorials in relation to the topic are more frequent and the moderator and speakers make an effort in clarifying slightly farfetched remarks.

As already mentioned, the meetings are characterized by a welcoming and accepting atmosphere. Even somewhat sudden and personal ‘testimonies’ from audience members are welcomed in an accepting manner. For example, an FTL interlocutor I interviewed, the day after a public interfaith meeting on ‘Living with—or without—a God: What Does It Mean to Me?,’ spontaneously noted that “I see it as something entirely positive when people get up to do a free testimony, and I think that that should be welcomed,” hinting to the middle-aged woman who, at the meeting the day before, suddenly rose to—in her own words—give a “testimony” on the sufferings she had endured in her life but withstood due to her faith in God. The testimony was welcomed with open faces and the entire audience and the speakers patiently waited to hear her out, although her emotional outburst was abrupt, extensive, and seemed a bit far from the subject.[[18]](#footnote-18)

The lighthearted atmosphere is further enhanced by the fact that no discussion or debate takes place, and neither speakers nor the audience express any critical views but focus on their own ideas, stories, and experiences when they communicate. In the ensuing section based on field notes from the first minutes of a public interfaith meeting in the fall of 2015, the FTL moderator introduces the forum and welcomes attendants:

Hello and welcome to an interfaith meeting under the auspices of Forum for Religious and Life Stances. My name is [omitted for anonymity] and I’m the leader of the local organization [omitted for anonymity] in Kristiansand in which I’m also part of the leader forum for FTL along with eleven members from different religions and life stance societies. The work of FTL is based on the UN Convention on Human Rights—the ECHR and UN’s Children’s Convention. The forum was established in 2007 with the aim of enhancing, on the one hand, understanding and respect between people, and promoting safety and tolerance between faith and life stance organizations here in Kristiansand. […] The Norwegian society has changed. The diversity, here in this municipality, [consists of] a plurality of faith and life stance organizations. We believe the best way to create results is to familiarize each other with the unknown; [it] *is* by acquiring knowledge on each other and each other’s faiths and beliefs. Respectful dialogue helps us with this. Thus, dialogue shall shape this evening—*not* a debate—but a conversation that can create more knowledge and a sense of safety among us.[[19]](#footnote-19)

The section illustrates how the moderator opens the public interfaith meeting and welcomes speakers and audiences. She introduces herself and presents FTL in more general terms, including the secular foundation of FTL’s work, after which she characterizes contemporary multiethnic Norwegian society. As an introduction to the selected topic of the event, she also tutors attendants on the course of the evening. The moderator assigns the means by which “the unknown” religion or culture may be approached—“respectful dialogue” “helps” with “acquiring knowledge on each other and each other’s faiths and beliefs.” The moderator elaborates her perspective by stressing that not just any dialogue is able to facilitate knowledge on “the unknown” religious stances of other people, but that a respectful dialogue is characterized by a certain kind of conversation; one that can create “more knowledge and a sense of safety among us” and which is, indeed, different from a debate. This way, she shapes the event into a didactic activity. Attendants—both speakers and audience members—are implicitly instructed to converse, and thus interact, in a certain manner to collaboratively gain the objective of the event: the aim is to enact an acceptable form of social interaction between differing religious and secular representatives in the format of a respectful conversation that is set to, in the end, produce more knowledge and a sense of safety among Kristiansand locals. As suggested below, the implicit attention to the form of talk serves a specific purpose.

* 1. *What’s in a Word? Dialogue as a Civilizing Conversation*

The moderator’s statement: “Thus, dialogue shall shape this evening—*not* a debate—but a conversation that can create more knowledge and a sense of safety among us” serves as an admonition to the audience in which she explicitly prescribes dialogue as a manner of speech that substantially differentiates itself from a debate. Notably, the moderator’s statement is followed by the very demonstration of FTL speakers’ ability to converse in a peaceful and patient tone of voice on a given conflictual subject, regardless of religious and cultural differences. Likewise, during interviews several of the FTL members, on their own initiative, stressed how dialogue differs significantly from debating or even discussing. One female interviewee put it this way:

Interviewer: Do you have any examples on successful interfaith initiatives in this town?

FTL member 1: Yes, well, I think of this entire presentation that *Forum for Religious and Life Stances* has, that is dialogue. And dialogue is something completely different from discussions. And it entails respect for one another and for each other’s differences.[[20]](#footnote-20)

Another said:

FTL member 2: Yes, that’s exactly it [referring to the polarized religious positions that, in his opinion, are characteristic of Southern Norway], a debate floats into nothing, and that’s why we don’t debate, we run a dialogue. And that is what is important here. Because a debate loses its focus […], it disappears… That was the case last year: ‘Now we have to find something to sell our news articles.’ Whereas the objective of the dialogue meetings, we are part of, is to benefit from dialogue and we have an appreciation of what they believe and what they believe and what they believe [...]. And that shall shape those who show up. That they’ll get a change of perspective in life. That they’ll get respect for people. And that is something that goes beyond the debate.[[21]](#footnote-21)

This way, the objective of the public meeting does not seem to revolve around the resolution of concrete religious or ethical disputes, nor, necessarily, to reach an agreement on a certain topic. Correspondingly, in regard to content, no rights or wrongs are pointed out during the meetings. Instead, the disagreements are mainly addressed as questions of creating awareness by, indirectly, enhancing mutual understanding through increasing knowledge on the different religions and life stances. That is,as a mode of interaction, the dialogue meetings are characterized by conversations void of conflict, which many of my interviewees similarly pointed out during our conversations. To this end, the text excerpts also show how the moderator and several of the interviewed FTL members pay considerably more attention to *how* the conversations are formed and lesser so to *what* is actually being said. In other words, they come to direct their attention more to form than to content.

Sociologist Nobert Elias applies the concept of ‘civilizing’ to describe the transformation processes societies undergo to constrain the impulsive behavior of their members. All societies foster norms of proper and cultivated behavior, as opposed to the vulgar and animalistic. The more socially integrated a society becomes, the more demanding the behavioral norms.[[22]](#footnote-22) In state-societies in which traditions of interdependence between different kinds of people exist, it becomes vital for people to control their drives and affects and to gain a sense of how they conduct, and appear, in relation to others. A high degree of self-control and an ability to interact with people from all levels of society becomes central behavioral norms and markers of respectability, while uncontrolled feelings or explicit demonstration of social superiority or inferiority is shameful.[[23]](#footnote-23) This particularly holds true in egalitarian Scandinavian welfare societies, such as in Norway.[[24]](#footnote-24) A central point in Elias’ contention is that large-scale civilizing processes are paralleled by individual civilizing processes, whereby society members are influenced by norms transmitted by civilizing others.[[25]](#footnote-25) Especially newcomers are characterized by unstable social relations and apparently ‘uncivilized’ conduct, while the established ones are characterized by social power resources and apparently ‘civilized’ conduct.[[26]](#footnote-26)

Whether or not the civilizing norms are successfully internalized is observable through the ways in which a person is met by others, for example with distance or scepticism versus respect or admiration.[[27]](#footnote-27) To be civilized refers to the cultivated and distinguished individual who masters accepted and appropriate behavioral forms and thereby almost unseeingly advances herself ‘above’ the uncivilized. This way, the concept of ‘civilizing’ both refers to a specific process of normative influence and a specific objective—proper and respectable human beings.[[28]](#footnote-28) To modify Elias’ theory to modern-day multi-ethnic Scandinavian welfare society, in which integration of, especially Muslim, migrants is deemed one of the biggest challenges by politicians and media alike, self-control and the ability to interact with all kinds of people is doubly a question of one’s ability to behave ‘correctly’ toward, and with, the ethnic, cultural, and religious ‘Other’ and vice versa.

* 1. *Public Interfaith Events: Performative Enactments of Proper and Civilized Talk*

Sociologist of religion Ole Riis suggests that in terms of religion, Scandinavian societies are characterized by a general tolerance of ethno-religious diversity, but are nonetheless highly intolerant of religious manners and activities that deviate from the established social norms.[[29]](#footnote-29) Likewise, since self-control and the ability to interact with all kinds of citizens have become a question of one’s ability to behave ‘correctly’ toward the religious ‘Other,’ as they constitute central behavioral norms and markers of respectability, especially in middle-class Norway, it seems analytically fruitful to explore exactly which transformative aspects these organized cultural encounters produce.[[30]](#footnote-30) The ensuing section takes up this task, as it points to key ritual features within the organization of the event.

As public events, the interfaith meetings are, in several ways, structured into three main parts that resemble those of rites of passage, which are set to produce transformations within the attendants and ultimately the world.[[31]](#footnote-31) While attendants and public speakers are assembled in a public venue to discuss religious diversity, during the meeting all attendants are, correspondingly, indirectly made ready for the so-called liminal phase. In the meetings, attendants are separated from society and thereby pulled out of their everyday social positions, which enable them to fully focus on the dialogue that is about to take place in the subsequent and most vital phase. During the liminal phase, in a limited timeframe the ritual object—here the FTL attendants—go through a variety of troubles, such as being in front of an audience while engaging in conversations with religious others on a potentially heated subject to, subsequently, in the last phase, be re-incorporated into local and civic society as transformed human beings. The liminal phase is the most important and critical one and depends upon the ‘right’ conduct of both the ritual masters and ritual objects to avoid any chaos. That is, in order to be productive, behavior within this phase has to be strictly controlled to successfully produce the required transformative outcome. The strong emphasis by the moderator and several FTL interviewees on dialogue as a certain manner of talk that differs significantly from debates and discussions illustrate the performance of proper cross-religious dialogue as both a manner of speech and a rule that directs social—and ritual—interaction. It is thus the cross-religious conversation itself that constitutes the core activity that must be meticulously regulated to be ritually productive; in order to not only come out—from different religious or secular perspectives—as knowledgeable locals on the chosen topic of the evening(s), but to additionally emerge as initiated members of a group of ‘good’ and ‘civilized’ Norwegian citizens able to enact acceptable and respectable forms of social interaction, all attendants must refrain themselves from any direct, verbal confrontation.

Sociologist Ove Skarpenes suggests that the Norwegian middle class has internalized the egalitarian structures deeply embedded in society and has mobilized against cultural hierarchies, and for this reason (popular) culture is closely connected with moral judgements.[[32]](#footnote-32) To be legitimate, cultural assessments have to be deemed morally esteemed, as his empirical findings also point to the status ascribed to being a ‘good’ Norwegian citizen.[[33]](#footnote-33) To this end, a “moral evaluation repertoire” stands as a shared cultural code in which characteristics such as honesty, kindness, tolerance, care for others, and democratic attitudes are emphasized by informants as desired and admirable assets.[[34]](#footnote-34) In this perspective, FTL attendants not only show considerable middle-class identity markers when they do not engage in any direct exchanges of opinions and, for the greater good, suppress internal religious and religious-secular disagreements. Doing so, the attendants engage in processes of identity formation as they project visions of themselves as precisely open, kind, considerate, and tolerant citizens whose prime concerns are the welfare and security of fellow citizens as well as the upholding of ethical standards, and thus cohesion of the local society.

On the one hand, such open public interfaith meetings constitute encounters between invited representatives of local faith and life stance organizations who, as members of FTL and as part of civil society in Kristiansand, express their viewpoints on certain subject matters handpicked and discussed in advance.[[35]](#footnote-35) They do so in the presence of the community audience, some of whom are already members of the religious or life stance organizations represented in FTL. Others are concerned citizens worrying about multi-ethnically induced tensions or simply involved with the social-ethical issues frequently taken up by FTL.[[36]](#footnote-36)

On the other hand, as organized cultural encounters, the interfaith meetings are characterized by the performative statement, the ritual enactment of suitable cross-religious communication forms and speech genres. Analyses of public events as rituals recognize that a performative dimension is key to what makes ritual, theater, and spectacle what they are: the studies often point to “the deliberate, self-conscious ‘doing’ of highly symbolic actions in public life.”[[37]](#footnote-37) Religious studies scholar Catherine Bell defines two overlapping features that make performative activities ritual-like: the first dynamic lies in the effects of the heightened multisensory experience the activity affords. Notably, spectators are not shown or told something as much as they are led to experience it.[[38]](#footnote-38) The second dynamic lies in framing—the way in which some activities, places, or people are set off from others as extraordinary.[[39]](#footnote-39) In distinguishing activity, the frame also communicates, and creates, a complete and condensed, yet often ‘artificial,’ world or microcosm. In brief, performances such as public events entail ritual-like features because they explicitly model the world.[[40]](#footnote-40)

Erving Goffman’s notion of ‘participation framework’ is a means of analyzing the various interactional roles played by different people in a group in a particular place.[[41]](#footnote-41) When a person makes a contribution to a spoken encounter, there is not simply a speaker and hearer, but a ‘circle’ in which each individual holds a particular participation status. The notion of participation frameworks can be mapped onto interactional situations and be applied to take into account the different participants in an interaction. The framework includes participants’ relative level of involvement and the status of each as a contributing party, several third parties who are involved in negotiations between the two main parties, and other parties whose status is simply to record the progress of negotiations, without making any spoken contributions. Whenever a participant makes an utterance, the other participants will all have some sort of participation status in relation to it.

To this end, the evening’s public interfaith meeting is comprised of, roughly, a group of up to 100 Kristiansand locals of middle-class backgrounds. They are of different faiths and beliefs, all engaging in the social interaction of a dialogic event in the public space of the library. Here, three key participants—the public speakers—are recognizable as the ‘main speakers.’[[42]](#footnote-42) The three invited speakers alternately assume the role of ‘main speaker,’ as they constitute the direct and main addressees of each other’s speech, i.e., the public dialogue event itself. The other two types of attendants in the interfaith crowd are also accepted participants in the conversation, but they are not addressees since the speakers’ utterances are not directly aimed at them. These include the moderator and the attendants. Outside of this main group of participants, there are also ‘overhearers,’audience members, who are within ‘hearing range’ of the conversation but are, at least not always, considered to be part of the encounter and do not have the participation rights of those who are.[[43]](#footnote-43)

Analyzed from a ritual performance theoretical perspective, the audience is not simply comprised of the actual attendants at the public meetings, but also by a wider audience of society members not physically present, i.e., as equivalents to an interpretive community that shares fundamental cultural norms.[[44]](#footnote-44) The interpretive community is, simultaneously, made up of consumers of news coverage on issues of ethno-religious tensions of relevance to the problem-solving interfaith platform. Part of this interpretive community is, of course, only implicitly present during the performative dialogue, but as stressed within reader-response theories, meaning does not reside statically in an object, but is an ongoing process of symbolic negotiation between individuals and the social net in which they are embedded.[[45]](#footnote-45) To put it differently, impact on cultural products does not necessarily entail the physical presence of the (entire) audience.

On a tangible level, during the enactment of proper cross-religious conversation, the attendants constitute first-hand witnesses to the actual interfaith meeting taking place in real time. On a symbolic level, the attendants are simultaneously transformed into first-hand witnesses to the way religious and secular representatives address some of these ethno-religious tensions that underlie the interfaith project—by initiating conversations and clarifying one’s own and others’ beliefs in a peaceful and patient tone of voice.[[46]](#footnote-46) Whilst the dialogic event unfolds, the attendants are not simply informed, but also displayed and instructed how to ‘do’ interaction through conversations with fellow, but religiously divergent, citizens. Of special notice is the process by which the attendants in this manner get to experience how cross-religious conversations are to unfold in a civilized and proper interactive format to create and manifest harmonious diversity, which is a characteristic feature of these meetings. Doing so, attendants are subjected to experience how potential, underlying challenges or threats to the cohesion of local or national society are met with affective responses of devotions and assertions of “tolerant inclusivity.”[[47]](#footnote-47) Moreover, the mixing of ethnically diverse speakers—some of whom additionally dress in religious attire, while others, mainly Christian or atheist speakers, dress in secular, everyday clothes common in ‘the West’—is illustrative of the ethnic, cultural, and religious diversity in FTL, both on and off the stage.[[48]](#footnote-48) Despite the visual diversity and the encompassed acceptance of conflictual perspectives in local and civic society, the meetings take on the shape of informal, harmonious diversity training sessions in which (direct addressing of) overt tensions and conflicts in the form of confrontations are suppressed. And as internal FTL disagreements across religious divides are never explicitly discussed or debated—e.g., in terms of confrontations—the disagreements remain for audience members to expound.

In this vein, the meeting illustrates and encompasses acceptable and respectable ways in which local citizens may participate (and belong) in Norwegian society, both as believers and non-believers, and engage in national, civic, and local society, attend to issues raised by the media, and express standpoints on social-ethical issues together. As such, the interfaith forum—with its open, intercultural platforms and attentive, open, kind, and polite attendants embedded in an interpretive community based on norms of harmonious diversity and assertions of tolerant inclusivity—constitute an excellent space for both (minority ethnic) newcomers and (majority ethnic) oldcomers to experience, rehearse, or simply ‘do’ proper and cultivated behavior toward one another. Doing so, they come to take part in a social activity that resembles that of (corporate) cultural diversity training sessions.[[49]](#footnote-49) Following Bell, public performances can provide powerful experiences of the coherence of cultural categories and attitudes.[[50]](#footnote-50) As seen above, the experience of the welcoming atmosphere of tolerant inclusivity prompted the emotional “testimony” from a female audience member who felt the need to share her own hardships with an accepting crowd.

1. **The Performance of Multicultural Religiosity as a Moral Position**

But exactly which form of public religiosity is performed at these events? And which form of religiosity is produced from the FTL forum as a result? Sociologist Bryan S. Turner distinguishes between three modes of multiculturalism: as policy, as moral position, and as description of state affairs.[[51]](#footnote-51) ‘Multiculturalism,’ in this case, refers to a moral position of religious pluralism, by which collective identities other than the majority—are sought, recognized, legitimized, and supported by the state through civil society actors.[[52]](#footnote-52) Corresponding with the internal organizational structures of FTL, the public interfaith meetings are organized around a principle of religious diversity as FTL, correspondingly, ritually enacts interaction formats of proper and harmonious diversity when conducting their public interfaith meetings. Such dynamics of religious multiculturalism work to alleviate ongoing anxieties about threats to local and civic society, the nation, and its members, thus upholding society’s cohesion and legitimacy. Thereby the interfaith meetings implicitly also conduct citizenship (and discipline citizens), which I shall return to below.

In his seminal work on “Religion as a Cultural System,” Clifford Geertz suggests, with an implicit functional focus, that religion constitutes a cultural meaning system that orders and organizes the world for the interpreting human species.[[53]](#footnote-53) Religion comprises symbolic models *of* and *for* society,and it entails both utopian and tangible elements since it fuses the two in its tendency to both reflect and shape.[[54]](#footnote-54) As public events, the interfaith meetings constitute representations of the way things are (‘models of’), while they simultaneously guide human activity (‘models for’) and take active part in shaping the social world. As public events with ritual features, the meetings mirror the religious and cultural diversity in Kristiansand, visibly illustrated through the religiously diverse FTL speakers, at the same time as they project visions of how cultural and religious encounters are to be tackled and positions of religious differences to be addressed. Just as pluralistic states with complex internal structures for recognizing and empowering regions and minorities are increasingly seen as representing the truly (pre-) ‘modern’ approach, internalization of multiculturalism is tied to views of what characterizes a ‘normal’ and ‘modern’ person.[[55]](#footnote-55) To put it differently, diplomatic, open-minded, tolerant, kind, and considerate citizens who further the cause of inclusivity and justice are not “born, they are rather made through talk.”[[56]](#footnote-56) Thus, the meetings not only offer an idealized order but also an idealized conversation that constitutes harmonious multi-religious diversity as a reaction to transformations and tensions in society, and they serve as exemplars of acceptable, respectable, and thus proper cross-religious and cross-cultural encounters.

From the perspective of public events as performance rituals, the FTL meetings do not attempt to reflect the real world accurately but to reduce and simplify it so as to create a more or less coherent system of categories that can then be projected onto the full spectrum of the human experience.[[57]](#footnote-57) As such, the meetings not only create a reduced and simplified world, a microcosm of an ethnically transforming society that mirrors that of local society and the nation. The dialogue meetings also serve as symbols of Norwegian humanism and civility, displaying and enacting civilizing interaction formats of religious and cultural encounters that are transmitted through norms of tolerance and multicultural inclusivity. The significance of the performance of multicultural religiosity lies in asserting a form of religiosity that passes as proper, cultivated, and thus respectable to a wide range of people.[[58]](#footnote-58)To this end, STL recently received an official seal of approval from one of its prime societal institutions, the Royal House of Norway, when STL leaders in 2014 were invited to a “dialogic conversation” with Crown Prince Haakon and Crown Princess Mette-Marit inside the royal palace.[[59]](#footnote-59) Since then, the royal couple have repeatedly visited local interfaith initiatives and opened a range of STL interfaith conferences.[[60]](#footnote-60) It is precisely this engagement of the otherwise politically neutral Royal Norwegian Family that indicates how FTL, through STL, offers a benign and respectable form of religiosity deemed acceptable to all strands of society, capable of being displayed in public. The social practices of the open dialogue meetings, and the religiosity that is produced from those spaces, lead to felt responses that proscribe and prescribe the specified behaviors, socialize individuals, and (aspire to) produce multi-religious ‘literate’ and thus ‘responsible’ citizens in an institutionally secular Norwegian society.[[61]](#footnote-61)

However, the offered positions of proper and cultivated multicultural religiosity result in a softening of the religious content, as the tremendous focus on form produces minor space for zooming in on, and actually solving, any religious or religious-secular conflictual issues. To be able to uphold dialogue as an exemplary manner of speech and mode of interaction characteristically void of tensions and conflicts, the public FTL speakers are supposed to establish their stories on personal experiences, emotions, and subjective beliefs, just as attendants are expected to base their comments on religious testimonies or on personal interests in socio-ethical issues of key concern to most (middle-class) Norwegian citizens across religious and secular divides.[[62]](#footnote-62) This way, the attendants’ subjective renderings steer away focus from any substantive differences within the cross-religious conversations and redirect awareness to the realm of ‘the common good,’ such as preservation of nature and climate, street begging, consumer culture, etc.—issues and concerns that, in the end, unite most local and civic society members and the nation more than they divide.[[63]](#footnote-63) However, but to no surprise, the overt attention to form comes at a cost. During the meetings, the political reality in Norway and Kristiansand is rarely directly addressed, just as the unequal power relations between FTL member organizations and (the world) religions they represent remain undeliberated. This is probably due to the fact that the avoidance of direct exchanges of opinions that risk fostering heated discussions goes hand in hand with the aspiration and ability to perform and enact displays of civilized and harmonious diversity.

1. **Governance of Religious Diversity and Islam**

As pointed out by anthropologist Lise Galal, interfaith meetings unavoidably categorize people into factions based on *a priori* ascribed differences within their respective groups.[[64]](#footnote-64) In this case, those ascribed differences are, namely, those of (ethnicity and) religion. As such, respective minority groups are, from the outset, understood, as well as constructed in, overly homogenous terms, as if their practices were not themselves always contested and reflective of power relations. To this end, the very organization of FTL—and other interfaith fora alike—illustrates the ambivalent position in which most religious minorities find themselves: the structure of FTL and its organizing of representatives from different religious and life stance organizations around public interfaith meetings inevitably turns all members, but especially the public FTL speakers, into generic religious figures that do not just talk and engage on their own behalf, but on behalf of their ascribed religious factions and their respective congregations and organizations.

However, such cultural and organizational mechanisms potentially put minority members—and speakers—in vulnerable positions. As seen in members’ explicit emphasis on dialogue as a manner of speech, and their implicit mode of interaction, the categorizations in question work to both concede and delimit attendants’ actions. To this end, attendants face public criticism and condemnation in the very moment they voice perspectives that are conflictual with those of the dominant (Christian-secular Norwegian) majority society. Especially Muslim members constantly have to be aware of what might be referred to as the dangers of representation.[[65]](#footnote-65) If a minority group member behaves illiberally, it is easily taken to be because (s)he is actualizing certain customs or behaviors that define the identity of the group as a whole.[[66]](#footnote-66)

Adding to this, some religious groups run the risk of automatically being cast as deviant, and thus radical, if they decline to engage in ‘moral’ society initiatives, such as interfaith platforms, which are not only perceived as benign efforts, but also as good, beneficial, and respectable projects by several significant members and institutions within the Norwegian majority society. To publically participate in and attend interfaith meetings can possibly prove, for several religious and life stance organizations, worthwhile in more than just one way. The importance of public attendance especially applies to minority religions since their public image, and the possibility for modifying that image, to a large degree depend upon how they represent their customs, beliefs, and engagements in wider society and, accordingly, how they are perceived therein.

Islamic scholar Schirin Amir-Moazami suggests that a central motive for public funding of interfaith fora is based on the mode of governance it constitutes.[[67]](#footnote-67) For example, the organizations help create fora from which public parties are able to conduct and steer minorities, and especially Muslims, into moderate and liberal citizens of the modern nation state. As a case in point, the founding of the Islamic Council of Norway (Islamisk Råd Norge) testifies to the role played by external, state-funded parties in Norwegian-based Muslim interfaith fora. As it so happens, the Islamic Council of Norway was initiated by a Christian organization, the Church of Norway’s Council of Ecumenical and International Relations (Mellemkirkelig Råd), in 1993, as the latter called for a dialogue partner to represent as many Muslim communities as possible.[[68]](#footnote-68) It is precisely the presence of the Islamic Council of Norway along with the interfaith work they provide that are often stressed as crucial elements in the Norwegian government’s—successful—management of the cartoon crisis from 2006 and onward. Notably, the crisis has not, on the same scale, resulted in conflictual confrontations between the Muslim minority and the Christian-secular majority, as has been the case in Denmark.[[69]](#footnote-69) Instead, the means by which state and civil society actors in unison pacified Muslim sentiments in Norway has been deemed a success—an “ambivalent” yet excellent instance of ‘good governance.’[[70]](#footnote-70)

What is ultimately at stake here is the conduct of citizenship in a religiously rich context and within an ethnically changing landscape and the fostering of formations of citizenship through enactment of proper and respectable cross-cultural and thus inclusive religiosity. As illustrated throughout the article, the formation of a cultivated form of religiosity is closely linked to civilizing processes and, through these mechanisms, to the formation of moderate and liberal citizens able to interact and ultimately co-exist. The conduct of the Kristiansand-based interfaith attendants and audiences—as a diverse population in Norway—is the object of extensive scrutiny because diversity generates considerable cultural anxiety and is thus taken to represent a problem that must be acted upon to ensure cohesion and stability. Rather than to suppress diversity, multicultural governance acts through the multicultural subject, to facilitate the playing out of diversity along paths deemed less intimidating. Thereby, as political scientist Gerald Kernerman has argued elsewhere, multicultural governance does considerably more than protect the spaces within which diversity thrives, it also helps to create those spaces to begin with.[[71]](#footnote-71) Like other religiously diverse regions and towns, Kristiansand locals are not able to know *a priori* how to express themselves in multicultural terms, but must instead be trained to understand, and operate within, the categorization process of inclusive religiosity and multicultural citizenship.

1. **Conclusion**

As illustrated throughout the article, interfaith platforms may be perceived as civic responses to societal transformations in which ethnic and religious differences have come to play a considerable role. Through the conduction of a case study of public interfaith meetings held by Forum for Religious and Life Stances in Kristiansand, a Norwegian interfaith forum based in Kristiansand in Southern Norway, the article pointed to transformative aspects within the pre-structuring of the dialogic event itself. Combining theories of interaction, ritual performance, and civilizing processes, the study has explored the performative-constitutive roles of public formations of religion in Kristiansand, a town characterized by increasing multi-ethnicity and ensuing multi-religiosity. By analyzing these public interfaith meetings as organized cultural encounters, the article has illustrated how the enactment of certain forms of cross-cultural religiosity created within and by the public interfaith meetings are interlinked with the formation of moderate and liberal citizens: by conducting cross-cultural and cross-religious conversations void of direct confrontations or tensions, the meetings offer idealized conversations that display harmonious multi-religious diversity as a reaction to transformations and (potential) tensions in society. Thereby, the meetings serve as exemplars of inclusive religiosity as civilized behavior in cross-religious encounters. As illustrated throughout the article, the formation of a cultivated form of religiosity is closely linked to civilizing processes and, through these mechanisms, to the formation of moderate and liberal citizens who are able to peacefully interact and co-exist. As such, what is ultimately performed and ‘rehearsed’ on this local interfaith scene is the conduct of formations of citizenship through enactment of respectable, proper, and inclusive religiosity. Through the responsibilization of citizens, the interfaith meetings exemplify a surging governance of religious diversity in a secular and mediatized age, which allows for a more nuanced understanding of interfaith initiatives as instances of public religion.

Yet, an obvious limitation to these formations of citizenship through inclusive religiosity is the avoidance of direct, straightforward exchanges of opinions and the ensuing lack of hands-on and solutions-oriented efforts. Another constraint lies within the ambivalent position between recognition and culpability, between rights and disciplining duties afforded to representatives of (minority) religions and life stances, particularly with regard to the Muslim minorities in the given local and civic society. The importance of public attendance especially applies to minority religions—and not least Muslims as they constitute visible minorities that take up ample space in local and national media—since their autonomy as social subjects to a large degree depends upon how they represent their wider engagements in Norwegian society. These are circumstances that interfaith fora and organizations have to navigate, and the position of inclusive religiosity constitutes a response to societal demands and desires of cohesion, stability, and peaceful co-existence that, however, do not necessarily reduce religious tensions significantly outside the interfaith space.

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1. Jeffrey Haynes & Anja Henning, *Religious Actors in the Public Sphere: Means, Objectives and Effects* (London: Routledge, 2011), 8. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. This article is a partial result from a research project that focuses on local interfaith organizations and networks in Norway and, in a broader sense, studies how processes of mediatization influence local society and its members. To be able to proactively handle and counter these tensions, interfaith fora need to be wary of media representations of (ethno-religious) conflicts to serve in their role as peace-keepers and conflict-preventers. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Oddbjørn Leirvik, *Interreligious Studies: A Relational Approach to Religious Activism and the Study of Religion* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 71–83. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. On the homogeneity of the nation, see Ada Engebrigtsen, “Good Governance? The Prophet Muhammad Controversy and the Norwegian Response,” *Etniskumo Studijos/Ethnicity Studies* 1–2 (2010), 67–85. Following several terrorist attacks in Europe by groups and individuals of Islamic background and an ensuing immigration debate, a public focus on and conceptualization of ‘Muslims’ as one coherent category have evolved. See Sindre Bangstad, *The Politics of Mediated Presence: Exploring the Voices of Muslims in Norway’s Mediated Public Spheres* (Oslo: Spartacus, 2015), 15 and 41–81; Rolf E.S. Halse, “Negotiating Boundaries Between Us and Them: Ethnic Norwegians and Norwegian Muslims Speak Out about the ‘Next Door Neighbour Terrorist’ in 24,” *Nordicom Review* 33/1 (2012), 37–52, at 49–50. Today, Muslims are repeatedly taken to imply a group of the (dark-skinned) ‘ethnically Other,’ who are frequently conflated with (visible) migrants. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Lise Galal, “Dialogens arrangement: Når muslimer og kristne mødes,” *Tidsskrift for Islamforskning* 9/2 (2015), 48–67, at 49; Ånund Brottveit, Ann Kristin Gresaker, & Nina Hoel, *‘Det handler om verdensfreden’:* *En evaluering av rollen Samarbeidsrådet for tros- og livssynssamfunn, Norges Kristne Råd og Islamsk Råd Norge har i dialogarbeidet* (KIFO Rapport, 2015), 13. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. One particularity in Norwegian interfaith work is the inclusion of secular life stance organizations, such as Norwegian Humanist Association (Human-etisk Forbund), into interfaith networks and into political interest battles. In this context, ‘interfaith,’ ‘multi-faith,’ or ‘interreligious dialogue’ are too narrow concepts and, instead, the term ‘faiths and life stance dialogues’ are primarily employed. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Jose Casanova, Rosemarie van den Breemer, & Trygve Wyller, *Secular and Sacred? The Scandinavian Case of Religion in Human Rights, Law and Public Space* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht Gmbh & Co., 2013); Stig Hjarvard & Mia Lövheim, *Mediatization and Religion: Nordic Perspectives* (Gothenburg: Nordicom, 2012). [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Saran Ghatak & Andrew Stuart Abel, “Power/Faith: Governmentality, Religion, and Post-secular Societies,” *International Journal of Politics, Culture and Society* 26/3 (2013), 217–235, at 225. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Cf. Galal, “[Dialogens,”](http://forskning.ruc.dk/site/da/publications/dialogens-arrangement%28fcc13980-a121-493c-b8fc-92f299181c48%29.html) 49–50. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. On theories of interaction, see Erving Goffman, *Forms of Talk* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1981). On ritual performance, see Catherine Bell, *Rituals: Perspectives and Dimensions* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997). On civilizing processes, see Nobert Elias, *The Civilizing Process* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994 [1939]); Nobert Elias & John L. Scotson, *The Established and the Outsiders: A Sociological Enquiry into Community Problems* (London: Sage Publications, 1994), 13-23; Norbert Elias, “The Civilizing of Parents,” in: Johan Goudsblom & Stephen Menell (eds.), *The Norbert Elias Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), 189–211. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Pål Repstad, “When Religions of Difference Grow Softer,” in: Giselle Vincett & Elija Obinna (eds.), *Christianity in the Modern World: Changes and Controversies* (Farmham: Ashgate, 2014), 157-174, 158. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Pål Repstad, “A Softer God and a More Positive Anthropology: Changes in a Religiously Strict Region in Norway,” Religion 39/*2* (2009), 126–131. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. STL was launched in 1996 as the result of tensions relating to the introduction of the primary-school subject on Christendom, Religion and Life Stance. The presentation of the new subject saw intense scrutiny over, on the one hand, the removal of the exemption rule and the unconventional subject on Life Stance knowledge and, on the other hand, preservation of central elements from the previous subject Christendom, which led to the formation of an alliance between the Norwegian Humanist Association, the Islamic Council of Norway, the Jewish Community, the Buddhist Society, and a preliminary version of the Holistic Association. Eventually, the foundation of STL became a reality. See Inger Furseth et al., “Tros- og livsynssamfunnene og deres ledere: Eller innadvendte eller utadvendte?,” in: Inger Furseth (ed.), *Religionens tilbakekomst i offentligheden? Religion, politikk, medier, stat og sivilsamfunn i Norge siden 1980-tallet* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 2015), 139–168, 145; Brottveit, Gresaker, & Hoel, ‘*Det handler*,’15). [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Samarbeidsrådet for tros- og livssynssamfunn, “Vedtekter,” §1. http// www.trooglivssyn.no/index.cfm?id=150175 (accessed 28 June 2016). Original in Norwegian. All English translations from Norwegian by author. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Samarbeidsrådet for tros- og livssynssamfunn, “Forum for tro og livssyn Kristiansand.” http://www.trooglivssyn.no/index.cfm?id=148595 (accessed 28 June 2016). [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Cf. interview with FTL coordinator, October 2015. The day after right-wing Anders Breivik’s attacks on government buildings [*Regjeringskvartalet*] and Utøya near Oslo on 22 July 2011, STL was approached by Norwegian authorities to arrange a national memorial ceremony across religions and life stances. See Samarbeidsrådet for tros- og livssynssamfunn, “En nasjon i sorg: De andre historiene.” http://www.hlsenteret.no/aktuelt/2013/de-andre-historiene.pdf (accessed 28 June 2016), 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Cf. interview with FTL coordinator, November 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Galal points out how interfaith, at least in the setting of the Danish National Church, is reminiscent of the concept of Christian mission in several and overlapping ways, one of which holds the Christian testimony central to the interfaith project. See Galal, “Dialogens,” 53. A benign conversation between religious others is facilitated through openness about personal motivations and via formulation of subjective faiths and beliefs. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Public FTL interfaith meeting, Kristiansand 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Interview with FTL member, September 2015. All interviews were conducted in Norwegian. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Interview with FTL member, December 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Elias, “The Civilizing of Parents,” 201. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Elias & Scotson, *The Established*, 365–379. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Ove Skarpenes, “Den ‘legitime kulturens’ moralske forankring,” *Tidsskrift for samfunnsforskning* 48/4 (2007), 531–557; Marianne Gullestad, *The Art of Social Relations: Essays on Culture, Social Action and Everyday Life in Modern Norway* (Oslo: Scandinavian University Press, 1992). [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Elias, “The Civilizing of Parents,” 190. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Elias & Scotson, *The Established*,36–39. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Dil Bach, “Parenting among Wealthy Danish Families: A Concerted Civilising Process,” *Ethnography and Education* 9/2 (2014), 224–237, at 227. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Ibid., 227. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Ole Riis, “Pluralisme i Norden,” in: Goran Gustafsson & Thorleif Pettersson (eds.), *Folkkyrkor och religiös pluralism: Den nordiska religiösa modellen* (Stockholm: Verbum, 2000), 252–293, at 279. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Elias, *The Civilizing*, 365–379; Skarpenes, “Den ‘legitime,’” 556–557. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Cf. Arnold van Gennep, “The Rites of Passage,” *Anthropos* 4 (1960), xxvi–198. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Skarpenes, “Den ‘legitime.’” Skarpenes’ study was part of a larger study on the Norwegian middle-class that explored how middle-class citizens draw cultural boundaries between other groups in order to construct middle-class identity. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Ibid., 557. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Ibid. Translation by author. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Furseth et al., “Tros- og,” 139–140. So-called ‘open’ dialogue meetings are usually planned at an internal FTL meeting in the beginning of the year with an open slot for potential up-to-date issues that might suddenly arise (in the media) during the year. See interview with FTL coordinator, November 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. A journalist from the local newspaper *Fædrelandsvennen* was also frequently present during the public interfaith meetings, as he was responsible for reporting on local beliefs and life stances. Nonetheless, the journalist did not report directly on the meetings, as they do not meet the journalistic criteria of conflict and sensation. See Ida Schultz, *Bag nyhederne:* *Værdier, idealer og praksis* (Frederiksberg: Samfundslitteratur, 2006). Instead, he collected information and ideas from other, forthcoming news and feature stories on religion and life stances in town. Source from an informal conversation with the journalist, October 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Bell, *Rituals*, 160. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. Ibid., 161. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. Goffman, *Forms*. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. Ibid., 131–132. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. Ibid., 132–159. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. Stanley Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press,1980); Ken Plummer, *Telling Sexual Stories: Power, Change and Social Worlds* (London: Routledge, 1995). [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. Cf. Thomas R. Lindlof, “Interpretive Community: An Approach to Media and Religion,” *Journal of Media and Religion* 1/1 (2002), 61–74; Jeremy Stolow, “Religion and/as Media,” *Theory, Culture & Society* 22/4 (2005), 119–145. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. Cf. Brottveit, Gresaker, & Hoel, ‘*Det handler*,’152. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. Mark Falcous & Michael L. Silk, “Olympic Bidding, Multicultural Nationalism, Terror, and the Epistemological Violence of ‘Making Britain Proud,’” *Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism* 10/2 (2010), 167–186, at 177. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. Correspondingly, the Muslim members across the different member organizations of FTL and the Buddhist member represented in the FTL leader forum often show up at the public meetings in religious attire. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. Diversity training can be defined as any program designed to facilitate positive intergroup interaction, reduce prejudice and discrimination, and generally teach individuals who are different from each other how to work together effectively. See Andrea Voyer, “Disciplined to Diversity: Learning the Language of Multiculturalism,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 34/11 (2011), 1874–1893. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. Bell, *Rituals*, 161. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. Bryan S. Turner, “Citizenship and the Crisis of Multiculturalism,” *Citizenship Studies* 10/5 (2006), 607–618, at 611. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. Cf. Engebrigtsen, “Good,” 69. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. Clifford Geertz, “Religion as a Cultural System,” in: idem, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 86–125. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. Ibid., 93. [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. Will Kymlicka**,** *Multicultural Odysseys: Navigating the New International Politics of Diversity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007). [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. Voyer, “Disciplined,” 1889. [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. Bell, *Rituals*, 161. [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. This is backed by the fact that the mother organization, STL, was established during the 1990s, the heyday of European multiculturalism. See Nathan Glazer, *We Are All Multiculturalists Now* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997); Will Kymlicka, *Multicultural Citizenship: A Liberal Theory of Minority Rights* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995). [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. Brottveit, Gresaker, & Hoel, ‘*Det handler*,’44. [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. See Samarbeidsrådet for tros- og livssynssamfunn, “Nyheter.” http://www.trooglivssyn.no/index.cfm?id=426721 (accessed 15 April 2016); Samarbeidsrådet for tros- og livssynssamfunn, “Nyheter.” http://www.trooglivssyn.no/index.cfm?id=325398 (accessed 15 April 2016). [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. Ghatak & Abel, “Power/Faith,” 230. [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. Cf. Skarpenes, “Den ‘legitime.’” [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
63. For an overview of topics covered at FTL open interfaith meetings in recent years, see Samarbeidsrådet for tros- og livssynssamfunn, “Forum.” [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
64. Galal, “[Dialogens,”](http://forskning.ruc.dk/site/da/publications/dialogens-arrangement%28fcc13980-a121-493c-b8fc-92f299181c48%29.html) 54. [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
65. During the collection of material for this study, a telling case arose. Under the headline “I Just Follow What the Quran Says,” in a widely read local-regional newspaper *Fædrelandsvennen*, the local Imam in Kristiansand, Abdikadir Muhammad Yussif, was quoted saying, “We Muslims have our religion. If the Quran or the Hadiths say it’s okay to attend birthday parties, we say okay. I don’t believe they say that. That’s why we say ‘do not attend birthday parties.’ We don’t say ‘you’re wrong and it’s forbidden,’ but ‘you shouldn’t.’” See Eivind Kristensen, “Jeg bare følger det som står i Koranen,” *Fædrelandsvennen*,14 January 2016, section: Nyheter, 16. His views—and not least the interpretations and debates the interview generated—resulted, first, in his temporary leave of absence, followed shortly after by his withdrawal from the Imam position after a board meeting in the local mosque steering committee. The reaction to the Imam’s statement is quite telling of the cultural-religious navigation required by religious representatives to avoid outcry in the public realm. [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
66. Cf. Gerald Kernerman, *Multicultural Nationalism: Civilizing Difference, Constituting Community* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2005), 96. [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
67. Schirin Amir-Moazami, “Dialogue as a Governmental Technique: Managing Gendered Islam in Germany,” *Feminist Review* 98/1 (2011), 9–27. [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
68. Brottveit, Gresaker, & Hoel, ‘*Det handler*,’26. [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
69. Civil society actors also played a significant role in the peaceful resolution between Muslim minorities and Christian-secular majority citizens in Norway. See Ulrika Mårtensson, “Hate Speech and Dialogue in Norway: Muslims ‘Speak Back,’” *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 40/2 (2014), 230–248. [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
70. Engebrigtsen, “Good,” 83. See also Brottveit, Gresaker, & Hoel, ‘*Det handler*,’150; Mårtensson, “Hate Speech,” 240. On the pacification of Muslims, see Farhat Taj, “The Status and Role of the Norwegian-Pakistani Mosque: Interfaith Harmony and Women’s Rights in Norway,” in: Ester Gallo (ed.), *Migration and Religion in Europe: Comparative Perspectives on South Asian Experiences* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2014), 59–76, at 67. During the cartoon controversy—when a right-wing Norwegian magazine reprinted the Danish cartoons—Muslim religious leaders in Norway closely cooperated with the Norwegian Government and succeeded in preventing Muslim communities from reporting the Norwegian printing of the cartoons by putting the blasphemy clause into effect and instead requested Muslims to use their freedom of speech. See Engebrigtsen, “Good,” 83. [↑](#footnote-ref-70)
71. Kernerman, *Multicultural*, 101. [↑](#footnote-ref-71)