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Pål REPSTAD

The Powerlessness of Religious Power in a Pluralist Society

In pluralist societies adhering to liberal and individualistic ideas, strict and conservative groups face some serious dilemmas if they want to recruit and keep members. In a liberal society, the most important form of religious power is normative power. Strict and demanding religious organizations will have difficulties in a liberal, anti-authoritarian society. Such organizations may succeed in increasing their control over loyal members, but in a broader context, they will be branded as authoritarian by the secular media and by general public opinion. This, in turn, will have negative effects on their ability to recruit new members. This line of reasoning is presented in connection with survey data and illustrative cases from present-day Norway. On a theoretical level, the author contests some points of view in rational choice theory stating that strict and profiled religious organizations will tend to have the greatest success.

Dans les sociétés pluralistes qui adhèrent aux idées libérales et individualistes, les groupes conservateurs qui veulent conserver ou recruter des membres sont confrontés à de sérieux dilemmes. S'ils peuvent réussir à accroître leur contrôle sur les membres les plus loyaux, ils sont taxés d'autoritaires par les médias séculiers et par l'opinion publique—ce qui handicape le recrutement de nouveaux membres. Se basant sur des données et sur des cas issus de la situation actuelle en Norvège, l'auteur confronte ses résultats avec la théorie du choix rationnel qui affirme que les organisations religieuses les plus strictes sont celles qui tendent à rencontrer le plus grand succès.

Religion in the West: From Cosmic Dualism to Personal Welfare

This article will discuss some possible consequences of religious individualism for the success of strict and demanding religious movements. The empirical basis for the discussion is a mixture of recent survey findings and more anecdotal evidence, both mainly from Norway. The conclusions, however, are probably valid for most Western countries in our time. Norway may be of special interest in this context. It is a small country with a Lutheran state church comprising almost 90 percent of the population, and the country has had a great number of strong revivalist movements in the past two

hundred years. At the same time, Norway today is characterized by a widespread religious individualism.

During the past two centuries, religion has lost much of its political, legal and cultural power over citizens in Europe and Norway is no exception. Many tasks in education and welfare have been moved from the church to state and municipal responsibility. Religion has to a large extent become a private issue. This norm is strong also among active Christians. Even in very strict Christian movements, it is no longer considered legitimate for religious leaders or remaining members to visit people who drop out of the movement and ask them why they have left (Repstad, 1984; Klev, 1999). Comparative surveys show that the religiosity of people in general in Norway has stronger elements from the Christian tradition than in most other countries in Northern Europe (Botvar, 1993). But even in Norway most people who believe in church dogma, do not do so because they are obedient to church authorities. If you believe in something, it is because you feel in your heart that it is right. Subjectivism and ideals about religious autonomy are becoming stronger inside the Nordic churches, even among religious professionals. Spiritual vocations and sacrifices are becoming more peripheral, and self-realization has become a legitimate reason for becoming a minister, according to a Finnish study among theological students (Niemelä, 2001).

Closely connected to institutional privatization, the content of the Christian tradition itself has changed. It is a well-established point of view in the sociology of religion that this changing content may be seen as a consequence of religious pluralism. Christianity has to compete in the market of life interpretations, and will tend increasingly to display its most friendly and attractive dimensions (Berger, 1967a). As we will discuss, this change of content will, in turn, make it more difficult for churches and religious movements in pluralist societies to develop a profile seen as authoritarian.

For most Norwegians, God has become a close friend or an impersonal power rather than an almighty personal being (Repstad, 2000). The tendency to let everybody live in peace with his or her own faith is connected to the weakening of the dualist tradition in Christianity, dividing people sharply according to what they believe. Even in low-church pietist movements, whose golden century in Norway was between 1870 and 1970, there are now less sharp distinctions between saved and unsaved people than some decades ago. According to field studies, concepts like “converted”, “born-again” and “saved” are less common, having been replaced by terms like “active Christians” or “practising Christians” (Agedal, 2001). Generally speaking, reasons stated for being a Christian now almost always focus upon gaining a richer and more meaningful life, almost never upon being saved from perdition. In this sense, people’s religious life has become trivialized. People’s religious commitment has become more a question of cultural and mental welfare for the individual, less a fight with eternal consequences for life and death. As a result, religious power and religious legitimations are much weaker today than, say, three or four generations ago (Repstad, 2002).

Faced with the emerging secularization in the 19th century, Christian movements adopted different strategies. Some movements laid greater stress on the positive appeal of Christianity, others escalated their preaching of Hell and damnation. Gradually popular opinion formed against using Hell explicitly in missionary strategies and religious socialization. The first critical report in the Nordic countries about scaring people with Hell, was published in the Danish newspaper *Politiken* in 1884. Then a journalist travelled round the countryside in Jutland and wrote a very negative feature about a revival campaign initiated by the Inner Mission (Lindhardt, 1959). Gradually, preaching of Hell became a problem. First, it estranged many people outside the movements. Second, faith in eternal punishment in Hell became a problematic part of the Christian heritage for many Christians as well. The really colourful fire-and-brimstone pictures of Hell became rarer in Christian preaching. Increasingly, the preachers limited themselves to vague hints about the seriousness of damnation in abstract terms, leaving it to their listeners to imagine what it really was about.

In an interesting analysis of low-church religious movements in the southernmost part of Norway in the first half of the 20th century, the historian Bjørg Seland (2001) presents the hypothesis that increased competition in the life-view market has led to a change in theology and strategy. Christians belonging to the low-church prayer-houses (*bedehusene*) toned down how difficult and demanding it was to be saved, and how much you had to sacrifice in your life by following the narrow road. Instead, they spread the happy message that you could come as you were and be saved instantly, if only you wanted it sincerely there and then. The style of music also reflected the changes in the market situation, from solemn and slow psalms with an endless number of verses to appeals about receiving salvation here and now, clad in light and catchy popular melodies. In the same market context it is possible to analyse the change from appealing to fear to appealing to hope and happiness.

Moreover, the increased tendency to visit old churches and other pilgrimage goals can be seen as an expression of religious individualism, and at the same time as an aesthetization of religion. In today's Europe, tourists visit churches, connecting to a tradition more collective and binding in earlier times than now. Establishing pilgrimage routes and distributing folders with information about open roadside churches are Norwegian examples of this trend. In the old days, freethinkers and dedicated religious pietists could unite in the conviction that religion was a very serious matter indeed. Nowadays, tourism, piety, cultural interests and entertainment are phenomena with blurred lines separating them, and it is not seen as dishonest or inauthentic to become a part of an old tradition for a while. Religious practice with a twinkle in one's eye is seen as enriching, not as hypocritical.

Indicators of Religious Individualism in Norwegian Surveys

Not only anecdotal evidence can be presented to support a picture of widespread religious individualism in Norway. Belief in Heaven is much more

widespread than belief that there is a Hell in some form, according to a national survey (Repstad, 2000).¹ A more trivialized and less dualistic religion means less bad conscience. The Norwegian pedagogue Inge Bø (2001) has presented a survey where exactly the same questions were put to young people in 1958 and 1998. The young ones in 1958 felt much more of a bad conscience for breaking Christian norms and not taking part in worship than people of the same age did 40 years later. This can be seen as an empirical indicator of religious individualism.

According to recent surveys, an overwhelming majority of the Norwegian population agree that you can be as good a Christian as anyone without going to church or attending religious meetings. Even nearly half of those who attend religious meetings regularly agree to this. The same questions were asked in national surveys in 1991 and 1998, and the tendency has become stronger during the 1990s (Repstad, 2000).

Other signs of religious individualism can be listed as well. As mentioned, almost 90 percent of the Norwegian population are members of the state church, the Church of Norway. In a representative survey among members, one question pointed to the fact that there are different opinions among clergy and bishops in many issues concerning faith and life-style. No doubt an important background for the question was an ongoing and energy-consuming discussion in the Church of Norway about whether homosexuals living in stable and registered partnership can become pastors in the church. A large majority of the church members agreed that existing differences were not serious enough to prevent them from being held in the church. Only 12 percent of the members felt that the differences in belief and life-style were so serious that there could not be room for them within the same church (Høeg et al., 2000).

However, from these findings we cannot draw the conclusion that most members of the Norwegian state church do not care about their church or their religious tradition. According to a comparative survey in 2001 in 18 European countries on people's confidence in institutions, confidence in the church is rated comparatively high in Scandinavia, probably because of its inclusive and not too importunate "folk churches". The Scandinavian countries are at the top of the list together with traditionally strongly religious countries such as Poland and Portugal (European Trusted Brands 2001 Survey). The famous sacred canopy (Berger, 1967b) has become broken and fragmented, but it has not disappeared completely. Church members were asked: "Do you think that Christianity tells you something giving meaning to the life you lead?" Interestingly enough, the number of people finding meaning from Christianity in all situations and in no situations were the same—one in 10 in both instances. The largest proportion (four out of 10) supported the statement: "Christianity tells me something about giving meaning in some situations in life." The fragmented canopy is still there in some situations.

To know a person's heroes is to know something about that person's values. In the same survey of members of the Church of Norway, the questionnaire presented a list of well-known Christian leaders and personalities, and people were asked whom they admired and liked to listen to (Høeg et al.,

2000). The result was very interesting: bishops and clergy with a liberal and inclusivist church profile topped the list, together with a few public Christian figures with weak institutional attachment (popular media figures, for instance, a pastor turned pop singer).

There is a close connection between individualism and anti-authoritarianism. Three out of four Norwegians agree to the admittedly somewhat leading statement that religious people are often intolerant. In the same representative survey among Norwegians, there are several indicators that the majority are sceptical of attempts by Christian leaders to use their religious authority to influence people in political matters. Six out of 10 agree that religious leaders should not influence public policy decisions. And as many as three out of four agree that religious leaders should not influence citizens' voting behaviour (Lund, 1999).

A similar scepticism about the use of religious power and influence is documented in the survey among members of the Church of Norway. About eight out of 10 children are baptised in Norway, and almost as many young people attend confirmation in church. The majority of weddings takes place in a church setting, and nearly all Norwegians have a Christian funeral. People's participation in these church rituals is high and stable. At the same time, only one in five members of the Church of Norway agree that the church should demand a form of promise from parents to give their child a Christian upbringing, when they bring the child to church for baptism. And nearly half the population deny the pastor a right to ask parents about their relation to Christianity when they plan to have their child baptised (Høeg et al., 2000).

To sum this up briefly, religion has become trivialized and individualized, thus weakening its power over most people. But an escalation of religious dualism and counter-cultural strategies, a restoration of Hell, so to speak, will not automatically lead to increased religious power. It is not as simple as that.

Churches, Sects and Denominations

In societies like Norway, authority is the most important form of religious power. In accordance with Max Weber (1947), I use the term authority in the sense of exercise of power experienced as legitimate. This is because we live in societies with a state-guaranteed freedom of religion, and also freedom for non-religious views of life. Our societies are dominated by liberal and anti-authoritarian thinking. No one can be forced for long to remain inside a religious community.

A well-established typology of religious organizations can help us in our reflections. In the sociology of religion a well-known distinction is made between sects, denominations and churches (see McGuire, 1997 for a good conceptual history). This typology has been criticized for presuming that religious organizations have not very much in common with other, more secular organizations. This may be a relevant general objection, but in our case, the well-established typology is helpful in developing some important points.

A *sect* consists of members who originally joined the organization voluntarily. Then, having entered, members are expected to be subject to strong demands regarding dogmatic agreement, moral practice and active service for the sect. A sect is exclusive and demanding, and it is built on the assumption that it has a monopoly on religious truth.

In claiming a monopoly on truth, the sect is similar to the *church* in the sociological sense of the word. The self-understanding of a church is that it has a unique right to religious truth. Outside the church no salvation can be found. But different from a sect, a church includes the whole population of a society. While you become a member of a sect through a conscious decision, you are born into a church. To place oneself outside a church is to exclude oneself from society. At the same time, as a church is supposed to include all the inhabitants in a society, it will develop a not too demanding attitude towards people and institutions, and choose strategies of compromise. Hence, a church has a harmonious relation with the greater society, while the relation between sect and society is strained and marked by mutual suspicion.

All this is common knowledge, of course, in the sociology of religion. It is also generally agreed that both church and sect are ideal types, pedagogical caricatures, useful for stimulating reflection, but too pure to be found in empirical reality. To find a more relevant typology American sociologists developed a third category, the *denomination*, some 70 years ago. The main difference between a denomination and a church is that the denomination does not claim a unique position regarding religious truth. It is more ecumenical, more open to the conclusion that other religious communities may represent elements of truth. Like a sect, a denomination is based on voluntary membership. But a denomination is less demanding of its members than a sect concerning theological teachings, ethics and life-style. Furthermore, over a time-span of some generations, children and grandchildren will be born into the denomination rather than choosing to commit themselves in a very dedicated way. Finally, it will cost less than in a sect to leave or withdraw from activity in a denomination.

To stay with Norway as an example, religious pluralization has been the main pattern in the last two centuries. Despite the fact that the state church has been and still is the dominating framework, inside this framework a lot of changes have taken place. In Norway, the church history of the past two hundred years is partly a story of how the church has experienced out-breaks by sectarian movements. But above all it is a story of the growth and development of denominations, and not least of how the Church of Norway itself has gone through a process of denominationalization. Church attendance and commitment have become more based on individual decisions and freedom of choice. The religious landscape has become more varied. Different movements live mainly in peaceful competition with each other. Today, the Church of Norway is primarily a large denomination among other denominations. Some will say that the Nordic state churches are still churches, sociologically speaking, because a large majority of the population are members. But this is not enough to define it as a church. The Church of Norway does not claim to be the sole representative of religious truth in

Norway, it is much more ecumenical than that. Admittedly, in certain critical or solemn situations the Nordic state churches appear to gather the whole nation in ritual events, but even that is a very pale copy of the classical churches, in the sociological sense (Repstad, 1995). Those churches formed a binding and taken-for-granted framework for the whole nation, as for instance the Danish-Norwegian Protestant church did during the Absolute Monarchy three hundred years ago. Today the vitality of denominations is based on their normative power, not on legal, economic or political power.

The very fact that alternative life-views are present in society weakens the possibility of church leaders to execute power strongly and efficiently over their members. If the strict discipline becomes too troublesome, it is always possible to leave the organization and join another, or to withdraw into passivity and religious privatization. There is no longer any church in our type of society with monopoly power. There is no longer a church in the sociological sense of the word.

Religious Denominations are Normative Organizations

The American sociologist Amitai Etzioni (1961) developed a simple, but useful typology of organizations, based on the kind of relationship between members and organization, or, in Etzioni's terms, what kind of compliance there is. Compliance may be explained as a combination of the type of power used in the organization and the type of involvement from members. Etzioni distinguishes between coercive, utilitarian and normative organizations. In a *coercive* organization people take part because they have to. The leaders resort to coercive power in order to make members obey. A prison is the most typical example of an institution with legitimate use of physical coercive means. In *utilitarian* organizations, members' reasons for taking part are mainly self-interest. A work organization is an important example. We exchange work for money. An important means of governing and motivation is to manipulate incentives, often in the form of economic remunerations. In a *normative* organization members have a normative motivation for contributing and taking part. Members are dedicated to the aim of the organization. If the leaders want to stimulate participation, they have to appeal to a value-based commitment.

These are also ideal types. We should not draw conclusions too quickly that specific organizations fit into one of the three types without any friction at all. People's motivations are often mixed. Not every action during working hours is motivated by economic self-interest. Spontaneous friendliness can be found in a prison. A religious community, especially a sect, can have elements of strong pressure, maybe even approaching coercion. And we should not rule out the possibility that some people perform religious acts with a discreet view to salary. But roughly speaking, religious organizations fall into Etzioni's third category, the normative organization. The means of government at hand for the leaders are primarily to arouse, maintain and strengthen the normative commitment of organization members in what these members find meaningful.

Normative Means of Government are Weak in Liberal Pluralist Societies

In many ways normative means of government are relatively weak, especially in a situation where many competitors offer their services. The likeliest alternative for people in the Church of Norway provoked by an increase in church discipline would not be to join an association of secular humanists, even though Norway actually has one of the world's largest secular humanist associations, relative to the country's population (*Human-Etisk Forbund*). If discontented with the state church, most dissatisfied people would probably remain nominal members of the church, using from time to time the ritual services offered by the church, but otherwise withdrawing from church activities. Some people, however, are more radical in their reactions. Looking at the past three decades, it is possible to interpret some peaks of withdrawal from the Church of Norway and some peaks of growth in the history of the secular humanist association as negative responses to decisions and acts of the leadership in the Church of Norway (Aagedal, 1995).

Another possibility is to move from a strict to a more liberal religious community. According to classical sociological exchange theory, having alternatives is a way of increasing one's power. Two hundred years ago Quakers and other religious dissenters had to make a long voyage from Europe to America to be able to worship God in the way they wanted. Today, the distance to travel can be much shorter. Let us present a rather nice example from the largest regional newspaper in the southernmost part of Norway, *Fædrelandsvennen*, in June 2001. A headline over six columns in the paper states: "The Cathedral said yes to dancing". Under a large colour picture of an elderly married couple dancing on the lawn outside the cathedral in the regional capital, Kristiansand, the newspaper tells a story about how this couple tried to arrange a church dance for senior citizens in Grim parish in the same city. They did not succeed, because "somebody feared that dancing could lead to something worse." But the neighbouring parish, Domkirken parish, said yes. So now there will be a senior dance once a week two miles away from Grim in the Domkirken parish centre. "It seems that a lot of people want to dance, without wanting to do it in a discotheque," comments a parish social worker.

It is very easy for religious leaders wanting to govern their flock in a clear and strict way to be stigmatized as a fanatic. This ease is partly maintained by the media. They tend to be more urban, secularized and liberal than the average population. The mass media have a tendency to use attempts to impose religious discipline as topics of entertainment. Today church leaders have much to lose and little to gain by following what is seen as an authoritarian policy towards staff and members. In an age of religious individualism, most people will not bother very much if they have to pursue their religious interests outside an established church. Most people are already religiously privatized in their daily life. A strengthening of church discipline will probably increase already strong tendencies towards religious privatization and deregulation. On the other hand, many people would still like to have

access to the church when it is at its most friendly and welcoming, especially at church rituals marking birth, confirmation, marriage and death.

People's historical knowledge is one factor making it difficult for a church leadership to have a strict profile in pluralist societies like Norway. More than a hundred years ago, it is now common knowledge, that church leaders at different times and different places defended quite a lot of things in the name of God, things the church leaders of today are not at all willing to stand up for. Slavery, anti-parliamentarism and the discrimination of women are examples of this rather dubious record. The effect of this historical knowledge is a humbler leadership and more relativizing, less obedient church members. It is a long time since it was taken for granted that church leaders are always right.

Another factor also contributes to a general resentment against strict church discipline. There are anti-authoritarian statements to be found in the Christian tradition itself, and this part of the tradition is sometimes used by people working for liberalization. Critics may point to Martin Luther, setting his conscience up against the established church institution, or to Jesus, confronting the religious establishment.

I have stressed that the church leadership trying to maintain an authoritarian style today risks facing great problems from the public in general as well as from large numbers of grassroots members in the church. This is especially the case if people sense that it is only a matter of time before the church will adjust its norms in a more liberal direction, and where many people active in the church are already defending new norms by means of old values. This may be said to be the case in the Nordic churches concerning the issue of access to church offices for homosexuals living in stable partnerships. In Norway this issue has been greatly debated recently. More and more people in the church defend access to church offices, often based on the argument that homosexuals in stable partnerships express and respect Christian ideals of faithfulness.

To sum up, there is an element of voluntariness in modern church life, making attempts at strict church discipline a symbol more of powerlessness than of power. Most modern churches are denominations, sociologically speaking. And it is difficult to govern a denomination as if it were a sect.

However, within more closed and sectarian religious communities, and among staff in congregations, power based on unbalanced exchange or force is still a quite meaningful concept of power. For instance, controlling recruitment to the movements' internal labour market is often an important source of power. Moreover, in religious contexts dominated by a cosmic dualism, normative religious power can still be very strong. But this is more and more the case in limited subcultures. Here leaders can even today secure loyalty and obedience from insiders. But at the same time, people in the periphery and outsiders will tend to withdraw in the face of strict church discipline.²

A strong strategy of power can backfire inside sectarian religious movements as well. If members are "contaminated" by democratic and individualist ideas outside their sect, for instance at work or through mass media, a leadership seen as authoritarian will in the long run create problems

also among the faithful. Most sectarian religious organizations in the Nordic countries are not communities in a strong and total sense. The number of private schools in Norway is very small. So, most members of organizations with sectarian traits meet other people at school and at work every day, and it is practically impossible to take shelter from modernity all the time.

Contesting an Alternative Perspective on Pluralism and Religious Power

It is possible to come up with an alternative sociological perspective to the one I have presented. In recent American sociology there is a set of ideas inspired by economists' views on people and society. According to this alternative paradigm, people will always ask for religious compensations, because life will always bring suffering and death. The movements with the strongest and richest promises of compensation will attract most adherents. According to this perspective, the strict and conservative religious movements with a clear message will grow, while the more liberal and dialogue-oriented mainstream churches will have difficulties keeping their members active and also recruiting new ones (for a classical text in this tradition, see Stark and Bainbridge, 1987).

Pluralism is conceived of differently as well. A traditionally strong view in the sociology of religion is that pluralism in itself fosters secularization. Faced with many alternative claims to truth, people have difficulty deciding what to choose, thus refraining from making firm commitments to any religion option. Under a religious monopoly the old religious truths are taken for granted. The new, rational choice-inspired paradigm, however, goes in the opposite direction. It states what economic liberalists always have said: monopoly creates apathy and indifference, while competition stimulates activity, quality and commitment. In a pluralist society the religious supply side is forced to increase its effort and to adapt its services to its target groups. From this, it may seem to be a possible consequence that the suppliers adapt uncritically to people's preferences. But as mentioned, this type of theory in the sociology of religion also stresses that people want clear and strong religious promises. Therefore, the practical conclusion of this theory is often recommendations to combine a culture of caring inside and a strict and distinct profile as seen from the outside world.

This alternative sociological perspective is compatible with the practice of tougher church discipline than the one I have introduced in the first part of this article. However, I find the so-called new paradigm based on a too simple and too narrowly quantitative model of human behaviour in a modern, pluralist society. The implication of the new paradigm seems to be that the louder your voice is, the more followers you will gain. I think this underestimates the anti-authoritarian sentiments in our culture. It is correct that some strict and conservative religious communities have been growing quite a lot, but the picture is not unambiguous, especially in Europe. In Norway, the traditionally strong and strict low church movements connected with the prayer-houses (*bedehusene*) have lost considerably in membership and social and

political power since the 1970s (Aagedal, 2001). The charismatic movements represent a more mixed picture. There are examples that Pentecostal and Neo-Pentecostal churches have increased their membership in Norway in recent years. But this increase is far from compensating for the weakening of the prayer-house movement. Furthermore, there is some evidence that some of the gains in recruitment in these charismatic churches are the losses of other, similar movements. Turnover in attendance, especially among young people, seems to be high (Repstad, 2000).

Sociologists should perhaps stick to interpretations of the past and present, and abstain from predictions. But one possible scenario is this: a religious organization based on the principles of strictness and firm leadership, increasing the use of negative sanctions against dissenting members and staff, may lead to a fairly successful movement with sectarian traits, or more likely several competing sect-like movements. But there will be communication problems with the outside. And perhaps the “folk church” in the Nordic sense, a church with the majority of the population as members, may disintegrate in two or three generations, if the average Norwegian citizen increasingly associates religion with intolerance and strictness. The logic of this scenario is as follows: a polarizing process may develop between a pole of sectarian religion and another pole of religious individualism, religious indifference and even anti-religious sentiments, where each pole seeks legitimation for its world-view in caricatures of the opposite pole.

NOTES

¹ Two Norwegian surveys are important sources for this article. The author of the article took part in preparing both, although other sociologists are responsible for the main reports presenting the results. One survey from 1998, including the total adult Norwegian population, was financed by The Norwegian Research Council, conducted by Norsk Gallup Institutt, and prepared for research purposes by Norwegian Social Science Data Services. A general presentation of this 1998 survey can be found in Lund (1999). The other survey is from 2000, including as its population members of the Church of Norway. The data in this survey was also collected by Norsk Gallup Institutt. The study was financed partly by the Norwegian Church Council, partly by KIFO, the Norwegian Centre for Church Research. KIFO was also scientifically responsible for the project. A general presentation of the results from this survey can be found in Høeg et al. (2000). The institutions mentioned bear no responsibility for the analyses and interpretations in this article.

² The focus of this article is the Christian majority in Norway. However, since the 1970s immigration has created a Muslim minority of between 1 and 2 percent of the population. Recently, the media have given much critical attention to authoritarianism among immigrants, especially among people with a Pakistani background. In these contexts, ethnic and religious forces, and the minority status itself sometimes reinforce each other, creating strong power structures. However, this is not the whole story of religious power in ethnic minorities. An interview study among young women in Oslo with a Pakistani background shows that many of these women use modern and democratized constructions of Islam as a critical weapon against patriarchal pressures in their upbringing (Jacobsen, 2001).

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