

Chapter 9

Cultural communication as political communication

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Abstract

This chapter makes the argument that issues related to the cultural public sphere should be considered part of the political communication circuit. Cultural journalism in the Nordic context is a central case in point. On the side of arts, popular culture, and lifestyle, Nordic cultural journalism at times includes reporting and debate about sociocultural and politically saturated issues such as climate change, migration, terrorism, freedom of speech, identity politics, and gender inequalities. The chapter highlights three theoretical approaches, intersecting with the field of political communication, which have been of particular importance in Nordic scholarship about cultural journalism: public sphere theory, the politics of recognition, and the sociology of (cultural) journalism. The media coverage and debates about #metoo in Danish and Swedish cultural journalism in late 2017 serve to illustrate the arguments about the political in cultural journalism and reveals its quantitative salience as well as its qualitative specificities.

Keywords: cultural debate, cultural journalism, public sphere, politics of recognition, #metoo

Introduction

Issues related to the cultural public sphere, including media and news content about arts and culture, are often infused with political dimensions. The perspectives and agents involved may differ from those typically associated with political communication, but to neglect them as part of the field would be to miss out on important aspects of the current political communication landscape. In this chapter, we pay particular attention to the political dimensions of what is often referred to as “cultural journalism” (i.e., institutionalised news media’s reporting of and debates about cultural issues, trends, and artefacts), as one example of culturally saturated media content with political communication perspectives and potentialities. On the side of arts, popular

culture, and lifestyle, cultural journalism may include reporting and debate on climate change, migration, terrorism, freedom of speech, identity politics, and gender inequalities. The latter has been especially salient in the recent coverage of the #metoo movement.

The Nordic region is particularly relevant when studying the political in cultural journalism. This is partly because the cultural journalism tradition trumps the more limited arts journalism tradition in this context, and partly because culture is an important pillar of the Nordic media model (e.g., Syvertsen et al., 2014). More specifically, media subsidy structures and the public service media ethos emphasise arts and culture as topics of priority (Kristensen & Riegert, 2017).¹

We highlight three theoretical approaches of particular importance in the Nordic context to the study of cultural journalism, which intersect with the field of political communication: public sphere theory, the politics of recognition, and the sociology of (cultural) journalism. In addition to outlining the overall contours of these macro- and meso-level theories, we point to some of the empirical research produced within these frameworks in the Nordic region. We argue that this research points to the importance of paying more attention to the cultural dimensions of the political, but that it also confirms the challenges in much existing research of recognising the cultural *as* political. We aim to make the case that if political communication scholars acknowledge the political potentials of cultural journalism, it will make the field better equipped to discuss political communication in all its guises and thereby achieve a fuller understanding of the political as well as communication, and specifically of how they intersect. When assessing political communication in one of its guises, it is important to know what it can be in other guises.²

In addition to emphasising the particular Nordic aspects of the field and the Nordic contribution to international research, we aim to elaborate in this chapter on some of the differences between the Nordic countries, both in terms of theoretical approaches and empirical realities. In addition to constituting a review of an often-neglected part of the field and a theoretically anchored argumentation for why it is crucial to start taking it seriously, the chapter also contains empirical elements to illustrate our points, including previous studies on cultural coverage in the wake of terrorist attacks (Hellman et al., 2017; Kristensen & Roosvall, 2017; Riegert & Widholm, 2019) as well as a new study on #metoo reporting in cultural journalism in the Nordic context. These empirical studies illustrate both the quantitative salience of cultural journalism as political communication and the qualitative differences it constitutes compared to other types of journalism, not least political journalism.

Three key theoretical perspectives

We draw on three approaches in the literature about the cultural dimensions of political communication that are of international significance in cultural journalism scholarship, and which have a prominent position in Nordic research. Somewhat crudely segmented, public sphere perspectives appear as particularly prominent in a Norwegian context, while Swedish research focuses more on democracy aspects, globalisation, and attitudes towards sameness and difference. In Denmark and Finland, sociological approaches are key, emphasising the role of cultural journalism and the news media in society, the organisation of the cultural newsroom, and a changing professional ethos.

Public sphere perspectives

Both sociologists and media scholars, also beyond the Nordic context, have proposed terms such as “the aesthetic public sphere” (e.g., Roberge, 2011), “the cultural public sphere” (e.g., McGuigan, 2005), and “cultural citizenship” (e.g., van Zoonen, 2005), and urged a “cultural turn in citizenship studies” (Dahlgren, 2006) to highlight the importance of moving beyond the political public sphere when studying media, citizenship, politics, and society. In the Nordic context, the works of Gripsrud (e.g., 2008, 2017) and Dahlgren (e.g., 2006) have been central. These concepts surfaced in the early 2000s, as various media and genres increasingly blurred the boundaries of the public and the private, and the political and the personal (e.g., Dahlgren, 2006). They have come even more to the forefront in the past decade as digital media technologies have offered new fora for public discussion and engaged new types of voices in mediated public debates. This has contested established notions of authority and expertise, distinctions between rational and emotional discourse, and distinctions between reasoning and argumentation, not only about politics, but also about lifeworld matters and cultural issues (e.g., Kristensen & From, 2015; Wahl-Jorgensen, 2019). Much political communication research has been increasingly critical of these changes as the public sphere has disrupted (for an overview, see, e.g., Bennett & Pfetsch, 2018). Cultural and affective turns in parts of political communication research have also directed attention to the aesthetic or cultural public sphere, emphasizing, however, the political importance of the cultural, critical, emotional, and subjective (Kristensen, 2019; Wahl-Jorgensen, 2019).

As in much political communication research, scholarly debates about the cultural or aesthetic public sphere take their point of departure in and criticise the Habermasian perspective on deliberative democracy – that is, the idea, crudely put, that decisions are made collectively, based on rational, equal, and impartial argumentation among citizens in the public sphere. This democratic ideal stipulates that the best argument ultimately wins, which, subsequently,

creates peace and consensus (Gutman & Thompson, 2009). The emphasis on argumentation points to the importance of media and communication. A key critique of Habermas's (1989: 30) outline of the public sphere is, however, that it distinguishes relatively sharply between "the public sphere in the political realm" and "the public sphere in the world of letters". Both are placed between the state and civil society as sites of public discussion, though discussions of a quite different nature and with a clear hierarchy between the two.

A first main argument in the literature criticising this division is that the boundaries of the political public sphere and the literary public sphere are in fact quite blurred. Roberge (2011) argues that culture should not be perceived as demarcated from the political but as an integrated and equal part. The public sphere is cultural *per se* – the cultural is part of the political and vice versa. For the same reasons, the literature distances itself from the hierarchising made between the sphere of public affairs and the sphere of letters (e.g., Jacobs, 2012). Habermas labelled the literary public sphere a pre-form "precursor" or "training ground" (1989: 29) of the political public sphere, as "it constituted certain principles, procedures for debate that were later taken over by the political public sphere" (Gripsrud, 2017: 183). While this points to the importance of the literary public sphere, it still suggests a hierarchy. This hierarchy has long been upheld by sociologists, political scientists, and media and journalism scholars, as most attention has been devoted to the political public sphere, the media as a political public sphere, and political journalism. This hierarchy has also been upheld in the newsrooms, with political journalists and hard news ranking higher than cultural journalists and soft news, as we shall return to (e.g., Kristensen & From, 2015; Schultz, 2007).

A second key argument is that all types of culture have the potential to critically engage people, make them reflect upon their lives, and influence their actions and interactions: "Cultural production are windows, so to speak, through which critical views can penetrate the routine of everyday life", Roberge (2011: 439) argues. Similarly, Gripsrud (2017: 183) points to the importance of the cultural public sphere as "a space for reflection and discussion" about human relations, emotions, and human existence, or in other words, issues of importance to the "development of subjectivity and self-understanding". While these arguments mainly refer to how individuals navigate the world, they also allude to the political potentialities of this lifeworld navigation. Accordingly, the literature argues for applying a broad conceptualisation of culture. Gripsrud (2008: 203) points to Habermas's own naming of the literary public sphere as somewhat narrow and perhaps also misrepresentative, as he referred to not only literature but to various cultural fields, including music and theatre. For that reason, Gripsrud suggests expanding the notion of the literary public sphere to the cultural public sphere. Similarly, McGuigan (2005: 429) argues that topics such as celebrity, sports, and scandal today "may be viewed as trivial distractions

from the great questions of the day or, perhaps on the other hand, as representing deeper cultural concerns”, pointing to a much broader conceptualisation of culture, encompassing also more intimate or private aspects, not mainly aesthetic ones. While early Nordic cultural journalism research often echoed Habermas’s argument about the decline of the public sphere, seeing cultural journalism becoming increasingly interested in popular culture and consumption rather than engaging cultural *citizens* (Bech-Karlsen, 1991; Lund, 2005), recent contributions have applied more inclusive approaches (e.g., Knapskog & Larsen, 2008; Kristensen & From, 2015).

A third commonality is the use of mediated cultural critique or criticism as a central case in point of the blurred boundaries of the cultural and the political public sphere. Roberge (2011: 448) argues that “criticism is always normative and interrogative, always tries to define culture through a political lens and conversely, politics through a cultural lens”. Similarly, Jacobs (2012: 232) argues,

aesthetic publics provide a space for commentary about important matters of common concern. In other words, spaces of cultural criticism link a discussion of entertainment media to a broader discussion about society, politics, and public life, and they do so within the same organizational spaces – the media – that organize the more privileged and “serious” public debates.

In the digital media landscape, cultural criticism exemplifies the inclusiveness of the cultural public sphere. At one end of the spectrum, it encompasses expertise-based cultural debates and reasoning by intellectuals, academics, and cultural journalists. At the other end, it includes micro-celebrities, influencers, and ordinary consumers expressing cultural opinions and subjective, experienced-based tastes on social media (Kristensen & From, 2015). As shown by Danish research into cultural journalism and criticism, these voices and discourses are all part of the cultural public sphere today (e.g., Kristensen & From, 2015; Kristensen et al., 2018).

When engaging with the political dimensions of cultural journalism, models of democracy beyond the deliberative have also been highlighted, among them “agonistic democracy” (e.g., Kristensen & Roosvall, 2017; Riegert et al., 2015). Agonistic democracy resembles deliberative democracy in that it conceives of argument as key, but it stresses the importance of confrontation rather than consensus (Mouffe, 2013). The goal is not to end up in peace and consensus, but to keep arguing in what Mouffe (2013) terms a “conflictual consensus” mode, where what you agree on is that democracy should prevail, not what methods are best suited to achieve the most preferable form. Agonism is not the same as antagonism; agonism includes respect for the opponent and does not create enemy-images (Chambers, 2001). Cultural journalism studies, especially from Sweden, have concluded that agonistic democracy seems to correspond well with the approach of cultural journalism in covering societal issues (e.g.,

Riegert & Roosvall, 2017). In an investigation of Danish and Swedish opinion pieces in relation to two terror attacks in 2015, cultural journalism appeared less deliberative and less antagonistic than traditional political journalism, instead being agonistic (i.e., embracing conflict but not employing enemy-like polarisation) (Kristensen & Roosvall, 2017). Likewise, an interview study with Swedish cultural journalism editors found that the *raison d'être* for cultural journalism, especially in the press, was permeated by a conflictual approach, situated within a democratic rationale (Riegert et al., 2018). These studies show that cultural journalism is inherently political. Following Mouffe (2005), we make in this regard a distinction between “politics” (i.e., an institutionalised and traditional political practice), and “the political” (i.e., the more ideological side, played out in numerous societal venues, providing ideological alternatives where pluralism and agonism play substantial roles). Mouffe (2005) argues that artistic practices have the potential to unsettle ideological hegemony in a “post-political” condition, where conformism, moralism, and universalism may otherwise repress the political agonism necessary for meaningful democracy. This is relevant for cultural journalism in two ways: cultural journalism includes reviews, debates, and reflection of artistic practices, and cultural journalism’s debates and literary essays constitute such practices themselves (Riegert et al., 2015).

The politics of recognition

A second theoretical strand relating to cultural dimensions of political communication draws on approaches to recognition (e.g., Fraser, 2008). This is specifically relevant to cultural journalism scholarship studying globalisation concerning identity and status in relation to both immigration and ethnicity in the domestic realm and approaches to the world outside of the domestic realm. Such research has to a large degree been done in Sweden, where cultural journalism has been a crucial arena for public discussion about identity politics. According to the Swedish digital media archive Retriever, the term “identity politics” first appeared in the cultural pages (*Dagens Nyheter* in 1993). Furthermore, the most circulated and read articles in Sweden have, in recent years, often been cultural debate articles, addressing issues of Swedishness, ethnicity, and racism with a justice perspective (Riegert et al., 2018).

Identity politics saw its heyday in the late twentieth century and can broadly be understood as struggles for justice and the right to maintain or cultivate group uniqueness by minority groups in majoritarian contexts – a politics of recognition of groups (Fraser, 2000, 2008). In addition to recognition, redistribution (of economic means) and representation (in political bodies) are interconnected major strategies towards justice and rights (Fraser, 2008). Fraser (2000) also distinguishes between two models under the recognition approach: the identity model and the status model. The identity model stresses

identities to the extent that they may become reified (Fraser, 2000). The risk is that focus moves from promoting equality to valorising difference (Fraser, 2008). Reification of identities is a staple of news media representations, particularly in output, making sharp distinctions between “us” and “them” (Roosvall, 2014). The status model, in turn, stipulates that what acquires recognition is not just group identity but “the status of individual group members as full partners in social interaction” (Fraser, 2000: 113). Thus, Fraser suggests that the status model avoids the pitfalls of the identity model, which are displacement of redistribution struggles, maldistribution of means, reification of people, and misrecognition (negative recognition) of people (Fraser, 2000, 2008). While the identity model contains crucial insights regarding racism and sexism (Fraser, 2000), recognition should no longer be reduced to a question of identity but must become a question of social status. The status model tackles subordination by “establishing the misrecognized party as a full member of society, capable of participating on a par with the rest” (Fraser, 2000: 113). The status model is more rarely evoked in news media output (Roosvall, 2014). However, as we shall return to, this is exactly what the #metoo movement seems to have been aiming to do: establishing the misrecognised party as a full member of society, capable of participating on a par with the rest. The status model furthermore aims to “de-institutionalize patterns of cultural value that impede parity of participation and to replace them with patterns that foster it” (Fraser, 2000: 114–115). Such de-institutionalisation of patterns could take place in and through the news media, where identity construction to a large degree takes place (Roosvall, 2014). Here, news media can constitute an arena for direct identity politics performed by activists and groups via, for instance, manifestos and statements on op-ed pages, or in cultural opinion sections, such as those published in relation to the hashtag #metoo.

In Sweden, 49 groups, occupational and others, had published testimonial manifestos in the beginning of February 2018 (Schwartz, 2018), only three months after a story broke about abuse in the Hollywood industry, triggering the movement. At the same time, news media can function as a forum for more indirect identity politics, a representational identity politics (Roosvall, 2014), as constituted through the totality of the #metoo coverage. As we shall return to, the very existence of the #metoo reporting broke previous patterns of silence, which had existed despite at least partial knowledge. Exercising rights does not just include the actions of activists in society – what is done via communication devices and channels in reporting on these actions is also a way of exercising rights (Butler, 2011). In studies of political communication, it is important to be attentive to if or when such extra- and intra-media versions of exercising rights might clash or converge. Cultural journalism and mediated cultural debates constitute important sites for analysing this, as they potentially include different types of voices than those typically heard

in political journalism and communication (Kristensen & Roosvall, 2017; Roosvall & Widholm, 2018).

Appiah (2018) highlights that we live with the legacies of ways of thinking about identity concerning, for instance, nationality and ethnicity, formed during the nineteenth century, which now have to be rethought. Fraser (2008) similarly suggests a rethinking of the American feminist movement, detailing geographical shifts in feminist energies to transformations in views on gender justice since the 1970s, and broader shifts in political discourse in post-war capitalism. Her aim is to reinvigorate theory as well as practice of the feminist imagination and, in the end, reinvent the feminist project for a globalising world. In the analysis of the #metoo news media coverage below, we will mainly relate to the last two of three phases of feminism that Fraser discusses: its intersection with identity politics during the 1990s and its more recent transformation into a movement increasingly characterised by transnationalism, which is a geographical scale that significant parts of cultural journalism embrace much more than general news and op-ed material do (Kristensen & Roosvall, 2017; Roosvall & Widholm, 2018).

The sociology of (cultural) journalism

A third Nordic approach to the study of the cultural dimensions of political communication takes its point of departure in the sociology of news and journalism. The sociology of news has been central in Western media studies since the 1970s, when research attention shifted from individual news makers' choices and predispositions to extra-media influences, such as political economy and technological change and intra-media or organisational structures (e.g., Gans, 1980; Schudson, 2005). With the emergence of journalism studies as a more distinct research field in the early 2000s, this sociological turn was further cemented (e.g., Steensen & Ahva, 2015). A key trait of this often empirically grounded research is that it typically focuses on news and journalism more broadly, not on cultural journalism more specifically. One reason is that sociological debates about news and journalism are closely connected to some of the abovementioned normative ideals about democracy, as news media and journalism are seen as key to an informed citizenry and as an important arena for the public reasoning about issues of political and sociocultural significance. The sociology of cultural journalism concerns the role that cultural journalism plays in society and what influences the practising of this role. Since the early 2010s, Nordic scholars have taken an interest in the study of the particular normative standards and practices of cultural journalists and the organisation of the cultural newsroom. Several of these studies point to cultural journalists often being split between obeying traditional journalistic values, such as objectivity and autonomy, and following their own professional paths, borrowing from

more aesthetic and narrative modes of communication. In the following, we highlight some of the studies and their empirical contributions to substantiate this argument.

In terms of normative role conceptions, survey data across the Nordic region show that, compared to other beat journalists, the watchdog role is of less importance to cultural journalists – for example, in Denmark and Sweden (Kristensen & Riegert, 2017) – but this does not imply that political roles of a broader nature are absent. A Swedish interview study, for example, shows that cultural editors see it “as their job to question the status quo, to challenge all power, expose injustices and authoritarian regimes in any form” (Riegert et al., 2015: 782). Furthermore, comparative research on a more global scale shows that telling stories and promoting tolerance, such as more humanistic types of political engagement, is more important to cultural journalists around the globe than to other types of journalists (Hovden & Kristensen, 2018).

These role conceptions link to the norms and values as well as organisational frameworks that influence the daily practices of cultural journalists. Drawing on the Finnish context, Hellman and Jaakkola (2012) argue that cultural journalists follow an aesthetic paradigm, adhering more to the norms and values of arts and culture than to those of Western journalism. Focusing on the Norwegian context, Hovden and Knapskog (2015: 807) show that this puts them in a position of being “doubly dominated”, by both the field of journalism and the field of cultural production, as they are considered to lack cultural and symbolic capital in both domains. This is one explanation as to why their work is, as mentioned, often considered of less importance in informing citizens, in stimulating debate of political and societal significance, and thus in serving democracy. This again links to the type of issues covered in journalism, including by cultural journalists.

Internationally, scholars have criticised journalism, more broadly, for turning its attention from hard to soft news (e.g., Plasser, 2005) and thus for neglecting the societal role of journalism. This is often viewed as a sign of tabloidisation or commercialisation (e.g., Jóhannsdóttir, 2018). Others have questioned this theoretical distinction, as the boundaries between what constitutes hard and soft news are vague (Reinemann et al., 2012). Cultural journalism exemplifies this. Parts of cultural journalism engages in traditional cultural reporting of cultural politics and day-to-day events in the cultural field by means of sources and news genres, that is, applying approaches known from news journalism and hard news. Some scholars argue that such approaches have in fact become more prevalent in cultural journalism, speaking of a “newsification” or “journalistication” of cultural journalism, also in the Nordic context (e.g., Hellman & Jaakkola, 2012; Sarrimo, 2017). But other parts of cultural journalism engage in arts, culture, and lifeworld issues by means of more interpretive and narrative genres and of distinct journalistic voices, that is, apply professional approaches

of a quite different epistemic nature than the ones typically associated with hard news or political reporting (e.g., Kristensen, 2019). Of key importance in the context of political communication research is that by applying such approaches cultural journalism may provide alternative perspectives, or “a cultural filter” (e.g., Riegert et al., 2015), including alternative as well as less polarised perspectives, not only on cultural issues but also on politicised, culturally saturated topics such as nationality, ethnicity, and gender (e.g., Roosvall & Widholm, 2018) or politically motivated violence, such as terror attacks (Kristensen & Roosvall, 2017; Riegert & Widholm, 2019). In the Nordic – and especially Swedish – context, cultural journalism appears to stand out as particularly engaged in such political dimensions of the cultural (Hellman et al., 2017; Purhonen et al., 2019).

For these reasons – in other words, reasons pertaining to the roles that cultural journalism plays in society and to the ways in which cultural journalists practise these roles – they have been labelled “journalists with a difference” (e.g., Forde, 2003; Hovden & Kristensen, 2018). However, such distinctions do not void cultural journalism of political dimensions, which becomes even more apparent when looking at the actors involved and given voice in cultural journalism.

Actors and sources in cultural journalism

Proximity to sources and objects of reporting is a characteristic that makes cultural journalism stand out in relation to other types of journalism (e.g., Jaakkola, 2015). Moreover, part of cultural journalism is viewed as “churnalism”, because it relies on the cultural industries’ information subsidies with only limited editorial effort (Kristensen, 2018). For these reasons, cultural journalists are often criticised for not conforming to normative ideals such as autonomy and distance.

It is important to note, however, that closeness to sources in cultural journalism does not concern sources from the political elite, but mainly involves cultural producers – that is, it does not necessarily imply a failure to take a critical distance to political elites. Such elites play a relatively marginal role in the reporting, however. A Danish study of printed and web-based cultural journalism shows that approximately one in two sources are from the cultural industries – artists, cultural personas, industry people, and so on. Journalists or pundits from the media industry, as well as experts, are also given a voice; however, this is rarely the case for politicians and officials (Kristensen, 2016). Similarly, a Swedish study of cultural journalism in newspapers and on public service radio reveals that only 3 per cent of actors were politicians, whereas journalists, authors, artists, musicians, and academics were featured much more frequently (Roosvall & Widholm, 2018). This is in contrast to the

otherwise prominent inclusion of state actors (often politicians) in journalism, which generally interplays with the application of national and international geographical scales. Swedish cultural journalism is, however, concluded to be inherently transnational, drawing on the transnational geographical scale in at least two of three articles or segments during the examined years from the mid-1980s to the mid-2010s (Roosvall & Widholm, 2018).

In addition, a comparative Danish-Swedish study of the editorial and cultural debates in connection with terror attacks in France and Denmark in 2015 showed that voice was often given to people from the cultural public sphere. It also showed that the Swedish cultural pages were more political, in Mouffe's (2005) terms, than the Danish ones: opinion pieces regarding the attacks were more commonly discussed in the Swedish cultural pages compared with the Danish newspapers, where the discussion took place more on the general op-ed pages (Kristensen & Roosvall, 2017). This is connected to the fact that in the Swedish material, "cultural personae" (authors, critics) were more common than in the Danish material (Kristensen & Roosvall, 2017). The same study concluded that reference points used in the cultural articles were more cultural, drawing on novels, history, authors, and the like. Though this is not surprising, it is significant, since it makes political issues come out differently in the way they are discussed by those contributing to (or, in some cases, even dictating) the discussion.

In continuation, cultural journalists are sometimes seen as competitors to artists and cultural producers, as they constitute cultural actors, producers, opinion makers, and sources themselves (Knapskog & Larsen, 2008). By extension, parts of cultural journalism do not include sources in the reporting at all. A Danish study shows that two in three cultural stories do not quote sources, though platform differences are significant with less sources in printed stories compared to online stories (Kristensen, 2016). One explanation is genre use, as key genres are reviews, essays, analyses, and so on, which do not comprise sources in the traditional sense. This suggests that, when covering explicitly political and broader societal issues that do not concern cultural products as such (e.g., the staging of plays, exhibitions of paintings, musical concerts, publications of books, etc.), cultural journalists may not be close to sources at all. In fact, the opposite is more likely to be the case. In cultural coverage and debates of, for instance, immigration policy, freedom of speech, or terror attacks, cultural journalists seem to be independent of sources, also in the sense that general journalism is ideally independent in terms of "distance to external constraints, in particular sources" (Jaakkola, 2015: 99). And perhaps even more so, given the fact that they do not attend political press conferences or intermingle with politicians and the like on a regular basis, as is the case for many political journalists in the Nordic context, often working from within the parliament as part of the press gallery. In fact, in the Nordic countries,

cultural journalism has been known for autonomy, as the cultural news desk in some major newspapers has traditionally been autonomous from the owners and the editor-in-chief, serving under its own editor only. While this autonomy has gradually been abandoned on a formal level, it still impacts the spirit of cultural journalism, which may take a different stand than the editorial pages in societal debates (Hellmann & Jaakkola, 2012; Riegert & Roosvall, 2017).

Intersections of cultural and political communication – the case of #metoo

We now turn to the media coverage in Sweden and Denmark of the #metoo case, as it exemplifies political dimensions of cultural reporting, constitutes an example of politics of recognition, and is illustrative of some of the differences between Nordic countries in their engagement with political-cultural issues (see also Askanius & Møller Hartley, 2019; Pollack, 2019; Pollack et al., 2018).

The study is based on the print edition of the Danish national newspapers *Politiken* and *Jyllands-Posten* and the Swedish national newspapers *Aftonbladet* and *Dagens Nyheter*, which are of a relatively comparable nature, covering more left-leaning and liberal-right-leaning parts of the media spectrum. Using the search term “metoo”, we studied the initial framing and debates from 17 October 2017 to 31 December 2017. This covered the period immediately after Alyssa Milano (re-)introduced the hashtag #metoo on 15 October 2017, which was a follow-up of the *The New York Times’* investigative reporting from early October 2017 that exposed the Harvey Weinstein scandal. The two Swedish newspapers published 710 articles (522 in *Dagens Nyheter* and 188 in *Aftonbladet*), whereas the Danish newspapers published only 194 articles (123 in *Politiken* and 71 in *Jyllands-Posten*). Studies by Askanius and Møller Hartley (2019) and Pollack and colleagues (2018) confirm the relatively limited reporting in Denmark, compared with Sweden.³ In both countries, the cultural pages dominate the #metoo coverage, though least so in the Danish newspaper *Jyllands-Posten* (see Table 9.1).

Moreover, the cultural pages seem to drive and instigate a lot of other coverage, as exemplified by the investigative reporting on the Swedish Academy and “The Cultural Profile” [“Kulturprofilen”], published in *Dagens Nyheter’s* cultural section. This set off much interest in the Swedish news sections and also appeared in the Danish coverage (cultural and other sections). Testimonial manifestos published in the cultural sections in Sweden set off publication of manifestos in the sports and news sections (65 manifestos in all; see Pollack, 2019), again followed by news stories, including local reporting on local politicians being dethroned due to sexual misconduct (“Stockholm news” section in *Dagens Nyheter*; see also Pollack et al., 2018).

Table 9.1 Sectioning of #metoo stories (per cent)

	Culture section	Debate section	Weekend supplements	National news section	International news section	Other section (e.g., sports, business)
Sweden	38	15	4	25	2	15
Dagens Nyheter	38	15	5	21	3	19
Aftonbladet	39	18	1	38	1	3
Denmark	41	28	10	9	9	3
Politiken	47	28	11	8	5	1
Jyllands-Posten	30	28	10	10	17	6

Comments: In the case of *Aftonbladet*, the separate section “entertainment”, which brings more pop-culture and tabloid-type stories about the cultural industries, is included in the cultural section category, as entertainment stories are included in the cultural sections of the other newspapers investigated, which do not have separate entertainment sections. The number of coded items were 522 (*Dagens Nyheter*), 188 (*Aftonbladet*), 123 (*Politiken*), and 71 (*Jyllands-Posten*).

In their study of the #metoo coverage in four Danish and four Swedish newspapers during the last two weeks of October 2017, Askanius and Møller Hartley (2019) show that in Denmark, the case was most prominent in the debate sections, while being covered more as traditional news and editorials in Sweden. Another difference was that there was more focus on the individual in Denmark, in contrast to the focus on structure in Sweden, although individual focus dominated overall. Their findings do not specify the role of culture sections, however. While the significance of news in the Swedish material is clear in our study too (see Table 9.1), the cultural section still trumps the news section as well as the debate section. The dominance of the cultural and debate pages, as well as the migration of the #metoo issue back and forth between the diverse newspaper sections, suggests the agenda-setting power of cultural issues as well as cultural sections. Moreover, the specificities of the coverage in these sections shine additional, much needed light on the issue of individual versus structure, noted as a significant distinction in the cited Nordic #metoo studies, or, as we discuss it, identity versus status (see also below).

Agonistic democracy approaches could be detected in the manifestos and investigative reporting that drove much of the coverage. They brought conflict and injustice to the fore, challenging traditional practices in the workplace and society. “Meeting someone halfway” and seeking consensus was not prioritised; instead, claims were rather unconditional. Furthermore, in both deliberative and agonistic approaches to democracy, debate and discussion are key, whether of a rational or conflictual consensus-oriented nature. Similar to Askanius and Møller Hartley (2019), our study finds that debate and opinion pieces were given much space, which we, in view of public sphere theory and the mentioned approaches to democracy, interpret as signalling the importance of the subject

(see Table 9.2). “Views” genres included not only editorials and debate pieces, but also columns or commentary published in diverse sections, and reviews and essays published in the cultural sections.

Table 9.2 Overall distributions between news, “views”, and front page references (per cent)

	News stories	Views	Front page references
Sweden	51	38	11
Dagens Nyheter	51	34	14
Aftonbladet	51	48	1
Denmark	46	52	3
Politiken	41	57	2
Jyllands-Posten	53	42	4

Comments: The number of coded items were 522 (*Dagens Nyheter*), 188 (*Aftonbladet*), 123 (*Politiken*), and 71 (*Jyllands-Posten*).

As mentioned, the #metoo testimonial manifestos given space in the cultural sections focused on women’s status rather than identity; they concerned women’s rights to equal roles, positions, and possibilities across sectors and industries. This could consist of simply being able to take the bus at night, not being seen as an object, being acknowledged for professional skills, or in other words, being able – as women – to take part in society on a par with men, as stipulated in the status model (Fraser, 2000). Without this focus on demands and claims to equal rights, and to equal status, the testimonies as such, with their accounts of sexual abuse, may have become objectifying and reifying, as often happens when women and their bodies are in focus (Roosvall, 2005).

A few salient articles exemplify a focus on status, also in the newspapers’ own production of media content. A particularly significant Swedish piece is the long investigative reportage by Matilda Gustavsson in *Dagens Nyheter* on 17 November, containing interviews with 18 women who had been sexually abused by “The Cultural Profile”, a person married to a member of the Swedish Academy and with much influence over the cultural scene in Stockholm (Gustavsson, 2017). The women are often quoted directly, thus embodying a power position in the discourse. Quotes focus on shame as being collective rather than individual (and not pertaining to the women), thus underlining status rather than identity. The roles and experiences of women are discussed, not their feminine identities. Body and sex(ual abuse) are continuously referred to, but in a power-critical manner, and they are not used as illustration or sole characteristics; the women’s positions as artists and the like are simultaneously highlighted. The women are actors in the article, not objects, and aspects of legal processes are included, which ultimately expresses an agonistic,

conflictual perspective without becoming enemy-focused or antagonistic. In *Aftonbladet*, where culture and entertainment are separated into different sections, an overview reading reveals, however, that in the entertainment pages, which are of a tabloid-like nature, focus is on individuals and men, specifically men who have been accused. A prevalent focus on the individual is also noted in previous studies of the #metoo movement across the Nordic countries (Askanius & Møller Hartley, 2019; Pollack et al., 2018). Such a focus on individuals and men does not seem to emphasise recognition of status as much as the traditional cultural reporting, but more in-depth studies are needed to examine this further.

A look to one of the most salient pieces in the Danish reporting, an extensive cultural article in *Politiken* (Wind-Friis et al., 2017), reveals a focus on agonism and status rather than identity, like Matilda Gustavsson's article in *Dagens Nyheter*. This long investigative piece focuses on misconduct by a key film producer at the Danish production company Zentropa. It is a reflexive article, critical towards previous journalistic reporting about the given film producer and company. It calls into question earlier objectifying practices and media images, thus criticising reification of identity – a risk with the application of the identity model – not only in the film industry but in the media industry as well. The article includes many direct quotes by both women and men, giving voice to some victims. At the same time, it calls out members of the press, letting them answer critical questions about their previous lack of action, despite their long knowledge, at least partly, about the misconduct. A forefronted conclusion is that a series of singular examples of abuse were not enough for the journalists to act; examples from other countries – the initial reportage from the US, and also testimonies from Sweden – seem to have been needed. This indicates the benefits, and necessity, of a transnationalisation of the women's movement, as suggested by Fraser (2008) in her critique of the too nationally confined women's movement in the US.

Despite the necessary transnationalisation alluded to in the Zentropa article, events in other parts of the world, except for the US, is not a key focus overall, especially not in the Swedish material. Issues regarding the Danish context appear only seven times (1%) in the Swedish data, and issues regarding the Swedish context appear 11 times in the Danish material (6%). When other parts of the world do appear, national specificity tends to be highlighted, not only in the news and the political opinion sections (such articles are found in *Dagens Nyheter* on 3 December and 25 November 2017 and in *Politiken* on 3 November 2017), but also on the cultural pages (one example is from *Dagens Nyheter* on 27 October 2017). This indicates a state-territorial framing and that the transnationalisation of the women's movement, argued for by Fraser (2008), is not yet realised, neither as it is accounted for in the media, nor in the scopes of the testimonial manifestos. The transnational characteristics of cultural journalism in Sweden that have been

identified previously (Roosvall & Widholm, 2018) do thus not materialise here.

This specific knowledge of the cultural journalism field, as part of the political communication field, indicates that there is something specific to the #metoo reporting, which – together with the general spread over diverse sections, especially in the Swedish material – suggests that it has taken on a merged form of cultural-political coverage. In other words, culture affects news and political coverage and opinion, and news and political opinion affects cultural coverage and opinion. Understanding the specificities of sections of journalism, and the specificities of the cultural public sphere, facilitates a valid analysis and a clearer picture of what is going on in our societies.

The critical aftermath of the #metoo movement, specifically the criticism towards how the media (mis-)handled specific cases and thus severely harmed persons who were named, contains further – and deeply tragic – evidence of the societal impact of cultural journalism. Based on their reporting on Benny Fredriksson, CEO of Kulturhuset Stadsteatern (the Stockholm City Theatre, one of the two main theatre institutions in Stockholm), who committed suicide after a series of critical articles about him connected to #metoo, *Aftonbladet* was convicted by The Press Council [Pressens Opinionsnämnd], resulting in the newspaper having to publish a statement of the decision and to pay a fee. The conviction underlined that the severity of the harm done towards Fredriksson was exacerbated by the fact that it was published not only in the news section “but also in the editorial and cultural pages [translated]” (*Aftonbladet*, 2019).

Conclusion

This chapter has pointed to the cultural dimensions of the political and the political dimensions of the cultural as an emerging research strand within the study of political communication. We have especially focused on the political dimensions of cultural journalism as an area with political communication perspectives and potentialities. We have highlighted three theoretical approaches particularly important in existing Nordic research and have demonstrated that even within these strands, especially those dealing with public sphere theory and the sociology of journalism, it remains a challenge to recognise the cultural as political, including the political potentialities of cultural coverage and debate. Or put differently, it remains a challenge for cultural journalism studies to be accepted as an important aspect of the political communication circuit and thus as a research field with (also) political dimensions. We have made the case that acknowledging these dimensions potentially makes us better equipped to discuss political communication in all its guises and variations and thereby to achieve a fuller, more well-informed understanding of the political as well as

communication and, specifically, how they connect.

To exemplify this, we have, in addition to drawing on previous studies of cultural journalism, provided a mapping of, and brief qualitative look into, the coverage of #metoo in Danish and Swedish newspapers in the autumn of 2017. This analysis demonstrates that cultural journalism may be a key arena for and driver of political coverage and opinion. Moreover, it indicates that knowledge of the field of cultural journalism as a form of political communication is necessary to be able to make valid conclusions about – in this case – the presence of (inter-)national framing, which in general news and political opinion are staple, but in cultural journalism is more of a rarity. The case of #metoo has also exemplified the inclusiveness of cultural journalism today. This coverage involved a continuum from politically saturated stories, investigative reporting, and cultural editors calling for action, at one end of the spectrum, setting agendas also for other parts of journalism. But it also included more traditional news stories about the evolvment of #metoo in various countries (applying national rather than transnational perspectives) and debate articles engaging critically and supportively with the topic, thus serving as a forum for conflictual consensus. At the other end of the spectrum, the coverage also involved entertainment and gossip stories. All of these stories add to the picture of this complex matter and point to cultural journalism as an area of research that deserves more attention in a world of increasing media hybridisation, both in terms of content and genres, and in a media landscape characterised by increasing attempts to stand out in the multitude of accessible media material, not least in the field of political communication.

Notes

1. One example is that, across public service broadcasters in the Nordic countries, culture is highlighted as key areas of commitment. This is evident in the annual public service reports from key public service providers, such as Sveriges Television (SVT, Sweden), Norsk Rikskringkasting (NRK, Norway) and Danmarks Radio (DR, Denmark).
2. The study of the political dimensions of cultural journalism presented here are not to be confused with scholarly debates about political communication cultures (e.g., Pfetsch, 2004; Esser & Pfetsch, 2017) or journalism cultures (Hanitzsch et al., 2011). These approaches study and compare the actions, norms, and attitudes of actors associated with the political public sphere within different political and media systems but pay little attention to the study of the political dimensions of cultural journalism and the actions and attitudes of agents contributing to this type of journalism.
3. Pollack and colleagues (2018) find extensive coverage in Norway and coverage in Finland somewhere in between.

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