

## CHAPTER 10

# Boundary work in the public sphere

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Contentions about freedom of speech aim at the boundaries of this freedom, not its core. The objective of this chapter is to recast and interpret the findings of the preceding chapters within a theoretical framework, combining the insights of two separate fields of scholarship: the sociology of the public sphere and the sociology of social boundaries. This chapter develops an understanding of the public sphere as a social sphere, being both a sphere of cultural and symbolic integration, as well as of conflict and power struggle. It emphasizes the need to extend our understanding of the public sphere beyond its role as a space for rational discussion and deliberative politics. It continues by spelling out the criteria that an extended concept of the public sphere should meet. The chapter gives an interpretation, in terms of symbolic boundary-making processes, of the public debates related to immigration and freedom of speech in Norway. Public debates about freedom of speech are concerned not only with the limits of freedom of speech, but also with the symbolic recognition and integration of identity groups. Both types of boundaries (of freedom of speech and identity groups) can be understood

as a power struggle for the position of these identity groups in the political community. What is at stake in these debates is the inclusion or exclusion of different identities in a multicultural society. The social definition of these symbolic boundaries impacts society's 'moral order' and society's social stratification.

## Introduction

In democratic polities the public and scholarly discourse on freedom of speech does not tend to focus on the core aspects of this freedom, but on its boundaries, on the borderline cases where disagreements come to the fore about where the limits of free speech must be drawn. Most of the literature on freedom of speech has traditionally been of a legal and philosophical nature (being mainly the work of philosophers of law, political theorists, and constitutional lawyers), and has emanated from the need to justify the principle of freedom of speech and to delineate its content and limits. In contrast to this tradition, a sociological perspective on freedom of speech is not concerned with elaborating normative principles for justifying the right of free speech or for limiting this right. It is concerned with the social practices of expression in public, i.e. the ways social, cultural, and institutional processes and structures *de facto* enable and limit the exercise of free speech. It also focuses on the social, cultural and institutional stakes, and the roles played in debates and discourses on freedom of speech.

The focus of this book has been the making of symbolic boundaries in public debates, with an emphasis on the public debates related to freedom of speech and immigration in Norway. Insofar as the right to freedom of speech would not have any concrete existence without the presence of a social space in which free speech is made public, making sense of these debates entails situating them within a broader understanding

of the public sphere as a space where symbolic struggles and processes of symbolic integration and exclusion take place. From this viewpoint, the public sphere is considered to be a space for the affirmation and contestation of society's moral order, and not only as a space of rational discourse and deliberative politics.

As stated above, the objective of this concluding chapter is to recast and interpret the findings of the preceding chapters within a theoretical framework combining the insights of these two separate fields of scholarship: the sociology of the public sphere and the sociology of social boundaries. Hence, the first task that the chapter seeks to achieve is to develop a sociological perspective on the public sphere, understood as a social space of struggle and integration. Starting with Habermas' understanding of the public sphere, and its criticisms by political theorists from different philosophical positions, it emphasizes the need to extend our understanding of the public sphere beyond its role as a space for rational discussion and deliberative politics. The chapter then sketches out the elements of such an extended conception of the public sphere, emphasizing the material and conflicting dimensions, as well as the cultural-symbolic and integrative dimensions of the social world. Such a conception will enable us to understand how the public sphere contributes to the creation and maintenance of society's moral order and social stratification.

Equipped with this understanding of the public sphere, the chapter turns to an analysis of the public debates about freedom of speech in Norway, conceived as a process of symbolic boundary-making in public. The empirical findings presented in the previous chapters of this book shed light on how the symbolic boundaries of freedom of speech are made and contested. They also illustrate how the public sphere functions as a locus where

universal claims about symbolic boundaries are made, contested, legitimized or marginalized. Finally, they illuminate some of the cultural processes linking symbolic boundaries to social stratification.

## The public sphere as a space for struggle and integration

Modern democracy is usually thought of as a product of the Enlightenment, which raised the idea of publicity to a fundamental principle. In his treatise ‘What Is Enlightenment?’ Immanuel Kant ([1784], 1991) puts the freedom to make public use of one’s reason at the core of the process of Enlightenment, i.e. man’s emergence from his self-incurred immaturity. The principle of publicity also constitutes the foundation of public opinion and people’s sovereignty, a major legitimizing basis of modern democracy. While pre-modern systems of government legitimized themselves by referring to divine will, modern democracies - where power is based on the consent of the governed - refer to public opinion. In contemporary democracies, the idea of publicity indicates the public sphere primarily, in which the public use of reason or public discussion of free and equal citizens can take place, and public opinion is formed and expressed. In modern democracies, political consent is generated through continuous discursive activity in the public sphere.

Jürgen Habermas has formulated the idea of the public sphere as a site where public opinion is formed through rational discourse in which private individuals forge a common understanding of public goals and exercise scrutiny over the state. Interest in the public sphere, at least in the English-speaking scholarly community, was renewed with the translation of Habermas’ *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit* (first published in 1962) into

English as *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1989). Habermas' concept is central to any discussion of the public sphere, but the fact that Habermas revised his own ideas in his *Theory of Communicative Action* ([1981], 1984) and subsequent works makes it important to distinguish between the different versions.

In *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, Habermas defines the public sphere as the realm of social life in which public opinion is formed. Public spheres are created when private citizens come together and form a public body through dialogue. Habermas differentiates between the political public sphere, which, in contrast to the literate public sphere, is oriented towards the state's activities. The media are necessary in order to disseminate information to a large public body. However, for Habermas the mass media put the public sphere at risk of manipulation and propaganda. Habermas follows Adorno and Horkheimer's assessment of mass media as authoritarian media, broadcasting massive and identical messages, and having the power to reverse the project of Enlightenment. As emphasized by Craig Calhoun (2011), Habermas in *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* tends to idealize 18<sup>th</sup> century English parliamentarianism, newspapers and coffee house conversations. Such an idealization is often at risk of ushering in golden age concepts and narratives of decline, as public discourse mediated by mass media is thought of by Habermas in terms of the loss of the rational-critical capacity.

In the *Theory of Communicative Action* (1984) and *Between Facts and Norms* (1996), Habermas developed his concept of the public sphere on the basis of his theory of symbolic interaction with the *lifeworld* – the background environment of competences, practices, and attitudes where communication and understanding take place according to the rules of practical rationality,

in contrast to technical or instrumental rationality that characterizes the *system* – as a critical point. *Reciprocal understanding* demands *universal validity claims*, which are inherent to all speech situations. These speech situations constitute the foundations of a democratic public sphere. The media contribute to the enlargement of the potential for communicative action: ‘Writing, the printing press and electronic media mark the significant innovations... by these means speech acts are freed from spatiotemporal contextual limitations and made available for multiple and future contexts’ (Habermas, 1984 vol. 2, p. 184). Communicative action ‘is raised to a higher power by the electronic media of mass communication.’ Despite the fact that the media are now given a role as distributors of communication, Habermas condemns the media for not permitting validity claims to emerge. The media are not an *ideal speech situation* or a democratic public sphere. Mass media are also part of the *system* and threaten to invade the *lifeworld* of intersubjective and communicative interaction. Habermas (2006) has moderated this conclusion in a more recent appreciation of the role of mediated political communication in the public sphere. In this later contribution, which is influenced by the works of Bernhard Peters ([1993], 2008), mediated communication is seen as a means of facilitating ‘deliberative legitimation processes in complex societies’ (Habermas 2006).

Habermas’ approach to the public sphere merits consideration because he accurately conceptualizes the nature of the public sphere, the shift from opinion to public opinion by the development of the public sphere’s preeminent institution, the mass-media. However, Habermas’ conception of the public sphere has been criticized from different standpoints. Two main traditions – radical democracy and political realism – challenge the normative foundations of public reason, communicative

rationality and deliberative democracy on which Habermas' understanding of the public sphere builds.

The radical democratic tradition (Tønder & Thomassen, 2006) emphasizes the principle of participatory parity as a fundamental democratic principle in a culturally plural modern society and criticizes the Habermasian ideal of communicative rationality. Indeed, this ideal demands that deliberations in the public sphere take the form of fully rational and impartial reasoning. This entails, for the participants in public deliberation, the imperative of agreeing with the best argument independently of their particular interests or identities. However, discourse in the public sphere may be characterized by a purposive and instrumental orientation, as well as by other expressive and emotional communicative strategies involving irony, personal narrative, aesthetic interventions, and theatricality. Additionally, a strict focus on rational deliberation disqualifies everyday talk and its relevance for democracy. Young (1990), for example, criticizes the ideal of impartiality in public deliberations for reducing difference to unity, and consequently impeding a genuine participatory parity. The stances of detachment and dispassion attached to the ideas of public reason and communicative rationality have the consequence, for Young (1990), of forcing individuals acting in the public sphere to abstract their feelings, affiliations, and points of view, generating 'a dichotomy between universal and particular, between public and private, reason and passion' (Young 1990 p. 97). In the same vein, Behabib (1996) insists on the need for normative theories of public deliberation to recognize that different visions of the good life and different collective identities play a central role for individuals acting in the public sphere.

The realist tradition underscores the public sphere as a site of public contestation and the enduring and creative nature of

conflict. Political realism (Galston, 2010) designates a heterogeneous set of approaches that have in common the development of a critique of Rawls' and Habermas' 'ideal theory'. Following Bernard Williams (2005), distinguishing between political moralism and political realism, the characteristic of 'ideal theories' such as those advanced by Rawls and Habermas, is to make the moral prior to the political. Political realism affirms the autonomy of politics in relation to morality (the right), denies the possibility of achieving coordination through consent, and considers that coordination will require coercion or the threat of coercion. Political realists 'see political conflict as ubiquitous, perennial, ineradicable, and they regard political moralists as being far too sanguine about the possibility of achieving either normative or practical consensus' (Galston, 2010 p. 393). They insist that political disagreements are of a different nature than intellectual disagreements, since in political disagreements our interests and cultural identities are at stake. In her critique of the Habermasian tradition, Mouffe (2000) mobilizes Wittgenstein's notion of the 'language game' pointing to the fact that agreement on language necessitates agreement on 'forms of life', a fact that entails, in pluralist societies, the prevalence of antagonist conceptions that develop into power struggles. Mouffe (2000) develops a perspective of 'agonistic pluralism' entailing a concept of the public sphere in which conflicts and power struggles are compatible with democratic values. Hence, political realism leads to a conception of the public sphere as a space, among other institutional spaces, where political struggles take place, since political struggles are also struggles for being heard (Rasmussen, 2016).

Taken together, these criticisms of Habermas' theories of the public sphere point towards three points of contention: the *kind of talk* that ideally should characterize public deliberation in the

public sphere, the *role of rationality and emotions* in public deliberations, and the *power mechanisms* that are at play in public deliberations.

Concerning the first dimension of contention— the *kind of talk* acceptable in public discourse – the Habermasian ideal of communicative rationality conceives public discourse as fully rational and impartial reasoning, entailing the imperative that participants agree with the best argument independent of their particular interests or identities. However, political utterances are aimed at finding solutions for conflicts and have a purposive and instrumental orientation. In addition, a strict focus on rational deliberation disqualifies everyday talk and its relevance for democracy.

The second issue of contention relates to the role of rationality in public discourse. The normative demands of public reason and communicative rationality are seen as excluding from public debates other expressive and emotional communicative strategies such as irony, personal narrative, aesthetic interventions, and theatricality, which are necessary for motivating and maintaining engagement in the public sphere.

The third issue has to do with discursive and social power. The ideals of communicative rationality in the public sphere suppose that all participants are equal. However, participation in public deliberation often correlates with power and cultural capital. As pointed out by Young (1990), public settings that require universal, neutral and egalitarian discursive modalities may reflect the *habitus* of the privileged class and constitute a form of symbolic power. Further, there exists a contradiction between the ideals of communicative action and the nature of politics involving power and conflict relations.

These issues of contention reflect higher-level disagreement about the *telos* (consensus vs. conflict), the mechanisms of

power, and the nature of agency in the public sphere. Concerning these three issues of disagreement, positions are formed around some basic differences. A first differentiation can be drawn between perspectives emphasizing consensus and social integration through common values as the result of the deliberation process taking place in the public sphere (Habermas 1984, 1996; Rawls 1993), and those considering that conflict and radical disagreement (agonistic pluralism) are fundamental characteristics of the public sphere (Mouffe, 2000; Williams, 2005; Luhmann, 2000). A second differentiation operates between realist theories (Williams 2005, Luhmann 2000), considering debates in the public sphere as expressing power and interest struggles, and idealist theories, for which public debates are concerned with values and cultural representations (Habermas, 1996, Mouffe, 2000). A final differentiation is related to different conceptions of agency in the public sphere. Whereas Habermas and Rawls conceive agency in the public sphere in the Kantian tradition, based on rationality and public reason, others (Mouffe, 2000; Young, 1990; Benhabib, 1996) emphasize that public debates involve individuals who are 'situated selves', including their identities and emotions, and not just rational agents detached from their concrete situation. Additionally, common to these approaches is the fact that, in addition to being philosophical elaborations – not analyses of how the 'real' public spheres work - they tend to underscore either the integrative and legitimating capacity of consensus reached through public communication, or the fundamental nature of disagreement in politics and the historical nature of discourse (Rasmussen, 2016). Finally, these normative theories tend to limit the role of the public sphere as contributing to opinion-formation and the legitimacy of political decision-making in a democratic polity, obscuring the role played by the public sphere in making and

maintaining society's social integration, moral order and social stratification.

In spite of the limitations of these different normative perspectives, the concept of the public sphere remains a central analytical tool to help us make sense of the relationship between the media and democracy (civic engagement). In contrast to these normative theories, a sociology of the public sphere will offer us a more empirically grounded understanding of public communication, including a wide range of social behaviors. A sociology of the public sphere, will additionally be multidimensional, reflecting the fact that social reality consists of both material and cultural elements, and is characterized by conflicts as well as by social integration and solidarity.

## **A sociology of the public sphere**

A sociological understanding of the functioning of the public sphere has to be empirically grounded in the analysis of historical societies, and must develop a conceptual apparatus adapted to the task of analyzing the public sphere as a social space. Furthermore, it needs to consider a wide range of social behaviors and motivations for social action, beyond rational agency and moral principles. As Gueuss (2008) reminds us, normative theories in politics tend to be conceived in terms of applied ethics, the best-known instance of this approach being Kantianism, focusing on a few general and abstract principles to be applied universally and independent of historical and social contexts. In contrast, a sociological approach to the public sphere has to be primarily concerned with how people and institutions actually operate in society and not how they ought 'ideally' to operate.

A sociology of the public sphere also needs to be multidimensional, considering the material and conflict dimensions as well

as the cultural-symbolic and integrative dimensions of the social world. Following Bourdieu (2000 p. 187), the social world can be considered as

Both the product and the stake in inseparably cognitive and political symbolic struggles over knowledge and recognition, in which each individual pursues not only the imposition of an advantageous representation of himself or herself [...] but also the power to impose as legitimate the principles for the construction of a social reality most favorable to his or her being – individual and collective, with [...] struggles over the boundaries of groups.

Hence, from this viewpoint, the public sphere may be seen as a privileged social space where cognitive and symbolic struggles over recognition – entailing struggles over the symbolic boundaries delimiting group belonging and exclusion, as well as social worth –take place.

However, at the same time, we need not lose sight of the insights of Durkheimian sociology because, as put by Alexander (2006 p. 3):

Societies are not governed by power alone and are not fueled only by the pursuit of self-interest. Feelings for others matter, and they are structured by the boundaries of solidarity. How solidarity is structured, how far it extends, what it is composed of – these are critical issues for every social order, and especially for orders that aim for the good life. Solidarity is possible because people are oriented not only to the here and now but to the ideal, to the transcendent, to what they hope will be everlasting.

Consequently, the public sphere is not only and uniquely a space of symbolic and political struggle, but is, by the same token, a space of solidarity and social integration. In public discourse and debate, the boundaries of solidarity are actualized

(and sometimes contested and redefined) and common ideals and values are mobilized and enacted.

Finally, we need to understand the social role of the public sphere beyond being a deliberative space contributing to opinion formation and producing 'inputs' to the political system, also thus contributing to the political system's efficacy and legitimacy. The public sphere, in modern differentiated and media-tized societies, plays a crucial role not only in producing and reproducing society's 'moral order' (Wuthnow, 1987) by universalizing cultural boundaries that sustain people's commitment to morally valued activities, but also by producing and reproducing social inequalities (Lamont, Beljean, & Clair, 2014).

The public sphere is the sphere where different conceptions of justice, the common good and solidarity, i.e. the boundaries and finalities of the community, are confronted and are objects of struggle for *universal recognition*. This entails both struggles among competing values and value-orientations (i.e. struggles over the symbolic categories or boundaries defining and delimitating the good and the evil, the worthy and the worthless), and struggles for the recognition of individuals' and groups' identities (including the symbolic boundaries between these groups, the assertion of their social worth or status, and the perimeters of solidarity). The public sphere is also the social space where demands for justice and regulation emanate, are negotiated and pushed through the state and the political system, insofar as the state has the legitimate capacity and power to universalize and to coerce.

From such a perspective, freedom of speech may be conceptualized as a feature or dimension of civil society in democratic liberal societies, i.e. as an institution of justice, an institutionalized condition for the functioning of democracy, but also as an object of political contestation and political decisions (Williams,

2005 p. 26). Indeed, as an institution of justice, Human Rights, of which the right to freedom of speech is one, stand against ‘people using power to coerce other people against their will to secure what the first people want simply because they want it’ (Williams, 2005 p. 23). However, what, in a given historical context, counts as injustice is not invariant, and how this right has to be limited is a matter of political contestation and social struggle. Because the right to freedom of speech is both a means by which social and political struggles are fought and a locus for these struggles, this right is threatened by non-civil practices (violence, secrecy, hate-speech, threats, libel, bullying, censorship and self-censorship).

Conceiving the public sphere as a social space where cultural struggles are fought, where the moral order is shaped, maintained, and contested, where symbolic boundaries are publicly enacted and struggled with, entails shifting the focus of the analysis of the public sphere from its role as the site of public-opinion formation to its role as a privileged locus of the social and cultural fabric of society. From this viewpoint, much of the public debate about freedom of speech, during the last decade, can be analyzed as the result of a process of boundary-making where individuals and groups struggle over the legitimate ‘principles of vision and division of the world’, their recognition and universalization, especially about which social divisions in terms of identity groups are to be recognized as legitimate, and about whether the right to freedom of speech has to be limited in order to protect these identity groups.

Insofar as Norwegian public debate about freedom of speech is closely intertwined with issues of immigration and integration of minorities, it can be interpreted in terms of symbolic processes taking place in the public sphere – both collective rituals and symbolic boundary struggles where universal

cultural claims are made, that contribute to the constitution, enactment and transformation of the moral order. The rest of this chapter is consequently devoted to the tasks of elaborating a framework to help us understand the public debates about freedom of speech in terms of collective rituals, moral order, boundary struggles, and universal cultural claims, and of assessing the social and structural consequences of these struggles.

## Two dimensions of the public debates about freedom of speech

During the last decade (2005-2015), freedom of speech has been problematized, on the one hand, within an increasingly globalized and transnational context, in Norwegian public debates and in social media, mostly in relation to the ‘Muhammad Cartoon Crisis’ (2005/2006), and in 2015 to the attacks on *Charlie Hebdo* in Paris and Krudttønden in Copenhagen (see Colbjørnsen, chapter 6). On the other hand, during the same period, freedom of speech has been problematized, in relation to the content and tone of public debates about immigration and the integration of migrants, in a period marked by increasing immigration (see Ihlebæk & Thorseth, chapter 5). When it comes to the issue of freedom of speech, a particular point of contention concerned the need to protect and respect ethnic and religious minorities, as opposed to subjecting these minorities to criticism when their cultural practices are in contradiction to democratic values and rights. Additionally, the issues of the representation and participation of minorities in the public sphere have been a constant concern.

Public debate about the exercise of freedom of speech in Norway relates mainly to issues involving, directly or indirectly, individuals’ and groups’ identities, as well as the regulation of

free speech on the basis of these identities. The public debate consists, firstly, of a meta-debate on freedom of speech, whereby the right and duty to publish materials (cartoons, religious criticism, critical discourse about immigration) is discussed in a context where identity-based or religious groups (mainly Muslims) consider these materials to be offensive, and in relation to which fundamentalists and extremist groups (abroad) have used violence in order to silence and censor the publishing of such materials. It has been argued that the right and duty to publish these materials is not absolute and has to be balanced with the need to recognize cultural and religious identities, and to show consideration for the sensibility of minorities and the violation of their rights and identities (Fladmoe & Nadim, chapter 2; Bangstad & Vetlesen, 2011; Midtbøen & Steen-Johnsen, 2015; Midtbøen 2016).

Secondly, the debate has been extended to include the issue of hate speech and the limits and sanctions of hate speech, insofar as hate speech is mainly directed towards individuals by reason of their belonging to identity and religious groups. What are the stakes in these public debates about the exercise of free speech? Why do the issues of identity and identity groups become framed as debates about freedom of speech in the Norwegian public sphere? These two sets of publicly debated issues (meta-debate about freedom of speech and self-censorship) may be understood as reflecting two types of simultaneous and intertwined symbolic processes taking place in the public sphere. On the one hand, these debates can be seen as a *collective ritual* in response to boundary crises in the moral order. On the other hand, these debates are constitutive *symbolic power struggles* in the public sphere. What is at stake in these struggles is the *universalization* of the symbolic boundaries – the categories of cognition or discourse about differences— defining both the limits

of inclusion for identity groups and of acceptable expressions about these groups. Indeed, it is not sufficient for identity groups to define symbolic boundaries that differentiate group members from outsiders. These boundaries have to be universally acknowledged and recognized by society (i.e. valid globally for all members of society, not only locally for a subgroup of society, even if the boundary is contested) as being efficacious identity markers. Similarly, the symbolic boundaries delimiting which discourses about these identity groups are not acceptable have to be universally valid (even if contested) in order to restrict public expression. Members of ascribed as well as freely chosen identity groups struggle with mainstream citizens and institutions for the recognition and universalization of the symbolic boundaries they want to prevail as part of society's moral order.

There is a ritualistic element characterizing the recurrent debates about freedom of speech in Norway, especially when they are related to the 'Muhammad Cartoons'. Collective rituals can be thought of as cultural practices that emerge when society's moral order is challenged, and when symbolic boundaries are blurred and in crisis (Wuthnow, 1987 p. 115). Following Durkheim, it can be argued that societies develop collective identities that define boundaries of membership, and distinguish the collectivity from outsiders. When these boundaries change and become blurred – as a result of internal disagreements, ambiguities about values, the need to include newcomers, or external threats— uncertainties about membership, authority and shared values occur.

The violence against cartoonists, the violent manifestations against the Muhammad cartoons, and the terrorist attacks against *Charlie Hebdo* were transgressions of shared values of freedom and freedom of speech in the democratic world. The public debates following these events in 2005/2006 and 2015

were about the press's right and obligation to publish the cartoons in contrast to the press's need to be sensitive to the dignity of minorities. These debates can be seen as the expression of a collective ritual, whose function was to clarify the collective boundaries to free expression and to reaffirm the moral order. The ritualized public debate, mainly driven by journalists and media professionals, served to mobilize collective sentiments and solidarity around the fundamental, but sometimes conflicting, democratic values of freedom and tolerance. The public debate following the attacks against *Charlie Hebdo* has been characterized by a confrontation between those who stressed the value of free speech and the obligation to publish controversial materials, and those who argued for being tolerant and sensitive to cultural and religious differences, and for refraining from publishing these materials. Through this debate, the values of freedom and tolerance have been re-established and consolidated and the symbolic boundaries clarified.

Indeed, collective rituals are essentially social and dramaturgic. They dramatize the moral order and communicate, through symbolic expression, fundamental features of social relations. In the case of the Muhammad cartoons and the attacks against *Charlie Hebdo*, external threats were combined with the difficult process of the inclusion of new members (migrants, especially Muslims) into the community, and provoked a blurring of the boundaries of both the community and free-speech, endangering the established moral order. The public debate following this boundary crisis, by dramatizing and provoking discussions about central values in Norwegian society, helped restore and reaffirm the endangered moral order, and reinforced shared values in the face of moral uncertainties. The democratic values of freedom and equality have been publicly and symbolically reaffirmed. This does not mean that the underlying tensions and

conflicts characterizing the integration of newcomers with different cultural and religious backgrounds have been resolved. On the contrary, the ritualistic symbolic reenactment of these values seems to have contributed to making these tensions even more visible, leading to an exacerbation of symbolic boundary struggles in the public sphere.

The two waves of freedom of speech debates in the Norwegian public sphere, in 2005/6 and in 2015, were, however, not only a form of collective ritual contributing to the reaffirmation of the endangered symbolic order. Because they referred to and concerned immigrant minorities, and especially Muslim immigrants, at stake within these debates were also the symbolic definitions of the identity groups that make up Norwegian society and the conditions of inclusion for these groups. These debates were also symbolic boundary struggles, where the issue of drawing the symbolic limits between acceptable and unacceptable speech, as well as the nature of the recognition of minority identity groups were simultaneously contested.

Symbolic boundary struggles taking place in the public sphere are power struggles about the universalization and institutionalization of social boundaries, in order to obtain universal currency in society. When it comes to ethnicity, the emergence of social and symbolic boundaries are the result of the co-occurrence of distinctions made by actors (symbolic distinctions, categories), and differentiated treatment of the members of such categories (social differentiation). As underscored by Wimmer (2013 pp. 4-5), social and symbolic boundaries involve the struggle over power and prestige – group honor, moral dignity, and personal identity, combined with material preoccupations such as access to material benefits or political power. Social and symbolic boundary struggles are not exclusively about ‘interests’ or ‘identity’, about ‘material’ benefits or ‘ideals’, but mix these

various resources into an intertwined struggle over who legitimately should occupy a given position in the hierarchical structure of society.

Drawing identity group boundaries and the boundaries of freedom of speech may be understood as two instances of a power struggle concerning the position and the social conditions of identity groups in the polity, where different normative and cultural conceptions of society and public expression and the public sphere are confronted. What is at stake in the debates about freedom of speech and hate speech is the legitimacy of the political organization (how society should be structured and ruled and how people under government should live; i.e. conceptions of justice, right and good) of an increasingly pluralistic society, including the criteria of inclusion and recognition of identity-based groups.

Identity groups—whether categorized as ‘immigration critics’ (Thorbjørnsrud, chapter 9) or being representative of ethnic and religious minorities (Nadim, chapter 8)—struggle for both access to the public sphere (experiencing ascription of their identities and devaluation of their social worth, as well as a lack of recognition of their positions as legitimate), and for universal recognition of their identities and political positions. Both groups struggle to transform the symbolic identity boundaries that are imposed on them by others. Existing identity boundaries limit their freedom of speech, and sometimes lead them to self-censoring insofar as these identity boundaries assign to them a given worth and position in public debates.

The stigma of racism, the public shame, and the moral condemnation that are attached to public expressions critical to immigration imply that public expression of those positions are psychologically and socially costly and lead to social and cultural devaluation and exclusion. As pointed out by Lamont et al.

(2016 pp. 281-282) ‘cultural membership is given to those who meet the standards of shared definitions of who is worthy in a symbolic community’. The lack of recognition experienced by immigration critics is embedded in the existing cultural repertoire or semiotic code of civil society (Alexander, 1992). Indeed, recognition concerns the social acknowledgement of worth across differences, and is relational, inasmuch as it is a status provided by others in a community (Lamont & al., 2016 p. 282). In the public sphere, the social estimation of worth is culturally articulated in terms of the ‘binary code of civil society’ (Alexander, 1992; 2006), which is mobilized in order to determine the worth of the persons acting in public, and to delimit the perimeter of the symbolic community of legitimate participants (inclusion).

The struggle for recognition and its afferent symbolic boundary struggle assume different forms for ethnic and religious minorities active in the public sphere (Nadim, chapter 8), who seek to escape their ascribed identity as representatives of a minority. The cultural repertoires and institutionalized scripts patterning the ways in which religious and ethnic groups are identified and classified in the Norwegian context – combined with a media logic emphasizing a diverse representation of minorities— contribute to the *ethnicification* and *culturalization* of individuals with an ethnic or religious minority background, when participating in the public sphere. These individuals struggle for the recognition of their singularity and individuality, as bearers of plural identities, and against the ascription of a particular identity as the representative of a minority.

The issue of hate speech (Fladmoe & Nadim, chapter 2) also brings together these two types of social boundaries – the boundaries of belonging (identities) and the boundaries of unacceptable speech. Making unacceptable certain types of speech,

whose focal points (gender, ethnicity, sexuality, religion, etc.) are related to identity groups, might be understood as a strategic move within a more general strategic struggle over social boundaries and their benefits (group honor, moral dignity, and personal identity combined with more mundane preoccupations such as access to professions, public goods, or political power).

Debates about the exercise of free speech are not just about the regulation of public speech, but are inscribed in a network of contested issues about the political integration of immigrant minorities (justice, rights, recognition, pluralism and tolerance), in a context characterized by increased cultural and religious pluralism, and the rise of fundamentalist ideologies and terrorism. These debates are also constitutive of collective rituals where central societal values are reestablished when the collectivity faces external threats and changes. As such, they are cultural phenomena operating in the symbolic realm. However, cultural processes are part of the social fabric and produce real effects on the social structure of society and the distribution of social inequalities.

## **Symbolic boundaries' structural effects**

Symbolic boundaries have effects, not only in the cultural realm, the realm of meaning, but also on the social structure of society and its social stratification. Boundary struggles about the nexus intertwining freedom of speech and identity groups in contemporary Norway affect both the 'moral order' of society and its social stratification. In other words, the categorization and labeling of identity groups constitutive of Norwegian society— in terms of ethnic Norwegians, Muslims, minorities, immigration critics, etc.— contribute to the elaboration of a moral hierarchy, where certain groups are symbolically more worthy than others

and more or less included within the national community. This moral hierarchy, in turn, has a bearing on the social hierarchy of the national community, its social stratification, by means of the play of cultural processes that affect these groups' access to material resources and power.

Indeed, social inequalities do not result uniquely from the distribution of material resources, but are also the result of the unequal distribution of symbolic resources and recognition, which is mediated by a series of cultural processes, shaped by the use of shared categories, classification systems, cultural scripts and repertoires (Lamont et al., 2014). These cultural processes operate on the individual level through cognitive activities and on the inter-subjective level, as individuals mobilize shared cultural scripts and structures in order to make sense of their social environment. The use of objectified shared categories for defining group boundaries and sorting people entails the relative stabilization of the hierarchy of categories. (Lamont et al., 2014) Lamont thus distinguishes several cultural processes that generate social inequalities.

One of those cultural processes, *identification*— the process through which individuals and groups identify themselves, and are identified by others, as members of a larger collective – reinforces the stabilization of symbolic boundaries and hierarchies based on group identities. Within this process of identification, two processes, *racialization*<sup>1</sup> and *stigmatization*<sup>2</sup>, are more likely to generate social inequalities as they limit access to material, social, and cultural resources for the members of the groups.

A second cultural process, the process of *evaluation*, concerned with the definition and stabilization of value in social life,

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1 The process by which biological and phenotypic differences between human bodies are attributed social significance.

2 The negative stereotyping and separation of groups who are labeled as different.

is also relevant for our analysis. According to Lamont (2012 p. 206), this process involves several sub-processes, most importantly *categorization* ('determining in which group the entity [. . .] under consideration belongs') and *legitimation* ('recognition by oneself and others of the value of an entity'). Because members of different social groups are constantly subject to evaluation, based on inter-subjective criteria, their social status and worth are stabilized within a hierarchy of recognition, which influences their opportunity to access material, social and cultural resources.

Several cultural processes have been identified in the previous chapters. Midtbøen (chapter 7) and Thorbjørnsrud (chapter 9) have shown how cultural processes of *stigmatization* operate for young political leaders acting in the public sphere as well as immigration critics. Group categorizations and evaluations, that are part of the established moral order, function as markers of difference, based on ethnicity, religion, disability or sexual orientation, and lead young political leaders to avoid discussing given topics, and in certain instances to censor themselves. As shown by Ihlebæk and Thorseth (chapter 5), the moral order may be enhanced or transformed as the result of *evaluations* and editorial decisions made by newspapers' editors in chief — even if their gatekeeping power is eroded by the rise of social media — concerning which types of opinions on immigration may be published. The stickiness and reinforcement of existing symbolic boundaries constitutive of the moral order (about acceptable speech and identity groups) are also enhanced by the phenomenon of spirals of silence (Fladmoe & Steen-Johnsen, chapter 3). When individuals (mis-)perceive their opinion as a minority opinion and fear social exclusion, they censor themselves and abstain from expressing their views, thus contributing to the reinforcement of the dominant opinion.

The phenomenon of hate speech (Fladmoe & Nadim, chapter 2) illustrates how group-boundaries and the creation of hierarchies interact. Without relatively stable and inter-subjectively constituted symbolic boundaries and categories, which sort and ascribe given identities to people on the basis of gender, religion, ethnicity, or sexuality, the degradation of identity and dignity (the symbolic violence which is inherent to hate speech) would not be possible. Similarly, without the social hierarchy of worth that is associated with group identities, hate speech would be meaningless. Indeed, hate speech takes advantage of the existing symbolic boundaries defining identity groups and their social hierarchy in order to degrade these identities, denying them legitimacy, value, worth, dignity and membership in the political community. Hate speech transgresses a major symbolic boundary of democratic societies – that of equality of dignity and worth of human beings – in order to degrade a person taking a position in the public sphere, negating the worth of her identity and the legitimacy of her opinion as an equal member of the political community and as a participant in public debate.

Debates in the public sphere, because they encompass cultural processes of identification and evaluation, and because they contribute to the establishment and stabilizing of social hierarchies, have long-term consequences for the social structure of Norwegian society and the distribution of material, social and cultural resources. The public debate about freedom of speech might be thought of as a collective ritual in which a society confronted with external threats and uncertainties reestablishes its symbolic boundaries and reaffirms its moral order by affirming for itself, in an act of self-reflexivity, the value of free speech and the intolerance of violence aimed at intimidating free speech, thus also clarifying the limits of

freedom of speech. But at the same time, because most of the uncertainties and threats that challenge the moral order are directly or indirectly related to minority identity groups and religion, this debate is also part of a more general symbolic boundary struggle in which what is at stake is the inclusion of these minority groups in the national community. As these struggles involve cultural operations of classification, identification and evaluation, such public debates incur the risk of generating processes of racialization, stigmatization and misrecognition, which, in the long-run, might generate and cement social inequalities based on cultural and ethnic markers.

## Conclusion

Despite being limited by its empirical focus—contemporary debates about freedom of speech in Norway – the analytical framework developed in this book, analyzing the dynamics of the public sphere in terms of symbolic boundary struggles taking place in public, is of broader relevance. The literature on symbolic boundaries is large and diversified (Lamont et al., forthcoming). This book's original contribution to this literature has been to explore the processes of boundary making as they occur in public, within the mediated public sphere. Debates in the public sphere do not exclusively consist of rational argumentation about public policies but also have a legitimizing function for the political system. Nor are they uniquely a reflection of diverging interests disguised in ideologies and power struggles between these interests and ideologies. Debates in the public sphere are also symbolic struggles over the boundaries constitutive of the moral order of society, mobilizing the resources embedded in societies' cultural repertoires, affecting the

identities, positions, worth, and recognition of diverse social groups, and ultimately producing – by the play of an array of cultural processes— social, structural and institutional effects that contribute to the differentiation and stratification of society in terms of access to resources and power, and having, consequently, real effects on people’s lives.

Furthermore, a social and symbolic boundary-making perspective on free speech has allowed us to better understand the past decade of debate about freedom of speech in Norway. These debates are not just about the confrontation of ideological preferences relative to an abstract right, but crystallize one of the most important challenges confronting contemporary Norwegian society, namely that of the social and political integration of immigrants and religious minorities.

A sociological perspective on free speech and the public sphere reminds us that the categories (the symbolic boundaries) which are constructed, mobilized and fought over in public debates, are not just intellectual or ideal constructions and concepts, but have social effects. They become *real* to the extent to which the *social* is as real as the material reality, and they produce real effects on individuals and groups. By considering how the actors struggle over which social boundaries should be considered relevant and legitimate, we endeavor to make visible what the consequences of being an X versus being a Y should entail. Perhaps Norwegian public debate would gain relevance if the participants, instead of debating which speech utterances are acceptable or not, would debate the modes of social and political integration in the Norwegian polity, and become more aware of which social and symbolic boundaries they are drawing and which real consequences these boundaries produce.

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