

Project description for the general public

This project concerns the Seventh-day Adventist Church as well as the Orthodox Churches in Great Britain and Poland. The main research question of the project is how these Christian minorities construct their identity through religious media use. By “identity” we understand a process in which the individual constructs the sense of self by relating to a religious collective (one’s Church). In this case identity construction involves relating to religious practices, tenets and traditions, values and norms. Identity is about perceiving a shared status or relation. The project analyses how these shared values, norms etc. are constructed by the representatives of minority Christian Churches. We argue that they use religious media (both intentionally and unintentionally) to construct the religious identity of their communities. As such the project investigates the relationship between media production and religious identity construction.

In this project the digital and print Adventist and Orthodox media are analysed. The print media include the biggest newspapers and magazines of every Church, whereas under the digital media we understand the official webpages of the Churches and most important church-related organisations. This material is evaluated with the help of media content analysis. In accordance with this qualitative tool we conduct a contextualised keyword search and assign analytical categories to the references we find. Furthermore the aspects of composition, formatting, location of the text and layout (incl. illustrations) are also taken into consideration. An important part of the project are the interviews with media professionals of each Church. We conduct episodic interviews in order to gather knowledge on their role and their perspective on the identity construction processes. The material collected during interviews and media content analysis is evaluated with the help of Discourse Analysis. This method will help us to uncover the discursive construction of identities. This research will be concentrated on the materialities of discourse (by whom the text is produced, what are the production stages, and who are the main actors involved) as well as on the process of symbolic ordering (what kind of symbols, signs and sentences are recurrent in the Churches’ media with regards to religious identity construction). An important part of the research is the comparison of findings between two Churches and two countries.

This approach will ensure the fulfilling the main aims of the project. It will show what aspects of religious identity are crucial in the process of its construction, to what degree religious identities are related to the national religious milieu and the dominant religious identity narratives, and what power relations behind religious identity construction can be identified. This is also the reason why we have decided to conduct this research: Although the mediatisation of religion has become one of the key themes in religious studies, the Christian minority Churches have not been analysed before. It is the major Christian Churches and the Muslim minorities which have gained scholarly interest. The analysis of the Adventist and Orthodox Churches will give a new perspective on the media-related identity construction processes. The Orthodox and the Seventh-day Adventist Churches were selected as case studies by way of purposeful sampling within the ‘most different’ system design. This approach is the most suitable for our study, as it allows to explain possible variations within the sample. Furthermore, the comparative approach to analysing identity building processes of two different Christian Churches in two European countries will enable us to draw a general pattern on how these processes work, and to analyse in detail the role of the media in Poland and the UK. In this way this project will fill an existing void within religious studies.