This book keeps what the title promises: the articles are all contesting secularism in one way or another, and seen together they give the reader a comparative perspective. The book is well written and well edited, and all chapters have high academic standard. The contributors offer new knowledge about how the relationship between the religious and the secular is legally framed within different countries, but also about how this relationship unfolds within the same nations. The book gives the reader the insight that it is not enough to know the legal frames of the relationship between the state and religion in a country; one must also understand how the government is practicing the laws and rules. The book shows that there is no way that one model fits all countries, independent of their history and culture. The book therefore gives new insights that are useful in the discussion about the relationship between the religious and the secular in our present world. Since the title of the book is «Contesting Secularism», it is fitting that the authors refer to the present world as the Post-Secular Age.

The book is based on papers presented at a conference in 2007. The main purpose of the book is to point out the multiple meanings of secularism, and to see it as a normative and political doctrine aiming at universality rather than a principle of neutrality. The main question addressed is whether secularism (seen as a political doctrine) provides an adequate perspective for the study and analysis of the contemporary challenges of religion today.

The book has nine chapters and is divided in two parts: the first part presents general lines and gives theoretical discussions of secularism. The editor has written an introductory chapter that discusses the meaning of secularism and includes an overview of the different chapters. The first chapter, written by Rajeev Bhargava, discusses the conception of multiple secularisms and multiple secular states. In the second chapter, Veit Bader is strongly normative when he claims that secularism is a hindrance to liberal democracy. Tariq Modood compares Muslims’ claims of equal treatment to claims for gender equality and/or ethnic equality. Rosi Braidotti writes about the Post-Secular turn in feminism in the fourth chapter. She discusses whether feminism has left the first generation of feminists’ repudiation of religious beliefs and turned to a greater openness concerning spirituality and religion.

The second part is entitled «Illustrations», and gives an overview over the relationship between religion and state/society in the US, Britain, France, Turkey and Iran, and India. To this reader, the second part was the most interesting read because the chapters give an illustration of the relationship between the legislation of state and religion and the actual practice of the state in religious matters.

Rogers M. Smith writes about how the conservative Christian institutions in the US have been spread and have received funding from tax money for their social institutions
and free radio and television broadcasting in spite of the «Wall of Separation» between
church and state. He also describes how Conservative Christian institutions have turned
their arguments for such support into that of an «Equal Treatment» approach, meaning
that support for religious institutions should continue and be extended to new religious
groups, rather than be taken away from the already existing Christian institutions. Linda
Woodhead discusses whether Britain can be described as secular or religious, and her
conclusion is that neither of these words can characterize the situation in Britain today.

John R. Bowen discusses secularism and the state in France, and shows that
although France has laïcité as an ideal the French state certainly governs religion in
order to control it. He also shows how the French state funds the cathedrals and
churches of the Catholic Church, and that the state also has given state financing for
Catholic private schools. Not all religions qualify as recognized religious bodies, but
for those who do, the state organizes and finances religious representation in a number
of areas: chaplain’s offices, religious broadcasts, meetings with the President. Thus,
laiété does not mean complete separation between religion and state – in the French
case; it means that the state governs the (recognized) religions.

Elizabeth Hurd’s chapter on contested secularism in Turkey and Iran also gives this
reader new knowledge. With the establishment of the Turkish republic, the French
model of laicism was adopted, with its state control of religious expression and insti-
tutions. The chapter describes the contest between the Kemalist establishment and
AKP, and concludes that it is still unknown whether or not Kemalism will remain
hegemonic or become refashioned. Hurd describes the resentful way in which the over-
throw of the secularist establishment in Iran was received in the West, and how «Islam»
became synonymous with violation of laicist conceptions of neutral public space. Hurd
highlights that both countries attempt to renegotiate the secular, and suggests demo-
cratic alternatives to both fundamentalism and Western-derived forms of secularism.

Thomas Blom Hansen writes about secularism in India and discusses the relationship
between a secularism that often has been defended by the educated elite and politicians
with what he calls the «Popular Passion». With the intention of keeping up public order,
the popular passion is often suppressed. Religious feelings and practices are seen as part
of a cultural realm, while passions that emerge from shared historical inequalities can be
admitted into the realm of politics. Public life of the secular in India is premised upon bal-
ancing the realm of «culture and religion» and the realm of «politics».

I miss a concluding chapter comparing how the different countries actually practice
the relationship between state and religion, and what this means for our understanding
of secularism. This would have integrated the comparative perspective of the book in
a better way. The book is highly recommended to all who want to gain new insights
into how countries actually deal with religious matters in ways not known to those who
only looks at the laws about religion in a nation.

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The interdisciplinary field of mass media and religion is a rather new and vibrant international research field and the Nordic countries can provide both good cases and recent examples of studies and theorizing. The present volume is a good example. Stig Hjarvard and Mia Lövheim have edited this volume and brought together authors from a Nordic network of researchers who focus on the mediatization of religion and culture. The network brought together Nordic scholars from sociology of religion, film and media studies, and theology. Although theoretical and empirical contributions from this network have appeared in various journals and edited volumes (e.g. Sumiala 2006; Hjarvard 2008; Lundby 2009; Lövheim 2011), this volume is an attempt to take the mediatization of religion and culture a bit further and underscore a Nordic dimension in the field. The editors have fruitfully aimed to link the Nordic dimension to the international academic dialogue.

So what is particular about the Nordic cases? First of all, the Nordic countries have, according to the editors, media systems with a high degree of public interest and intervention. They share a democratic-corporatist media system with a strong public service component and a long historical tradition of widespread newspaper readership. Furthermore, the old media have a strong presence in newer media forms such as Internet, mobile media and the likes. This is relevant as it is quite different compared to the situation in Southern Europe or in the United States. In the Nordic countries media outlets are (generally) non-confessional in nature and public service media are the public’s primary source of information about religious matters. Second, the Nordic societies are comparatively secular, with religion generally seen as a private matter and the church playing a less prominent role in society. Recent changes regarding immigration have also challenged the image of these countries as homogeneously Protestant. The editors also stress that media has been overlooked as an area of research by mainstream sociology of religion scholars, and strive to, through this volume, to overcome this weakness.

Put briefly, this book addresses theoretical and empirical developments in mediatization perspectives on religion, the changing role of the national Lutheran church in a mediatized culture, popular media culture as an important source of religious imagination and practice, media’s role in negotiations of Islamic identities in increasingly multicultural Nordic societies, and new media and the performance of religious identity and ritual.

The concept «mediatization of religion» has been developed by Hjarvard (2008) and is further criticized and developed by other researchers (i.e. Lövheim 2011). Hjarvard, in turn, has developed his theory accordingly, which is clear from this volume. One of the major achievements of this volume is that one is able to follow this development. Lövheim (2011) has criticized Hjarvard’s (2008) definition and operationalization of religion. Originating from the influence of media in the field of politics (Asp 1990), Hjarvard has extended the use of mediatization to also include religion’s growing dependency on the media. According to Hjarvard, mediatization of religion involves the ways in which religious organizations, practices and beliefs are altered.
through the increased presence of media both inside and outside the institution of religion (p. 26). Mediatization of religion entails a variety of changes that interact with already existing developments in the field of religion, such as individualization and secularization. Hjarvard’s chapter in the present volume outlines his theory of mediatization of religion in a way which, at least partly, pays attention to the criticism and further elaborations offered since he first developed the concept in 2008. Media as conduits (primary source of information about religion), media as languages (formats religion, in different genres), and media as environments (provide social functions of community) are three central distinctions from media scholar Meyrowitz (1986) which Hjarvard link to his theory; the outcome not being a new kind of religion, but rather a new social condition in which the power to define and practice religion has changed.

Furthermore, Hjarvard in this chapter also connects his theorizing to the specificities of the Nordic societies and suggests that even if there are differences between the national contexts, we still might expect media to influence religion in the Nordic countries. He outlines this through presenting three cases or forms of mediatized religion: religious media, journalism on religion, and ‘banal religion’. The latter builds on Billig’s term «banal nationalism» (1995). Banal religion is found in narrative fiction and entertainment and contains a bricolage of texts, images and practices from a variety of institutional and folk religions. Key is that banal religions are detached from their original community, and serve as a backdrop of cultural knowledge about religion or things vaguely associated with the supernatural.

The other chapters in the volume provide empirical cases, showing what mediatization of religion in each of these three forms can mean if studied in a Nordic context. Peter Fischer-Nielsen analyzes the use of internet communication by the Danish National Church, and concludes that mediatization of religion is somewhat taking place in that internet is challenging the church as the natural place in which to engage with religion. Increased involvement with religion on the internet along with a survey on how pastors use internet in their work indicate changes, and Fischer-Nielsen’s discussion brings nuance to the debate on mediatization. Henrik Reintoft Christensen takes on a critical use of Davie’s theory of vicarious religion (2007), using Scandinavian media debates on homosexuality. His empirical material is rich and exciting but there is something of a slip in the chapter between whether Davie’s examples were all that good, or that her theory does not work on the material used here. I did find it a very promising attempt to critically engage with a theory which is much cited, not least in work on religion in Northern Europe, but the outcome of Christensen’s engagement shows that more work should be done here in a careful and critical way particularly concerning the theory and its application. The debate should continue. Marcus Moberg and Sofia Sjö focus in their chapter on the relationship between media and institutional Christianity by analyzing the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Finland’s recent engagements with contemporary media. They argue that the church have initiated what they call a process of «self-mediatization», which can be seen as indicative of how religious institutions find new ways to enter the mediated public sphere.

Knut Lundby and Kjersti Thorbjørnsrud critically explore what happened when the Norwegian Security Police went on Facebook. Their chapter is informed by three
transformative levels of mediatization: narrative transformations, institutional transformations, and cultural transformations. Besides having a high level of connection to contemporary developments in the Nordic countries, the chapter is also a theoretical contribution. Johanna Sumiala’s chapter is based on media anthropology and focuses on the ritualization of death during two school shootings in Finland (in Jokela 2007 and in Kauhajoki 2008). She analyzes the mechanisms by which the media becomes the ‘immanent frame’ in post-Protestant Finland, which also says a lot about the role of mediatization in a secularized Northern Europe.

Mia Lövheim examines how young female bloggers acquire a new voice in debates over religion, specifically Islam, in cases from Denmark, Norway and Sweden. She shows how new media can provide possibilities for young women to act as agents and speak from a position of authority. Mediatization here contributes to religion in ways that challenges conventional representations of gender and Islam. The blogs Lövheim studied become a new form of space where values are negotiated collaboratively through resources of new media. Ehab Galal draws on the concepts of mediatization of religion and Davie’s vicarious religion when analyzing the use of Islamic satellite television among Muslims in Nordic countries. Galal contends that the programs enable viewers to stage Muslim identity in new ways, characterized by ‘belonging through believing’, and the media plays an important role in staging a religious performance that supports a belonging justified in terms of individual belief.

Line Nybro Petersen analyzes how mediatization transforms the role of religion in society by taking a closer look at young Danish female fans of the Twilight Saga book and movie series. Four factors support and intensify this process: (1) The loss of authority for organized religion is replaced by a priority (among the fans) of media representations, (2) popular fiction reinforces fascination with supernatural phenomena, (3) the circulation of religious symbols and narratives in popular culture transforms the meaning of these phenomena in the narrative as well as in the fans’ imagination, and (4) the display and function of religious emotions change as they become part of the performance of fandom in emotionally charged social ceremonies. Nybro Petersen comes to the conclusion that media narratives promote engagement with religion to a culturally secular audience but in so doing they also transform both its substance and function.

Liv Ingeborg Lied discusses the application of mediatization theory to the study of religion. Drawing on insights from her study on popular culture and religion in Norway (Eidsjø and Lied 2011), she adds to the discussion on the theory of mediatization of religion. Hjarvard’s theory hypothesizes that popular culture influences the ongoing reshaping of religion. Lied reminds us that the process of mediatization of religion may be more or less prominent in different cultural areas. The theory seems limited to geographical areas where religion typically takes on a highly institutionalised form such as the Protestant churches in Northern Europe. Lied argues that continued research on the mediatization of religion needs to recognize religion as a continuum of religious forms, ranging from explicit and reflective to implicit and intuitive. In sociological terms, such a continuum includes organized/institutionalized/official religions, on the one end of the continuum, to everyday/non-official forms of religion, on the other. This is a conclusion which I find highly commendable, and, as Lied’s contribution is the closing chapter of this
edited volume, it brings the volume together. This also brings further nuance to Hjarvard’s three forms of religion, and could push the development a bit further. Together with Hjarvard’s own chapter, where he somewhat has moved on since 2008, and the case studies, the volume as a whole is worth reading. Both single pieces of empirical and theoretical work are of value in that they provide good empirical cases from countries and cultural fields which are both similar and different. The volume also hangs together theoretically and the chapters are in dialogue with one another in a way that is not always the case with edited volumes. If one should be critical, it would be that the overarching theory of mediatization calls for further research regarding reception. What if banal religion, to use Hjarvard’s term, is everywhere, but no one cares? In media research, there are three aspects to take into consideration: production (under what circumstances does production take place?), text (what is mediated and how?) and reception (how is the text used?). The reader certainly appreciates the user side being represented in some of the contributions. In some of the chapters there is a blur between producer and consumer, such as blogs, which is recognized and important for continued research. The take home message of this read is that this collection of essays should be read both in sociology and sociology of religion, and by media and communication scholars. It is probably a good sign that the reader is left with an impression that more work needs to be done, and that we now have more theoretical tools and empirical inspiration to make use of.

References


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This collection of articles deals with the public grief after the horrific attacks in Oslo and Utøya on July 22, 2011.

Soon after the tragic events KIFO (Institute for Church, Religion, and Worldview Research) launched a research project the purpose of which was to look into topics such as who participated in the public rituals, the use of symbols, why the Oslo Cathedral became a national place of mourning, the role of religion and religious institutions in the memorial ceremonies, possible similarities to memorial ceremonies in other countries after national catastrophes and acts of terror, the role of cohesion and diversity after July 22, 2011, and finally, the problem of how July 22, 2011, should be commemorated as a collective memory.

Five sets of data were collected while the commemorations were still taking place, so as to captivate the emotions while they were still fresh in mind. 1) a representative investigation into the public participation in the various commemorations, 2) an investigation into what took place in a selection of parishes in the Church of Norway, 3) a qualitative study of contributions from other faith and humanistic/secular communities, 4) a case study of what took place in and around Oslo Cathedral, and 5) an open questionnaire distributed in cooperation with the Norwegian Ethnological Research (Norsk Etnologisk Gransking).

An appendix accounts in some detail how the various sets of data came about and how they were put to use in the articles. Also included are comparisons to official sets of data. This adds to the impression of a thorough piece of academic work.

Based on the topics mentioned above thirteen researches from various academic fields within sociology of religion, history of religion, anthropology, theology, cultural studies, and German literature ask the question: how does a nation react to and come to terms with the emotions which struck the nation after the attack which not only killed 69 people and wounded about 20, but which also left most Norwegians with a sense of this being an attack on how Norwegians perceive of themselves because the acts of terror were targeted at the very core of Norway as a liberal, inclusive democracy carried out by an enemy from within. The attacks unleashed a mass mobilization of mourning unlike anything Norway had ever experienced. It is estimated that three out of five million Norwegians—in one way or another—took an active part in the various demonstrations of grief, be it by participating in the laying of flowers (i.e. the rose processions), the lighting of candles, by attending memorial services or watching them on television.

The horrific events on July 22, 2011 triggered a mass mobilization of grief. Public grief as opposed to private grief is the focus of attention in the articles. Survivors and relatives of victims are not included in the data. Focus is on the process of sorrow and the expression of sorrow which was a shared national experience involving most people. The expression of public grief is not only a question for the here and now. It also entails considerations of how this momentous moment in Norwegian history is to be interpreted and expressed as part of the collective memory. Most of the articles
interpret the data available to them within a Norwegian context. However, some of the investigations and hence the articles based on these stand out from the rest, precisely because the perspective is of a more general nature and here methodological and theoretical questions are brought into highly relevant perspectives.

Religious minorities (i.e. Muslims) made a point of stressing their Norwegianness, as being part of the all inclusive Norwegian ‘we’ and mosques were visited by members of the royal family and Prime Minister Jens Stoltenberg, unlike The Council for Religious and Life Stance Communities (Samarbeidsrådet for tros- og livssynssamfunn) who tried to negotiate a multi-faith service with the Ministry of Culture (encouraged to do so by Muslim, Jewish and Humanist-Ethnic communities) were not able to achieve this. Behind this can easily be detected the power struggles for the correct interpretation of ‘the Norwegian we’. Are ‘we’ a diverse society as expressed by the imam of the World Islamic Mission, or are ‘we’ the much broader all-inclusive community irrespective of religion, ethnicity, gender and social class, as Stoltenberg formulated it? Rituals on this basis would be comparable to civil religious commemorations, however, religion in these articles refers to only organized religious groups which invariably raises the question about the way in which Norwegians who feel they do not belong in any of these religious organizations were able to express their grief.

Most of the articles deal with what actually happened in Norway with respect to the roles played by various religious groups (predominantly the Church of Norway) and representatives of the state i.e. members of the royal family and the Prime Minister related to the attacks which is also the research material behind the articles. Only occasionally is the Norwegian case compared to expressions of public grief in other countries.

It is unusual to have so rich qualitative and quantitative material to be collected as the rituals are still taking place and the public grief is still a question of trying to come to terms with what happened. We are still so to speak in medias res. This has, however, to some degree been at the expense of what can best be described as detached research in which empirical studies are viewed through the lenses of relevant theories.

The various responses to the attacks are ways of coming to terms with and trying to restore cosmos from the chaos caused by the abominations (to use Mary Douglas’ term). An integral part of the rituals are on the one hand the use of symbols, predominantly the Norwegian flag, red roses, and lit candles. On the other hand, the use of key phrases, which were constantly repeated in the days following the attacks. The popularity of phrases such as love, democracy and openness are a case in point. The symbols and the phrases have in common that they are what in discourse analysis are characterized as floating signifiers. They are vague concepts that can be used without one specifically set contextual content. Precisely because they are vague, a sense of unity can be created around them. One of the most well-known and frequently cited is the following: «If one man can create that much hate, you can only imagine how much love we as a togetherness can create». This was spread as a message of love and from being a tweet it was eventually used by Prime Minister Jens Stoltenberg at the memorial service in Oslo Cathedral on July 24, 2011. This is an example of how active the social
media were, beginning right after the attacks and how quickly they spread. All these aspects are keenly analyzed in a number of articles.

Two articles stand out and deserve to be discussed here in a little more detail as they add a comparative perspective to the analyses. Interestingly enough, but perhaps not so surprisingly, the two articles in question were written by two scholars from academic (and geographical) backgrounds which differ from those of the other authors. The two researchers are Helge Jordheim (cultural history, medieval studies and museology) and Douglas James Davies (Welsh).

Immediate and spontaneous reactions tend to take the same shape and form as a deep felt urge to give expression to people’s horror at what has happened. The responses after September 11, 2001, and the responses in Norway were to some extent similar. The target points became meeting points for placing flowers and lighting candles. The first hours after such an attack are extremely important as an indication of the way in which such an attack is to be interpreted. In Norway, Prime Minister Jens Stoltenberg was very quick to express how important it was to respond by working for more democracy, more openness and more unity, in marked contrast to the political reaction of President George W. Bush who declared ‘war on terror’.

Memorials and memorial sites are a kind of communication with a message not only to the people involved but also to people who in the future will visit these memorials as part of the collective memory. Here we are reminded of the Holocaust Memorial in Berlin and the 9/11 memorial at Ground Zero, New York. In Norway, an anonymous person has donated money and appointed an artist whom he/she thinks would be best suited to create the memorial monuments throughout the country. The ideas and the ideology behind the anonymous person’s choice of artist remain unknown to the public. It is pointed out that the authorities have chosen the easier way out rather than allowing time to consider possible alternatives and this may turn out to be highly unsatisfactory in the not too distant future. The debates concerning memorial monuments have already caused much controversy and some have raised the question whether there should be any monuments at all. Another point in question is: who is the sender of this kind of communication which a memorial is—essentially ‘we’ wish to commemorate the victims of the terrible deed committed against ‘us’—a ‘we’ which once were and who have lived through this atrocity. But who these ‘we’ are, is difficult enough to decide in the present let alone deciding who the ‘we’ will be in the future and how these ‘we’ will relate to the construction of a mutual past. This is enough to take one’s breath away, as the writer of the article says.

Another important issue is whether the memorials should reflect the individual or the collective. Cenotaphs, as they have become known in Europe, commemorating soldiers who died in WWI and WWII, are now being replaced by individual monuments—a trend which has caught on after the Vietnam Wall in Washington D.C., and, most recently, the Ground Zero memorial in New York. In a Scandinavian context, this shift was seen recently in Copenhagen in 2011 when a monument was revealed, commemorating soldiers who had died in active duty since 1948 listed by name and place of service and—as something quite new—with space left on the walls for the names of future fallen soldiers. The July 22 victims differ from this in that the attack was an
attack on the collective Norway more than an attack on individuals. The yet unanswered question is whether this fact calls for a different kind of memorial.

The articles in this book offer interesting insights into ‘grief in progress’, or, to put it differently: what happens when a nation is stunned by an act of abomination such as was the case in Oslo and Utøya on July 22, 2011? How do officials of the state react: members of the monarchy, the Prime Minister and representatives of the various religious communities? The articles, each in their own way, analyze a national and sociologically interesting phenomenon. To what extent is the nation able to maintain a democratic and inclusive process? Ritual theory, secularization, cultural and religious diversity are subjects which are all touched upon. What is missing however – but is promised on the back cover of the book – are the ways in which the empirical data could be analyzed using theories of civil religion. Which rituals are more inclusive, which are more exclusive in relation to majority and minority communities? The power struggles are mentioned but not explicitly analyzed. Such an approach would have been highly relevant and might have put the empirical material into a more general and broader perspective. As it is the articles are primarily interesting within a strictly Norwegian perspective.

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