

# The ethnic and religious future of Europe

## EDITORIAL

The current volume of *Scripta Instituti Donneriani Aboensis* is based on a symposium arranged by the Donner Institute together with the Migration Institute of Finland and the CoE at Åbo Akademi University 'Young Adults and Religion in a Global Perspective' in June 2017, holding the title 'The Religious and Ethnic Future of Europe'.

Europe is currently undergoing significant demographic changes due to an aging population and increased immigration. The demographics of religion constitute a new research field that has developed alongside growing xenophobia and Islamophobia worldwide. Fear of the demographic change in Europe is one of the ideological motors behind several xenophobic social and political movements of our time. Academic research has lagged behind this development and not taken seriously enough popular concern for growing multi-ethnicity and religious diversity. Today, however, there is an emerging body of relevant scholarship on this controversial topic, addressing several of the timely research questions that arise in the intersection of religion and demographic developments. These include issues related to demographic projections and statistics on religion and ethnicity but also the use and misuse of such data in policy-making and public discourse. For instance, the ways contemporary religious identities and belongings challenge assumed religious categories also feeds into the latter dilemma. Current liquid, multiple or rapidly changing identities make predictions more hazardous and open to misuse.

The current volume of *Scripta Instituti Donneriani Aboensis* discusses the cultural, ethnic and religious aspects of this ongoing demographic shift towards multi-ethnicity and religious diversity, presenting the latest research findings as well as methodological and theoretical questions concerning the cultural and societal implications of demographic trajectories. The volume is based on a conference arranged in Turku, Finland in June 2017, by the Donner Institute for Research in Religion and Culture, the Migration Institute of Finland and the 'Young Adults and Religion in a Global

Perspective' Åbo Akademi University Centre of Excellence in Research. The aim of the conference was to bring together world-leading demographers in the field of religion and ethnicity with researchers from the humanities and social sciences, who address issues of religious change, migration and intercultural relations from their respective perspectives. In this way, the larger implications of demographic changes for the research on multicultural societies, interreligious encounters and diversity can be evaluated and enhanced.

The volume opens with a review article by Conrad Hackett and Michael Lipka from the Pew Research Institute in Washington DC, USA, outlining and discussing the demographic factors that currently make Islam the world's fastest-growing major religious group and making projections into the future, stretching to the year 2060. The article section opens with three texts focusing on different theoretical contributions to the research field. Firstly, Matti Kamppinen introduces a theoretical framework for future-oriented studies of religious agency applicable to the ethnographic research discussed in the volume at large. Thereafter, Fredrik Portin examines the disruptive character of right-wing populism in relation to issues of democracy and public legitimacy, basing his arguments on the political philosophy of, for example, Laclau, Mouffe and Latour. Issues of demographic change and diversity are given a theological illumination by René Dausner in his article on humanity and hospitality.

These theoretical contributions are followed by a number of ethnographically driven investigations. Didem Doganyilmaz Duman analyses the political atmosphere in Europe today in relation to the increased visibility of Muslim refugees and Islamic symbols in the public sphere. Thereafter, the media sphere is given a closer examination in Joanna Krotofil's and Dominika Motak's critical discourse analytical assessment of the media coverage of the 'migration crisis', especially in Poland. In Wardah Alkatiri's contribution, broader perspective is applied to current ethnic conflicts, offering a critical postcolonial analysis of the modern conception of nation-states and nationalism with regard Indonesia as a pertinent example. After these articles focusing primarily on Islam and Muslim perspectives in their ethnography, Mercédesz Czibalmos concludes the series of ethnographic articles with an analysis pertaining to Jewish perspectives on intermarriage in contemporary multicultural Finland. Finally, the volume ends where it started, with a demographic analysis. In their substantial contribution to the volume, Jose Navarro and Vegard Skirbekk present a global overview of

income inequality in relation to religion, estimating the development from current times to the year 2050. Understanding income inequality within and across religions is important in order to develop policies that reduce such tensions, they argue, helping to decrease tensions among religious groups and preventing conflict.

Accurate and transparent statistics form the basis for scientific inquiry and understanding on many phenomena, including religious and ethnic developments. Path-breaking global statistics developed by international research organisations have made it possible to provide reliable analysis of both contemporary and future religious developments that take into account the changing global demography. Obviously, the quality of elementary data varies between countries, but already current data sets allow us to discuss many issues with some certainty. This is a fundamental prerequisite for debating potential future scenarios. We believe that the potential of global religious statistics is still to be explored in numerous ways and hope that this volume can provide inspiration for that endeavour. However, it is obvious from this special issue and the observations made during the conference that reliable and valid statistical analyses are growing even more dependent on nuanced qualitative global studies providing us with increasingly sensitive measures of religious, cultural and ethnic belonging as well as deeper insights into the contemporary complex dynamics between forms of belonging and agencies.

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