

Book Reviews

Ida Marie Høeg (ed.): *Religion og ungdom*. Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 2017, 271 pp.

In this anthology, *Religion og ungdom* (Religion and Youth), edited by sociologist of religion Ida Marie Høeg, Norwegian authors from different research fields such as religious studies, sociology, and anthropology analyse youth's relationship with religion and spirituality in Norway. The term 'youth' is used as an umbrella term to include both adolescents and young adults in the book's chapters. The chapters focus on young Norwegians' experiences of religion and spirituality in various contexts such as schools, confirmation training, youth milieus and media. The chapters also include generational/cohort and life-stage perspectives on the study of youth, pose questions related to identities and practices, and present themes from gender to ethnicity and from individualism to social engagement. The data used in the chapters is extensive, ranging from survey results and popular magazines to fieldwork and interviews. The anthology is in Norwegian, so it is aimed at Norwegian (or Nordic) readers.

Religion og ungdom consists of an introduction and eleven chapters. Høeg's introduction emphasises that this volume examines Norwegian youth as agents, and religion is understood as something to be explored and tried, as well as some-

thing young people shape. Høeg introduces the reader to the concept of youth, the background of youth studies within the field of religious studies, and the characteristics of the lives of Norwegian youth in light of current research. Most young people in Norway live good lives, have good relationships with their parents and families, go to school and increasingly enjoy their leisure time at home, as well as in their hobbies and involvement in various organisations. Thus, religion competes with other leisure activities, not least those involving different media. Høeg summarises relevant Norwegian research that illustrates that a third of young adults are personally Christian (meaning they are Christian on their terms and in their understanding). Another third do not believe in God. Young adults between 21 and 26 find religion less meaningful than young people between 15 and 20. New religiosity or alternative spirituality is most widespread among young adults, and the number of young people with an immigrant background who identify more strongly with religion is increasing. Young Norwegians are also less critical of religion than Norwegians in general. In addition, young people's authority structures are looser, so they increasingly follow their own compass of inner values.

Høeg provides basic information about young adults in Norway in the introduction. However, some more

statistics would have been useful for the non-Norwegian reader. It would have been particularly helpful to have learned more about religiously affiliated Norwegians in general, the numbers of non-religious Norwegians, and the corresponding statistics for young Norwegians. The introduction's statistics are collected from several studies from different periods, and of young adults of different ages. As Høeg herself writes, youth seem more interested in religious questions than young adults, although research including both youth and young adults is not always presented or available.

After the introduction the volume continues with two studies of representations of Islam in the lives of young Muslims: Audun Toft focuses on classrooms; Janna Hansen focuses on Facebook. Next, Torjer A. Olsen studies how Sámi youth with a Laestadian background negotiate their identities, while Lill Vramo analyses young Norwegian Sikhs' turban practice and explores the borders of inclusion within Norwegian society. In chapter five Ann Kristin Gresaker illustrates how religion is discussed by celebrities in two lifestyle magazines, *Mann* for young men and *Det Nye* for young women. In the next chapter Irene Trysnes studies the identity negotiations of youth in relation to religion and gender in Christian youth milieus. Next, Trysnes and Pål Ketil Botvar explore young people, individualisation, and new religiosity or alternative spirituality. In chapter eight Høeg analyses the civil engagement of

youth participating in the Church of Norway's confirmation training, while in chapter nine Sivert Skålvoll Urstad explores who secular Norwegian young adults are, and how they relate to religious questions. Sindre Bangstad explores how young Muslims in Oslo relate to secularity, liberality, and tolerance. In the final chapter Levi Gier Eidhamar studies young Muslims' thoughts and beliefs concerning existential questions of life after death.

The introduction presents the chapters and their focus. However, the reader is not provided with a clear explanation of the chapters' order. Secular youth are presented towards the end of the book, but youth from different religions and contexts are not introduced in a thematic order. A clearer and explained structure would undoubtedly have helped underline central themes and provided a dialogue between the chapters, a dialogue now largely missing. Yet the volume offers a rich array of perspectives, some with a more obvious place in the volume than others. Most of the chapters focus on young people's experiences, but in chapter five Gresaker studies how celebrities discuss religion in magazines for young women and men. Its different focus means this chapter seems a little out of place. The chapter is interesting, but in relation to the volume as a whole it would have been even more interesting to read, for example, about how youth or young adults from different religious backgrounds understand and discuss the religious

and spiritual media representations of celebrities.

While many of the chapters make a strong case and relate to previous research meaningfully, others are less connected with current debates. In chapter seven Trysnes and Botwar analyse survey and interview data concerning new religious young adults and individualism. Their theoretical premise lies in Robert Bellah's (1985) utilitarian individualism, which is about maximising one's self-interests and gains, and expressive individualism, which entails everybody's possibility of fulfilling their own potential. Trysnes and Botwar maintain that young people are more utilitarian than older adults, focusing on the question 'What's in it for me?'. Although their findings are interesting, Trysnes and Botwar do not discuss the characteristics of the participants' particular life stage. Not only would this give more context, it would also afford a more nuanced picture of individualism(s) among new religious young adults. As Arnett (2004) and Høeg, among others, point out, young adulthood is a life stage during which young people learn to stand on their own two feet. The focus during this life stage is therefore on the self and the individual's choices. Thus, the results not only indicate generational differences, as suggested by Trysnes and Botwar, but also possible differences between life stages.

An important and partly shared theme for authors such as Toft, Hansen, Olsen, Vramo, and Bangstad is

the young people who are navigating different and at times multiple identities and places in Norwegian society. Young adults face questions of religion, spirituality, and non-religion in relation to questions of identity, gender, ethnicity, education, and media. One of the strengths of *Religion og ungdom* is the insights it provides into the several simultaneously lived realities of young people in contemporary, multicultural, and multi-religious Norway. While some of the chapters confirm the findings of previous research – for example, Urstad's chapter on the prevalence of secular young adults – the contributions also afford interesting insights into the lives of young people from religious backgrounds living in a secular society, as is the case in Bangstad's chapter on young Muslims. Another strength of the book lies in the rich quantitative and qualitative research data, the chapters employ. As many of the chapters discuss important and current issues within the field of youth studies and studies of religion, an English version of the volume would no doubt find a larger audience.

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