



Elisabeth Arweck and Heather Shipley (eds): *Young People and the Diversity of (Non)religious Identities in International Perspective*. Springer, 2019.

Young People and the Diversity of (Non)religious Identities in International Perspective presents current research on young people, (non-)religion, and diversity. The particular focus the editors Elisabeth Arweck and Heather Shipley have chosen is on young people's experiences of religion and non-religion as they are related to the topics of sexual and gender identities. In fourteen well-written case studies the editors and their contributors deftly explore how young people's stances may develop, and the social or spatial contexts in which these stances may be formed. The aim of the volume is twofold: to build bridges geographically by bringing international perspectives into the developing discussion, and methodologically across academic disciplines. To fulfil the volume's ambitions, there is an obvious need for researchers with experience in gender and sexuality studies, religious socialization, formal education, ethnicity, migration, and civic engagement. The international experts, from a range of disciplinary perspectives, demonstrate that they have much to contribute to these conversations. Drawing on local, national, and international contexts, they unpack some of the complexity by exploring how these different perspectives are related conceptually, theoretically, and empirically.

Non-religion in various forms or the study of other-than-religion (L. Lee, Research Note. Talking about a Revolution: Terminology for the New Field of Non-religion Studies. *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 27(1), 2012: 129–39), and particularly in relation to religion, is a new subject which has received much attention lately, while research on how these ideas play out among young people is less prevalent (see, for example, E. Arweck, 'I've been christened, but I don't really believe in it': How young people articulate their (non-)religious identities and perceptions of (non-)belief, A. Day, G. Vincett, and C. R. Cotter (eds), *Social identities between the sacred and the secular* (pp. 103–25). Farnham: Ashgate, 2013). The framing of worldviews to include non-religion, religion, 'spiritual but not religious', and how they interact with identity constructions offers nuanced insights into young people's lives. To avoid giving a false impression that young people can be easily boxed into one of a number of identity pigeon holes, the various studies show that there is considerable overlap between identities. Instead of drawing clear boundaries between religion and non-religion or defining any universal distinctions between religion and non-religion, the authors use them as categories merely for analytical purposes. Examining how non-religion and religion overlap and intersect with gendered and sexual identities brings new perspectives of identity constructions

among young people. Most significantly, it appears that the socialization agents that operate with young people with a non-religious identity are the same as those with a religious identity, even when young people report that neither religion nor non-religion is important for their self-interpretation.

Individual relations with (non-) religious institutions, and how they reinforce young people's identities invites more inquiry, not only in religious minority groups, but also in religious majority contexts. However, less attention is paid to class. Nonetheless, Amir Sheikhzadegan, Roberta Ricucci, and Shanon Shah do touch on this issue, but particularly Mathew Guest in the chapter 'The hidden Christians of the UK University Campus' and Josiane LeGall and Daniela Moisa in the chapter 'The Religious Socialisation of Young Adult Muslims in Montreal' deliver well on their promise to consider class. In his excellent study Guest shows that class structures are evident when young people negotiate their cultural and (non-)religious belonging in environments in which they have recently participated. In this collection of case studies, but also for future research, the intersectional relationship between (non-)religion and socioeconomic backgrounds is an angle that will benefit from more research.

The key question when researching young people is why we should examine this particular age group, and not (non-)religious actors in

general. Why should we study young people with diverse sexual and gender identities who belong to majority or minority groups in different geographical contexts? These are particularly relevant questions, as youth and (non-)religion is an academic topic that has recently been gaining increasing attention. But these questions are not thoroughly discussed in the introduction or in any of the chapters. The answer is probably simply embedded in young people's formative years. Even in diverse Western societies, in which strong reflexivity follows individuals over the course of their lives, worldview and sexual and gender identities are mostly developed at a young age. Young people select, explore, and express their (non-)religious, gender, and sexual identities when they are moving from the (non-)faith of their childhood to adulthood. Thus, identity construction comes into sharper relief in young people's lives, which enables the researcher to better grasp the aspects of identity formation. Where religious organizations are concerned, young people also contribute to the development of a particular type of religious subject, which the international confirmation studies in Europe from Tübingen University clearly prove (Schweitzer et al. (eds), *Confirmation, Faith, and Volunteerism: A Longitudinal Study on Protestant Adolescents in the Transition towards Adulthood. European Perspectives*. Güterloher: Güterloher Verlagshaus, 2017).

This collection of chapters offers very prescient research. While much of the existing literature has focused largely on plurality at the national level and on a single point in time (snapshots), the chapters here deliberately turn their focus to the spatial dimensions of the theme and explore how the growing visibility and diversity of religion and non-religion are manifested at the local level. Thus, we learn that it is possible to conduct rigorous empirical studies into (non-)religion with the potential or explicit aim of contributing to young people's identity constructions in the contemporary global world, and various national and geographical contexts. Editors Elisabeth Arweck and Heather Shipley and the international panel of contributors offer unique international perspectives on (non-)religious identities across and within three continents. Against the backdrop of the larger global picture most of the case studies are drawn from northern Europe and North America – the UK and Quebec (Canada). Geographical contexts from the Philippines, Malaysia, Italy, and Germany are also represented. The chapters compare research insights with similar studies. The best chapters are those that critically investigate studies from other geographical and cultural contexts, and reflect on why their findings may be contradictory. LeGall and Daniela Moisa discuss the influences of parents, social background, and the degree of religiosity as significant factors explaining why the findings

differ from European findings that highlight a more active role in young Muslims' religiosity.

A surprising but even more interesting point is the empirical finding that indicates that media plays such a marginal role for religious and non-religious identity constructions. Although several of the researchers have previously highlighted the interplay of religion and media in the study of young people and (non-)religion, this is downplayed here, or more precisely, this aspect is absent in the majority of the studies. Of course, it is easy to request perspectives which one considers to have been omitted, but such case studies could be important for the processes connected to religiously and sexually diverse identities, and how they intersect. Is the interaction with virtual social networks over such issues as sexuality, gender, and (non-)religion less significant than family, peers, and schools, and is media mostly used to seek religious knowledge? Both Simeon Wallis's chapter "'I'm Not Really a Non-religious Person': Diversity among Young People of No Religion' and Josiane LeGall's and Daniela Moisa's chapter 'The Religious Socialisation of Young Adult Muslims in Montreal' confirm that media is an agent for developing young people's stances, but with other agents from social spaces and contexts. Since Arweck's and Shipley's volume was written, other international studies have challenged the issues in an international context (see M. Moberg and S. Sjö (eds), *Digital Media, Young Adults*

and Religion: An International Perspective, London: Routledge, 2020). The case studies presented in Arweck's and Shipley's and in Moberg's and Sjö's volumes demonstrate the need to examine in more detail (non-)religious socialization and media, and how media contribute to the intertwining expressions of ethnic (non-)religious sexual and gender identity in minority and majority social contexts.

Ida Marie Høeg
University of Agder

IDA MARIE HØEG is Professor of Sociology of Religion at the Department of Religion, Philosophy and History at University of Agder. E-mail: ida.m.hoeg@uia.no