

Introduction

Religious diversity in Europe: Mediating the past to the young

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God Is Back is the title of a bestselling book about an alleged return to religion in the world (Micklethwait and Wooldridge 2009). But rather than the return of one single God, what we in fact seem to be witnessing is the appearance of many different gods and a plurality of competing world views, both religious and secular. It raises discussions, with deep historical roots, about the place of religion in society and in particular in what is labelled as 'the public space'. Also religious violence has returned, in Europe, mainly from Islamist terrorists. Furthermore, Islamophobia and anti-Semitism led to violence and oppression. At the same time an awareness that religion can connect people and may contribute to peace and toleration emerged as well. History in this context is often invoked as a motivation or legitimization for divergent actions and policies.

Young people in particular are exposed to such narratives and experience their effects in their daily lives. However, as the authors of Chapter 2 (John Maiden, Stefanie Sinclair, Päivi Salmesvuori, Karel Van Nieuwenhuysse and John Wolffe) emphasize, on the basis of a series of pilot studies in different places and contexts in Europe, young people are usually quite open-minded with regards to religious (or convictional) diversity, and are willing to discuss their experiences, reflect on them and learn from them. At the same time, it is also obvious how little historical and religious knowledge they have and how much their vision of the past is twisted by presentism, that is, the backward projection of present experiences into the past (Borries 1994; Angvik and Borries 1997). In fact, they get their information from a wide variety of sources, from their close, personal circle (family, friends, religious community) to schools and various mediating contexts, most of which are covered in this book.

This book sets out to offer a critical assessment of contemporary representations of the history of religion and religious – or broader, 'convictional' – pluralism, particularly with regards to young people. It is part of a wider project that aims to improve the understanding of religious pluralism and to facilitate peaceful coexistence and toleration among young people,² although in this book we will be focusing particularly on assessing these representations and how they are mediated to the young.

Defining Europe

Unlike many studies that refer to Europe's history and identity, this book adopts a broad, inclusive view of Europe. We use the term first of all as a geographical concept, referring to a generally accepted definition which situates the continent between (including) the British Isles in the west, the Nordic countries in the north and the northern Mediterranean (Portugal, Spain, Italy, Greece) in the south. Europe's eastern borders are perhaps less easy to agree on: for practical purposes in this volume we have excluded both Russia and present-day Turkey (but not the 'European part' of the former Ottoman Empire). We are aware that such a meta-geographical concept is far from being 'objective' (see extensively Lewis and Wigen 1997), but it is workable. We also decided to work within a limited time frame: our historical references do not go back beyond the European Middle Ages, thereby avoiding possible discussion about the 'Europeanness' of Ancient Roman and Greek civilizations. At the same time, this time frame encompasses the history of al-Andalus and the Ottoman lands in Eastern Europe as well as that of European Christendom, to which most studies of European identity tend to be confined. This is important in many respects, not least because the experiences and memories of these Muslim lands resonate strongly in the present, albeit in quite diverse ways, as will become clear in the following chapters.

Such an inclusive view of Europe raises other issues though: to what extent is it meaningful to group together such diverse countries and (sub)regions? Is there 'enough' homogeneity or similarity to isolate them as a separate continent? For outsiders (and for Europeans living elsewhere) the answer is obvious enough, even if the question of the exact boundaries remains unsolved. From a religious perspective, we can nevertheless easily distinguish between an Orthodox Europe, born out of the Byzantine Empire, a Catholic and a Protestant Europe, divided into Lutheran, Calvinist and Anglican areas (a careful observer will also recognize patterns in early and late Christianization). For its part, Islam dominated much of the Iberian Peninsula for centuries, until its final conquest by Catholics at the end of the fifteenth century and the subsequent expulsion of Muslims (and Jews). Islam also held sway in Southeast Europe after the conquests of the Ottoman Turks spanning the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries. Since then (until the twentieth century, that is), the latter region has been a mixed Islamo-Christian zone, a multi-ethnic, multi-confessional concoction which did not just include Orthodox Christians and Muslims but also Catholics, Protestants and Jews, to name just the main religious categories. Secularization patterns, the Cold War, post-war migrations and the increasing attraction of Asian and Amerindian spiritual cultures and New Age have also had a profound impact on the religious fabric of Europe, and are perhaps even more prevalent today (Pasture 2013; see also Chapter 1). The main issue is whether the contemporary divisions within Europe are less significant than those distinguishing Europe from the rest of the world. An answer to that question, however, lies beyond the scope of this book and would require a global comparative study, including 'outside-in' perspectives.

It does seem remarkable, however, that many contemporary narratives about Europe, even secular(ist) ones, emphasize the Christian dimension, somehow

marginalizing or blatantly ignoring the fact that large swathes of Europe were under Islamic rule for centuries. Antiquity, by contrast, is normally included within European history. Many claim that Europe is rooted in Christianity and treat Islam as the 'external other' against which Europe has defined itself (Wintle 2016; Delanty 2013). At first sight, these views appear to encompass Jewish history, as they often refer to a Judeo-Christian heritage, but appearances can be deceptive: the notion of Judeo-Christianity has ambiguous, if not deeply anti-Semitic, roots, and does not prevent anti-Judaic or even anti-Semitic stances, for example, with regards to ritual slaughter (see in particular Nathan and Topolski 2018; Kluvelde 2018; Topolski 2018). The contemporary use of Judeo-Christianity has another obvious downside in that it effectively excludes Muslims from Europe's identity construction.

A different set of questions arises regarding the distinction with America, to which Europe is connected as part of what is called 'the West' – a concept with an even more complex history even though the Atlantic Ocean is clearly vast enough to act as a boundary (Corm 2005, 2009; Nemo 2010). There are no such links between Europe and the East, however. The exclusion of Russia from Europe may appear bizarre: as the heir to the Orthodox legacy and to that of communism (that quintessentially European ideology), it is in many ways undoubtedly European, and its exclusion is a political and cultural construction based on complex, largely geopolitical considerations and reasons (Neumann 1995, 1998a, 1998b; see also Pasture, forthcoming). In this book we would have liked to buck this trend and to have included Russia in our analysis, but the huge scale of this task rendered this impractical.

The European perspective is also a way to overcome the trap of methodological nationalism, although the national straitjacket is difficult to escape from, as media and mediating contexts are often structured along national lines and are highly dependent on language (itself an important barrier for effective transnational or pan-European research). As Laura Galián, Madis Maasing and Karel Van Nieuwenhuysen remark in Chapter 3, history textbooks, for example, often take a strongly national perspective, and focus almost exclusively on national history. Significantly, some smaller Northwest European countries, however (with Germany as an interesting exception as a larger country), adopt a broader European perspective, which in fact is part of their national identity. Likewise, in this book most chapters contain a national dimension, although we have tried to offset this as far as possible by making comparisons between different countries.

Before continuing our investigation, a few more observations are required – first about the meaning of religion as defined in this volume. In reality, we leave the definition rather open-ended. Most contributions deal with the main religious institutions or communities, although non-institutional forms such as New Spirituality are covered as well. We also touch on non-religious world views, albeit without discussing all their possible interpretations, definitions and boundaries. As Lois Lee (2015) demonstrated, the non-religious encompasses a wide variety of positions, from agnosticism to atheism, and many variations in between, which include personal searches for meaning and individualistic bricolage. A similar story could also be told about religious people: they too display a wide variety of positions and practices. This is the case for all beliefs, and applies just as well to Muslims, Christians, Jews and Buddhists. As it happens,

even the boundaries between religious and non-religious have become porous, and appear increasingly irrelevant for many. This is what we observed in different settings, among the young people that took part in the pilot studies (Chapter 2) and in our study of interconvictional associations (Chapter 9). This, to be sure, is completely at odds with the polarization that appears to dominate the media, although, in this case too, appearances can be misleading. In the current populist discourses about a Christian civilization under threat, for example, religion is rarely the issue, but it is politicized as an identity-marker (Marzouki, McDonnell and Roy 2016); hence blurring the boundaries between politics and religion.

Religious diversity in Europe: Different narratives and interpretations

It is widely accepted that Europe has become a multicultural, multireligious, even hyper-diverse region, mainly as a result of immigration, although huge differences exist within Europe: while the main Western European capitals such as London, Paris, Brussels or Berlin perfectly illustrate this assertion, the situation is much less diverse in more rural areas, and in Mediterranean countries – within which huge differences exist – as well as in Eastern Europe, even in capital cities such as Warsaw and Budapest. Although countries that belonged to the former communist bloc were interconnected to some extent and welcomed activists from all over the world (Mark, Kalinovsky and Marung 2020), they did not experience the same waves of immigration as in Northwestern Europe, which attracted large numbers of workers for their booming industries as well as refugees and fortune seekers after decolonization and other major upheavals.

The narrative that Europe has become a hyper-diverse region suggests that this is a largely recent phenomenon and therefore flies in the face of another discourse that has always identified Europe with pluralism and diversity, and in which Europe is represented as the cradle of toleration. The latter is certainly part of the self-identification of the EU, although this narrative has lost much of its appeal in the face of current debates about multiculturalism and immigration. To a large extent the discourse of ‘unity in diversity’ – from this perspective a highly ambiguous motto – actually refers to national and ethnic pluralism rather than cultural and religious, although these are obviously strongly connected. Elsewhere I have argued that although characterized by large internal migrations, for centuries and until recently, Europe was relatively homogenous compared to some other regions such as South and Southeast Asia or Africa, and actually developed an ideal of homogeneity that was rooted in the complex history of Christendom, through monopolistic claims over the truth as proclaimed by Christianity as well as the close association between church and state. Pluralism, and toleration as its alter ego, rarely was something that was valued positively, let alone something to strive for. This ideal has survived the gradual secularization of Europe (which also needs to be put into perspective) and particularly inspires modern and contemporary ideologies of nationalism and populism (see Pasture 2015 and Chapter 1 of this volume).

Secularization is certainly a dominant narrative when discussing the meaning of religion in society today – Paolo Costa considers it a ‘modern foundational myth’ (Costa 2019) – although it has become highly contested. There is, however, no consensus on the meaning of the term, referring most frequently to the declining social significance of institutional religion and in particular of Christian churches. When used with regards to Europe, the term ‘secularization’ could arguably therefore be replaced by ‘de-Christianization’ (e.g. Christie and Gauvreau 2013). The original theorists of secularization and their contemporary acolytes, however, clearly refer to religion in general when they imagine an inconsistency between religion and modernization, and claim that modernization, understood in widely divergent terms as social differentiation, rationalization and individualization, and as underlying an ideal of progress, would inevitably entail, and indeed bring about, a decline in the social significance of religion.

In this description it is hard not to discern an ideological component, and a conceptual history reveals the common origins of secularization and secularism in Christendom itself (Lübbe 2003; Quack 2017; see also Asad 2003 and Weir 2015). Notwithstanding extensive attention to trying to define the different concepts, the two are easily conflated. Rather than speaking about ‘the ideological underpinning of secular society and politics’ (Calhoun, Juergensmeyer and Van Antwerpen 2011: 9), I prefer to limit the use of the term secularism to the *ideology* advocating that ‘religion ought to be separate from all or some aspects of politics or public life (or both)’ and that the state has ‘a *raison d’être* of its own and should not be subordinated to religious authority, religious purposes or religious reasons’ (Fox 2015: 2; see also Modood and Sealy 2019: 6; Wohlrab-Sahr and Burchardt 2012). While secularism in the sense of emphasizing the neutrality of the state and a formal separation between religious institutions and the state is often presented as a tool promoting toleration – in India it is sometimes even identified with toleration (Keysar 2017: 40) – a more radical, political interpretation of secularism views it as a means of limiting the role of religion in the public sphere and subordinating religion to the interests and values of the state (Asad 2013). Speaking about the French *laïcité*, Étienne Balibar in this respect distinguishes between a position that respects ‘the autonomy of civil society, to which belong the liberties of conscience and of expression’, and a radical interpretation of *laïcité* as ‘an essential piece of the “normative” primacy of public order over private activities and opinions’ (Balibar 2018: 163). In this perspective, secularism risks becoming ‘identitarian’ and limiting the freedom of conscience and religion, excluding people who manifest their faith. It then has a lot in common with the positions of New Atheism, which basically considers religion incompatible with Western liberties and rationality (Lee 2015: 136; Modood and Sealey 2019). In that perspective, secularization is not only the inevitable result of social processes but also the desired outcome of secularism.

To be sure, few, if any, still endorse the normativity and inevitability of secularization as a process closely tied to modernity: secularization theory has been redefined and reinvented as a theory of religious change explaining why religions may actually resist decline and even expand in modern societies (the classic example being Inglehart and Norris 2004). Neo-secularization theorists also concede that secularization does not

imply the eventual disappearance of religion (and thus is 'relative'), and may follow different paths: Karel Dobbelaere (2002), for example, distinguishes between macro-, meso-, and individual levels, while José Casanova (1994) recognizes that social differentiation led to the emancipation of 'the secular spheres' (the state, the economy and science are the prime examples) as well as to the parallel formation of a separate religious sphere. However, he argues that the latter is not confined to the private domain and that a process of de-privatization has taken place since the 1980s through which religions (re-)emerged as public actors.

Nevertheless, surveys and statistics do reveal the declining relevance of both institutionalized religious practices and 'churching' in Europe, with only minor variations and exceptions (see Chapter 1). Ronald Inglehart (2021) recently made a strong case that religion worldwide – not just Christianity – is receding, but his argument remains contested (see also Stolz 2020 and the reactions in this special issue of *Social Compass* for a state-of-the-art discussion).

What such surveys are largely unable to measure is the significance of non-institutionalized religion and individual spirituality, which are often said to have no significant societal impact (see e.g. Bruce 2002, esp. 95–9; for a poignant critique see Aupers and Houtman 2006; Houtman and Aupers 2007). The traditional literature on secularization interprets spirituality and non-institutionalized religion therefore as cyphers of secularization – illustrating in this way how much the concept of religion in secularization theories owes to Christianity (Asad 2003). These new trends could also be considered as signs of the vivacity of religions that are engaging with modernity in various ways. They may be viewed as expressions of individual liberty which lead to and legitimize a wide variety of spiritual alternatives to institutionalized religions. From this perspective, rather than as a sign of increasing secularization, New Spirituality should be considered as a form of 'democratization' of religion, as well as blurring the lines between the secular and the sacred (Cooper 2016). In this process, as Slavoj Žižek (2001) observed, *believing* and *believing in* became dissociated. Hence, adopting a long-term perspective, Ethan Shagan concluded that 'secularization has not segregated belief from the world, it has instead opened the world to belief liberating a central category of Western civilization from the demands that Christianity placed upon it' (Shagan 2019: 293).

The secularization of Europe is also put into perspective when migrants are added to the equation. In this case we are less concerned about whether the religiosity of migrants will decline in the same way as that of the autochthonous population or follow different paths, and are more interested in the fact that migrants bring in different religious traditions and hence increase the diversity of the religious landscape, thereby creating a need for societies to 'govern' this diversity. In a political perspective pluralism appears as the core of the liberal ideology according to which the state should 'not impose on all citizens one single view or way of doing things' (Bardon et al. 2015). For others, the difference between pluralism and diversity lies in pluralism's presumed 'engagement' and its evaluative or normative stance. In this respect religious pluralism refers to an imagined ideal state in which 'balance, harmony, mutual support and equality of opportunity between faith communities' prevails (Eck 2016; Beckford 2003: 101; see Giordan 2012; Bock and Fahy 2019).

In any case the ways in which European states have accepted religious diversity and pluralism vary quite considerably, giving way to different 'secularisms' or, to avoid the latter concept's ideological load, 'secularities,' that is, secular state systems which in diverse ways govern religion and spirituality.³ This refers to ways of guaranteeing religious freedom and the right to believe and worship as well as to proselytize, and affects the way religions may organize themselves, the relationships between religious institutions and secular authorities and with other organized world views, and the degree of reciprocity and equality shown to minority religions and world views. The latter is hardly an issue in Europe though, but not because European societies treat different world views in the same way. In fact quite the opposite is true (Roy 2019). In most states in Europe, (organized) religions, spiritualities and secular world views do *not* have equal status and do *not* enjoy the same rights and benefits (Fox 2015). Notwithstanding centuries of conflict and continued separation, historical Christian churches have privileged relationships with secular authorities, and concertation with other religious institutions is organized according to the same model applied with the Christian church(es). However, most religions, including New Spirituality and non-religious world views, do not have similar centralized church structures. Only recently, that is, roughly since the 1960s and, particularly, since the 1990s, has there been a growing tendency to treat different religions equally, although today this equality increasingly means that they all suffer from the same biases (Ferrari 2013; see Chapter 1). In this respect the late Alfred Stepan introduced a useful alternative approach, looking into the ways in which societies guarantee what he calls the 'twin tolerations,' according to which democratic political institutions get 'sufficient space' from religious institutions to function, while the state allows its citizens to live their religion in peace. These twin tolerations effectively allow for several regimes of secularity (Stepan 2000, 2011).

Even if declining religious statistics may suggest otherwise, people, and young people in particular, are exposed to religious differences in their daily lives and are challenged in their beliefs – which can be religious but also non-religious and secularist – and in their search for identity. Sometimes they are faced with manifestations of intolerance and violence, in their own personal experiences or in their immediate surroundings, or through what happens elsewhere, both nearby and far away – as modern media has considerably reduced the significance of physical distance, while at the same time creating new opportunities for interaction. The gruesome murder of French secondary-school teacher, Samuel Paty, on 16 October 2020, which happened while we were working on this book, once again revealed to us all – including the young people we have in mind in this book – the power of religious fanaticism and the reality of apparently incompatible world views in Europe. Clearly the murder not only affected the local community of Conflans-Sainte-Honorine, but also resonated all over Europe and beyond.

Apart from the increased significance of diversity and pluralism, perhaps the most striking feature today is the enhanced public visibility of religions (Casanova 1994; Hjelm 2015; Furseth 2018a), even if the visibility question depends a lot on one's particular perspective and location: the position of religion in society looks quite different if you are analysing it from the perspective of a country like the Netherlands,

where only a minority still considers themselves Christian, or Poland, where a militant Catholic Church is trying to help shape a nation after decades of communist oppression, or Ireland where the same Church dominated public life but has now entered a deep crisis after the exposure of major abuse scandals, or the United States, where the impact of evangelicalism and Christian nationalism has increased greatly since the Second World War,⁴ let alone from the standpoint of China or Iran (Hjelm 2015; Beckford 2010, 2012).

The ‘visibility’ of religion in the public sphere is largely mediated through the media. An extensive literature has developed to assess the multiple ways in which various media function as intermediaries for processes of change within and between religious and other social institutions, and what the relationship is between the ‘mediatization of religion’ (Hjarvard 2008, 2012, 2013) and its changing public representation. A central issue here is whether religion itself is changed by this process: obviously religious institutions adapted in different ways, depending on issue and context (Furseth 2018b; Hellemans and Rouwhorst 2020). There is certainly also evidence that it becomes more diffuse and even ‘banal’ (as Michael Billig claims has happened with nationalism), in the sense of being present in everyday action, receiving its meaning not from grand manifestations but often from the simplest of daily events. Although in this book, we will not be dealing with these changes *an Sich*, they do coincide with our findings that religion is a reality and a practice that young people encounter in their daily lives, and not (only, not even particularly) in explicitly religious settings. An important finding of the research on the mediation of religion is that changes may not only be abrupt and immediate, provoked by specific incidents such as terrorist attacks, but that they also take place at a deeper, more gradual level. Another conclusion, more directly relevant for us, is that it is possible to ‘use the media to engage with contentious issues in ways that may reduce ethnic and religious stereotypes’ and polarization (Lövheim and Hjarvard 2019: 208; Hjarvard 2008, 2012, 2013). In the Nordic countries, in particular, the potential use of the media to improve relations between people, and particularly youngsters, with different world views and faiths has been extensively studied.

Nevertheless, the mainstream media, from newspaper and television headlines to the unrestrained clamour of social networks, continue to be dominated by often simplistic, black-and-white narratives. This is not surprising, as the media tend to focus on the spectacular and on issues that disrupt social order (Hjarvard and Lundby 2018). Nonetheless, a closer look at the representations of religion quickly reveals that there are more voices than may appear at first sight. A more nuanced picture soon emerges, showing different views of the meaning of religion, religious liberty and the separation of church and state as well as about the role of religion in society, the (il) legitimization of violence, and the past and present of religious diversity in Europe and elsewhere.

It could be argued that five, not entirely unrelated, issues dominate the public perception of religion in Europe today, which also suggests that religion has become a political factor again (Schwörer and Fernández-García 2020): (1) the occurrence of politically motivated religious violence, particularly by some Islamist movements; (2) the uses of religion in contemporary populism, often adopting a ‘clash of civilizations’ identity discourse between a ‘Christian’ *Abendland* and an Islamic East,

fuelled by anti-Islamic images and cartoons that often seek to provoke and insult; (3) more generally the discussions on the place of religion and religious (mostly Islamic) symbols and practices in the public and the social sphere (the wearing of headscarves, the building of mosques and minarets, the ritual slaughter of animals); (4) to a lesser extent, the political clout of conservative Christian evangelicalism in US politics, especially since the presidencies of George W. Bush and Donald Trump and (5) the resurgence of religion in conservative ethics, in the pro-life movement, which is also gaining ground in Europe. The notion that religion might also be a force for good seems to have dissipated in European narratives – missionaries tend to be presented as colonialists or as ‘aid workers’, ignoring their religious motivation (Goddeeris 2021: 96–102). When religions, especially Islam, are referred to, it is often in a distorted, schematic way, either casting doubts about present-day political Islam or praising a decontextualized and idealized past of coexistence. In any case religion appears mostly within a context of tensions, if not conflict, which particularly emphasizes religious ‘minorities’ – including Jews, not only as an ethnic group (and associated with Israel), but also Judaism as a faith community (e.g. with regards to ritual slaughter).⁵ The Covid pandemic has furthermore fuelled anti-Semitism, in various ways.

Mediating contexts

This book assesses the representations of religion and religious interactions in Europe today. Rather than focusing exclusively on the media, we decided to look at different *mediating contexts* where religion is represented. In this case, ‘mediating contexts’ refer to places and instances in the public sphere where religion is (made) ‘visible’, and thus also mediated towards the public. Mediating contexts can not only be print, audiovisual and online media, in the widest sense – for example, also including books – but also places such as museums where religions are literarily ‘on display’ (although this of course depends on the type of museum) as well as symbolic ‘places’ in civil society, including political parties, religious institutions, spiritual groups and (inter)faith associations.⁶ The intended public of these representations are primarily, but not exclusively, young people. After all, young people also encounter images and representations that are not specifically targeted at them.

Our initial expectation was that this approach would provide a far more diverse picture of the presence of religion in contemporary society than the traditional sociological surveys, which inevitably argue that religion is in decline, even though this conclusion clearly runs contrary to the widely held perception that religion is increasingly visible in society. We do believe, however, that this increased visibility, if narrowed down to what is commonly referred to as the public sphere, is also incomplete. In fact, it pays to abandon the framing of secularization that underpins this notion, and to take the perception of religion seriously, appreciating that religion is a multifaceted phenomenon that is present in very different contexts. This corroborates Inger Furseth’s approach towards religion, which is grounded in a social science complexity frame of reference and argues against reducing history to ‘single dimensions’ and basic evolutions in one or other direction: in reality there are (and

actually always were) ‘several seemingly contradictory religious trends at different levels’ (Furseth 2018b: 16). This is also highlighted by this book, even if our aim is not to engage in this theoretical debate on the place of religion in society here. In this respect our ambition remains far more modest: assessing (albeit still to a limited extent) the multiple ways in which religion and religious coexistence are presented to the public and to the young in particular, and what we can learn from these experiences to improve our understanding of the issues inherent in living together with people of different faiths and world views.

Ever since we first imagined this book, we realized that the representation of religion would vary according to the particular mediating context. Indeed, you hardly have to be an expert to imagine that the way popular newspapers depict religion would differ from the representations in, for example, religious schoolbooks (see also Lundby et al. 2018; Christensen 2018). This may appear a self-evident truism, but it seriously questions some of the basic assumptions that dominate public debate and current scholarship. This book also brought together different approaches and perspectives. The results of our research certainly confirm our initial expectations, but also show that, once again, reality is more complex than anticipated. In fact, the phrasing of the example above already suggests as much: by specifically comparing the popular press and religious schoolbooks (rather than just the press and schoolbooks), we are already implying that differences exist within each of these quite different mediating contexts (RETOPEA 2020).

The fact that the press is diverse may not come as a surprise: indeed, the media landscape includes not only tabloids but also so-called quality press, as well as lifestyle magazines and explicitly religious journals, published either by secular publishing companies or by religious institutions and associations. National political and mediating contexts also play a role in how religions and religious and convictional plurality and interactions are covered: media coverage of the same subject in Scandinavia, the UK or Greece can vary considerably as a result of the different political and mediating contexts, in line with diverging institutional positions of religions and the way media position themselves within the media market (Christensen 2018). Moreover, religious actors are often active participants or mediators in the media representation of religion: they are publishers and intervene in the public debate (Hjarvard 2012, 2013). Contrasting representations of religion can also occur in situations in which religious actors are not involved and where one would perhaps expect there to be only minimal differences, as between religious and history schoolbooks, for example. Religious textbooks tend to be far more inclusive, discussing a variety of religious traditions from different places, than history textbooks – which focus on Christianity, conflict and largely lose their interest in religion after the French Revolution.⁷

That said, there are also quite a few parallels in the way history textbooks deal with religious diversity and interactions. Representations of religious diversity in history textbooks vary, but as Laura Galián, Madis Maasing and Karel Van Nieuwenhuysen argue in Chapter 3, there are also some important parallels between the almost fifty textbooks they analysed from four countries – they even suggest some sort of common ‘canon,’ notwithstanding important national differences. Not surprisingly these representations focus on conflicts and take into account a relative variety of actors,

even if they also tend to homogenize the different faiths. But this restricted focus on conflict and the implicitly positive depiction of secularism – which is not critically assessed – is, as the authors note, highly problematic, particularly because textbooks clearly constitute an important source of information for young people, as was also confirmed in the pilot studies; they are arguably the most ‘pedagogical’ tool through which young people can obtain information.

The same applies when we move on to museums, a large selection of which have been analysed by Merve Reyhan Kayikci, Tamara Sztyma-Knasiaecka, Naum Trajanovski and Marija Manasievska in Chapter 4. Many national historical museums consider religion as constituent (if not identical) to civilization. Islam, for example, is presented in this way. But this also implies that Islam is homogenized and disconnected from both European history and the present-day world. The dialogue with the local community, particularly with a Muslim background, then becomes difficult. Some, more general, museums, while also ‘exoticizing’ religions, appear more successful. The Chester Beatty Museum in Dublin, one of the world’s leading religious museums, offers a case in point. It organizes extensive activities aimed at promoting religious understanding among young people. However, it also illustrates the fact that museums, in contrast to history textbooks (but similar to religious textbooks), often neglect more contentious parts of religious history. Some museums are implicitly or even explicitly designed to encourage mutual understanding, as is the case with the Jewish museums studied in Chapter 4. Given the long history of persecution of the Jews, culminating in the Holocaust, Jewish museums in this respect constitute a particular case. Most of them engage very successfully with the pluralist past to convey a message of connection and unity. Some museums, however, prefer to remain silent about religion. For its part, the permanent exhibition at the House of European History in Brussels, an initiative of the European Parliament and open since 2017, recognizes the legacy of Christendom and – in passing – Islam and Judaism as parts of European heritage and as ‘defining’ features of Europe but gives them hardly any visible space (Cf. Rosenberg 2018; Settele 2015; Kaiser 2017). A guide explained to me that the museum considers religion as a divisive force in Europe, which clashes with its ideal of creating a common, unifying narrative.⁸ These differences make the narrative of museums complex, and quite different from that presented in textbooks.

However, both textbooks and museums, although not all to the same extent and in different ways, share a certain secularist bias, associating religion rather with non-European cultures and, when talking about Europe, with pre-modern times, as if religion in Europe somehow ceased to be a significant political and societal factor after the French Revolution. Religious minorities – perhaps most obviously in the case of Jews – become ‘ethnicized’ or ‘nationalized’ and are presented (if at all) as national or ethnic minorities. This version of events has some historical basis: an evolution of this kind did happen, but to a much lesser degree than suggested, and in fact nation and religion were often intertwined (see Wood 2016 for a recent discussion). In the Yugoslav wars in the late twentieth century, religion again functioned as an identity-marker, and around the same time it re-emerged in the debate on multiculturalism, in which the word ‘culture’ was used to refer to migrant communities and was mainly associated with religion.

Remarkably, this secularist bias (which has largely been debunked by recent historical scholarship: see Chapter 1) paradoxically disappears if one moves away from mediating contexts that bear the mark of academic traditions (such as textbooks and museums) towards popular culture – an observation that points at the need for more self-reflexivity among the academia. Popular media (as expressions of popular culture) illustrate the new visibility of religion in different ways. They describe religion as quite widespread, even if it still depends a great deal on media and context (Lundby et al. 2018). Moreover, although very prominent in particular settings (particularly online and in extremist media, which hardly qualify as popular culture), the tensions that characterize political and academic discourses in general seem far less prominent in popular media. In fact, they could be considered ‘post-secular’ in that religious plurality, in all its different guises, is a reality that in itself is hardly viewed as problematic; attitudes appear far more relaxed. This may also relate to the prominent presence of non-institutional religious expressions, in particular (New) Spirituality (formerly called New Age), which appear in various popular media, including video games and lifestyle magazines (Lundby et al. 2018). Religious symbols moreover are often decontextualized and dissociated from their particular origins; they also show a wide variety of identities ‘in between’ religious and non-religious and atheism (Lee 2015). In fact, as Stef Aupers and Lars de Wildt (2019) recently argued, role playing in video games (in which religious references are very prominent) can actually contribute to mutual understanding and empathy towards the (non-)religious other and can bridge the gap between belief and non-belief.

In Chapter 5 Mikko Ketola, Ivan Stefanovski, Kaarel Kuurmaa and Riho Altnurme analyse two media that may be illustrative of popular culture: TV series and YouTube videos. TV series remain extremely popular among people of all ages, even if the ways of watching have changed since the first (mass) introduction of the medium in the 1950s. While religion is sometimes depicted in conflictual settings, this is not necessarily the case, as, for example, in the internationally successful series *Citizen Khan*, or even in the series from the Balkans. Although one tends to associate online media with radicalization and fundamentalism – particularly Islamist but also from other religious traditions – most online content is actually either neutral or promotes religious peace and toleration. YouTube offers a case in point, as indicated by the authors, who found a diverse range of video clips that promote religious literacy and toleration and in so doing also combat extremism and radicalism. In fact, this chapter nicely illustrates how TV series and YouTube videos can be used to educate young people.

Politics is the mediating context where one would expect the greatest emphasis on religious oppositions and an instrumentalization of religion in line with political agendas of conflict and identity-building, all the more so as political discourses are mediated to the public through the press, be they in print, audiovisual or online, which arguably tend to inflate tensions even more. In Chapter 6, taking political debates about the ‘refugee crisis’ between 2013 and 2017 as a case study, Laura Galián, John Maiden, Stefanie Sinclair and Árpád Welker compare how notions of national and transnational memory have been used to discursively frame contemporary understandings of toleration and peace. Their chapter focuses on political debates in Germany, Hungary, Spain and the UK as examples of quite different national contexts,

with complex histories of religious coexistence, not necessarily peaceful, between Christians, Muslims and Jews. The results of this comparative study not only confirm our expectations, but also qualify them to some extent. References to religious history are indeed instrumentalized, but with different goals. Particularly interesting in this respect are the very divergent ways in which history is used to legitimize and provide support for very different political stances. Although not addressed in the chapter (nor in this book), one may also observe the difference in which the political press addresses religion through political debate and the way other popular media such as lifestyle magazines represent it (Cf. esp. Lundby 2018).

In Chapter 7, Lidija Georgieva, Naum Trajanovski and John Wolffe assess the representation and commemorative practices of two major examples of peace-making from recent times: the Good Friday Agreement (1998) and the Ohrid Framework Agreement (2001) that put an end to the civil wars in Northern Ireland and North Macedonia respectively. Although the cases differ in several respects, their analyses reveal the futile attempts made by academic or 'elitist' circles to propagate a supposedly inclusive narrative, but nevertheless show that cultivating collective memory, particularly through physical memorials and museums recalling the conflicts, can contribute at least to a sense of justice, as a first but not unimportant step towards more enduring peace. This is actually an important finding as it highlights the potential role heritage can play in promoting peaceful coexistence.

Contemporary debates about religion in society often treat Islam as the European other. As explicit religious violence in contemporary Europe appears to be largely carried out by Islamist terrorists, so Muslims in particular have been targeted by secularists and populists, who describe them as backward and criticize them for being dissociated from 'European values' of democracy, freedom (inter alia of expression) and (gender) equality and emancipation. There are also, however, counternarratives that emphasize Islamic traditions of toleration and *convivencia*. In Chapter 8, Nadia Hindi Mediavilla, María Dolores Rodríguez Gómez and Antonio Peláez Rovira discuss how in al-Andalus, especially during the Nasrid era of Granada (1230–1492), a relatively peaceful *convivencia* was enacted and legitimized on the basis of the Islamic legal and ethical tradition, and how concepts such as *dhimma* (the legal status of non-Muslims under Islam), *mudajjan* (the legal status of Muslims under Christianity), *dār al-islām* (the 'house' of Islam), 'adl (justice), *istishsān* (the public good) and *tasāmuḥ* (mutual tolerance) are being used in contemporary initiatives to reimagine Islam in the current plural context.

By looking into the discourses in some prominent Islamic initiatives towards peaceful coexistence and toleration, Chapter 8 already introduces the theme of interfaith and interconvictional collaboration. Interfaith and interconvictional organizations offer a fascinating space for encounter and dialogue, often particularly addressing young people. While most research concentrates on interfaith movements, Elina Kuokkanen and Patrick Pasture argue in Chapter 9 that they should actually be viewed in a broader perspective and also include the non-religious. Their findings show a remarkable level of engagement in dialogue as a means of increasing mutual understanding and acceptance of difference, of setting up a conversation without – and that distinguishes them from ecumenical initiatives – arguing for a particular truth.

The purpose appears above all to be about reintroducing *civility* into the debate, which is reminiscent of a largely forgotten tradition associated with the Radical Reformation and in particular with arguably the earliest ‘Western’ experiment with religious pluralism, the ‘holy experiment’ of Roger Williams in Rhode Island and Providence Plantations (on Williams’s significance for civility and the debate of toleration see esp. Bejan 2017). A more inclusive narrative can also be found among the New Spirituality subculture, as is studied by Lea Altnurme with regards to the Estonian case in Chapter 10. Altnurme, however, also points to continuing tensions between different understandings of religion, and to institutional and non-institutional spirituality.

In conclusion, and before we go on to discuss the mediating contexts in detail in the following chapters, we thought it would be useful to provide an additional perspective to this book. As we often refer to the representations of the past, we wanted to outline this past according to the latest historical scholarship. In Chapter 1, Patrick Pasture and Christophe Schellekens offer a wide-reaching essay of how Europeans dealt with the issue of religious diversity. They do not provide the usual narrative of Europe as a beacon of toleration though, and question the still-popular narrative about the alleged progress of secularization and the marginalization of religion, arguing that the role played by religion in society changes in far more complex ways. Instead, the authors emphasize a fundamental longing for homogeneity and a deep-rooted fear of diversity as a continuing legacy of Christendom, and the association between religion and politics. They present history as one of people who are struggling to find practical solutions to what they perceive as existential problems. They also include the history of al-Andalus and the Ottoman Empire in their assessment, noting the parallels, differences and interactions in dealing with religious differences.