

**Stig Hjarvard and Mia Lövheim:
Mediatization and Religion: Nordic Perspectives.
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Professor of media studies Stig Hjarvard and professor of the sociology of religion Mia Lövheim's new edited volume, *Mediatization and Religion: Nordic Perspectives*, presents Scandinavian research on the changing relationships between media, religion, and culture in a Nordic context. The research behind the volume has grown out of a cross-disciplinary Nordic research network involving both media scholars and scholars of religion. The book focuses on the important but varying role of modern mass, digital, and social media in contemporary Scandinavian societies with regard to negotiations of the role of religion in the public sphere and for individual and social identities. The common point of departure is 'mediatization theory', which posits a 'mediatized' reality for contemporary society, in which religious organizations, leaders, communities, and individuals negotiate their identities and interaction in and by means of the media. Mediatization is the name of the process through which the media take over cultural and social functions formerly covered by organized religions, eventually contributing to the secularization of society.

Overall, the volume clearly demonstrates the relevance of the concept of mediatization for academic discussions and analyses of the changing role of religion in the Nordic societies. The book offers substantial empirical studies, in many cases by younger scholars, and it gives a good indication of prevailing theoretical trends in this particular field. In addition to mediatization theory, theories and concepts of secularization and religious change as well as the work of British sociologists such as Davie and Bruce loom large both explicitly and implicitly. As outlined by the editors in the introduction, the Nordic countries share

several characteristics that shape the interaction between media and religion in ways that make it relevant to introduce the particular Nordic perspective to the international discussion in the field of religion, media, and culture. These include the relatively secular nature of the Nordic societies, a democratic-corporatist media system with a strong public service component, a large newspaper readership, a high degree of market penetration by new media, primarily non-confessional media, etc. The editors point to notable current changes in this situation – changes that have been framed by phrases such as ‘the post-secular condition’ and ‘the resurgence of religion’ – and present the volume as a contribution to the discussion of this new situation, paying particular attention to the interrelations between ‘religion’ and ‘media’.

The volume is divided into four thematic sections. The first section, ‘Mediatization, Public Media, and the National Church’ (pp. 21-94), focuses on the public presence of religion and the changing role of the national Lutheran Church in a mediatized culture. The first chapter, by professor Stig Hjarvard, provides a clear exposition of his seminal theory on the mediatization of religion and offers a typology of forms of mediatized religion. From Hjarvard’s perspective, mediatization is the process through which ‘the media’ (again, modern mass, digital, and social media) acquire an important role not only in the transmission of religious imagery, but also in the production and framing of religious issues, with ‘the media’ determining or influencing the conditions for the presence of ‘religion’. This section also features an article by Peter Fischer-Nielsen on the use of internet communication by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark and a discussion by Henrik Reintoft Christensen of Grace Davie’s concept of ‘vicarious religion’ with regard to Scandinavian debates on homosexuality. Marcus Moberg and Sofia Sjö advocate the use of the ‘post-secular’ as a basis for situating the mediatization of religion debate in a sociological discussion of religion’s place in late-modern society. They note the significance of the active negotiations by religious communities of their presence in the new extended public sphere, thus pointing to a certain multidirectionality between ‘media’ and ‘religion’. The second section deals with the mediatization of social conflicts (pp. 95-128). Knut Lundby and Kjersti Thorbjørnsrud focus on the publication of a caricature of the prophet Muhammad as a pig on the Facebook page of the Norwegian Security Police Service, while Johanna Sumiala discusses the ritualization of death in the context of mainstream and social media during two school shootings in Finland. The book’s third section on religious identity and a changing media environment discusses the media’s role in the negotiation of Islamic identity in a multicultural society (pp. 129-164). It features stimulating articles by Mia Lövheim and Ehab Galal. Lövheim examines a set of young female Scandinavian Islamic bloggers. She convincingly shows how the new social media provide possibilities for enhancing and extending the agency and authority of young women, suggesting that mediatization through new media also opens possibilities for individual agency and new collective forms of action in the field of religion. Ehab Galal’s reasoned analysis focuses on the relationship between the religious identities of Muslims in Scandinavia and their use of satellite television from their region

of emigration. He sees Islamic television programmes as a set of discursive and symbolic resources and investigates how they offer spaces for Muslim identification and belonging, how they position their Muslim audiences as specific kinds of believers. His findings show that Islamic programming stages Muslim identity as a process of becoming, in which belonging is acquired through individual belief achievements. The media play a crucial role in staging the (often vicarious) religious performance of belief in a framework in which Islam functions as a transnational and individualized community.

The final section of the book, "Religion and Popular Media Culture", features interesting articles by Line Nybro Petersen and Liv Ingeborg Lied. Petersen analyses the reception of Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight Saga* book and film series among a group of Danish teenage girls, using a multi-dimensional approach that refreshingly engages both sociological and cognitive theories to uncover how processes of the mediatization of religion occur in the researched fan group. From a study of religions perspective, Lied lends a critical but constructive and pertinent eye to the theory of the mediatization of religion, based on her own work on religion and popular culture in Norway. Lied's keen analysis focuses in particular on the notion of religion entailed by Hjarvard's mediatization theory. Lied points out that Hjarvard's theory is biased towards an imagined traditional Protestant institutionalized form of religiosity and not towards grasping the significantly broader phenomenon of religion. Lied concludes that mediatization theory is certainly useful, even if its scope is limited to the Northern European context. Combining insights from cultural and cognitive studies of religion, Lied finally (albeit briefly) advocates a much broader view of religion as a varied cultural phenomenon that interacts with media in varying ways.

The cooperation of Lövheim and Hjarvard as well as their work of bringing and thinking together the fields of religious studies and media studies is both welcome and important. However, the book's strengths also speak clearly of its 'biases'. Among these are the somewhat narrow (or discipline / field specific) understandings of the key concepts of 'media' (here biased towards modern mass, digital, and social media) and 'religion' (here biased towards the organized Lutheran churches); the empirical slant of mediatization theory towards Northern Europe; and perhaps a bias within the general field of religion, media, and culture towards the West in general and towards British sociologies of secularization in particular. The concept of 'lived religion' (cf. Meredith McGuire, R.A. Orsi) is not used in this collection of papers, although it seems to this reviewer that it could be a valuable discussion partner in this field. Several of the contributors discuss these biases openly and fruitfully (for instance, professors Lied and Lövheim in their very good articles). The dialogue between media scholars and scholars of the sociology and history of religions, to which this volume bears witness, certainly provides important qualifications of and nuances to the mediatization thesis — including promoting a greater emphasis on the agency of actors and seeing the interaction between media and religion as multidirectional rather than as a unilateral process from 'media' to 'religion'. However, in this reviewer's mind, it is still an important theoretical point to make – at least from a general study of religion or cul-

tural studies perspective – that religion as a cultural phenomenon has always depended on ‘media’, leading to interesting effects on religion as a social practice, just as particular media have been, and are still, strongly conditioned by particular contexts of use (as also noted by Lied). Further work is needed to contextualize, cross-culturally and historically, the concepts of ‘media’, ‘mediation’, and ‘religion’, and it would be excellent to see such work include Nordic case studies as an extension of the stimulating work presented in this book. This book does not directly engage with the currently booming fields of aesthetics of religion and material religion within the general study of religion and the anthropology of religion. These fields theorize and discuss the concepts of ‘media’ and religion as ‘mediatized’, cross-culturally and in the long history of religions worldwide (e.g., work by Birgit Meyer and David Morgan, Manuel Vasquez, etc.). The editors do, however, briefly point to these cognate fields (p. 11). A deeper conversation with these fields in the future would be an interesting development. This does not, however, change the fact that Hjarvard and Lövheim’s edited book offers a series of pertinent and worthwhile empirical case studies as well as many fruitful insights into the changing interactions between modern mass and digital media and religion in the Nordic context.

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