Journal of Religion, Media & Digital Culture (JRMDC)

<http://jrmdc.com>

Kennet Granholm, Marcus Moberg, and Sofia Sjö (eds.),
Religion, Media and Social Change

(Abingdon: Routledge, 2015.) 214pp. Hardback: \$140
 ISBN: 978-0-415-74282-5

<http://www.routledge.com/books/details/9780415742825/>

Reviewer: Giulia Evolvi, University of Colorado at Boulder

giuliaevolvi@gmail.com

The book aims at exploring the interplay between media, religion, and mass-mediated pop culture in order to understand religious and social change in the Western world. The work of Granholm, Moberg, and Sjö is situated in an academic trend that, over the last two decades, has engaged in a critical re-thinking of secularization. As pointed out in the introduction:

The sociological study of religion currently finds itself in a transitory phase marked by the rethinking and abandonment of early monolithic secularization theories coupled with a growing need for novel perspectives and further theoretical innovation in order to make sense of the changing nature of religious life in the Western world, as well as beyond it (p.3-4).

The book describes changes in contemporary religiosity and takes into account phenomena such as globalization, technological development, neoliberalism, and consumerism. Gender, power, hierarchies, and authorities are put in dialectical relationship to account for theoretical models that go beyond the secularization theory; in doing so, the volume challenges traditional sociological views. The volume mainly addresses scholars in the field of sociology of religion, “where the bulk of all theorizing on religious change has been developed and still takes place” (p.7). Granholm, Moberg, and Sjö discuss issues of privatization and individualization in the context of religious change, drawing from the pivotal work of Casanova (*Public Religions in the Modern World*, University of Chicago Press, 1994).

From the introduction, the reader might speculate that the volume gives little contribution to an existing corpus of literature – represented, for example, by Talal Asad (2003), Christian Smith (2007), Charles Taylor (2007), Craig Calhoun et al. (2011), and Philip Gorski (2012), authors who challenged the secularization thesis by offering examples of religious persistence in late modernity. However, *Religion, Media and Social Change* makes an important contribution to the sociology of religion by introducing a media perspective and focusing on the unexplored angle of mass-mediated pop culture. The volume is therefore interdisciplinary in reconciling sociological perspectives with the field of religion and media, drawing from the work of scholars such as Stewart Hoover (2006).

This book benefits from strong contributions that explore various aspects of religious change, and represents an important resource in the field of religion and media for three different reasons. First of all, the volume explores both traditional and new media, presenting the mediation of religion as a historical continuum rather than relying on a sharp separation between the pre-digital and the Internet age. The work of Peter Horsfield, which explores the use of Latin and Vernacular in medieval Christianity, marks the relevance of a historical perspective for the field. The contribution of Tim Hutchings, focusing on the Bible App, explores the continuous renegotiation of practices and meanings that occur with the advance of digital technologies.

Second, the book analyzes various forms of religiosity, without limiting itself to the Judeo-Christian tradition. Siobhan Holohan, for example, focuses on the depiction of Muslims in Britain, exploring important contemporary issues such as migration and multiculturalism. Innovative contributions are found in the chapters of Teemu Taira, who analyzes atheism, Titus Hjelm, who

explores Satanism in popular culture, and Carole Cusak, who focuses on new religious movements. These perspective add an interesting angle to the study of religious change, which too often takes into account established religions rather than non-mainstream movements or atheism.

Third, the volume advocates for a study of religious change that includes both theoretical approaches and empirical case studies. The first section of the book is dedicated to the discussion of the current theories of religion in Western society, with a brilliant contribution from David Herbert introducing the concept of religious re-publicization. While few criticisms can be made, it nevertheless would have been beneficial to have more case studies illustrating methodological approaches to textual and audience analysis; in this way, the book would have better linked theory and empirical research.

The volume is limited to the study of religious change in the UK and Northern Europe, with few exceptions. While this is not a weakness *per se*, the book could have been improved by a more detailed discussion of the socio-religious context and the theories that inform the study of the sociology of religion in the region. Furthermore, various chapters draw on the theoretical tradition of “mediatization” and the work of Stig Hjarvard and Mia Lovheim. Addressing more specifically the characteristics of the mediatization tradition and its difference from that of mediation would have given the book more chances to address a media studies audience. While the majority of the contributors are scholars in the field of religious studies, the interdisciplinary aim of the book makes it compelling to satisfactorily address media theories as well.

In conclusion, “Religion, Media and Social Change” represents a complete and interesting work that fills gaps in the existing field of sociology of religion by bringing non-conventional perspectives into conversation with existing theoretical approaches. It challenges the secularization thesis taking into account the critical rethinking of scholars in the field; furthermore, it offers reflections to understand the complexity of contemporary religious change in Western countries. The volume is therefore important for its contributions to the creation of theoretical frameworks that could enrich the field of religion and media.