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Primary religious socialization agents and young adults' understanding of religion: connections and disconnections

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ABSTRACT

A recurrent critique towards socialization theory is its emphasis on stability and disregard for change. Some case studies in the YARG project, particularly that of Ghana, do indeed point to the central role and influence that young adults ascribe to their primary socialization agents. In these contexts, personal religiosity is described as being in accordance with the values of parents and family, making religious transmission from one generation to another appear like a seamless affair. However, data from these contexts also point to how secondary socialization agents, such as peers, media and secular education, play a central role for how young adults maintain their personal religiosity. The aim of this paper is to analyze how young adults in Ghana, India and Poland describe the role of primary socialization agents on their religiosity, but also, to critically discern this influence as against that of secondary socialization agents. This article builds on both survey and interview data.

KEYWORDS

Religious socialization; primary socialization; secondary socialization; young adults; emerging adulthood; religious transmission; self-socialization; family

Introduction

Within any conceptual understanding of socialization, the presence of adult agency and agents is fundamentally assumed. Desmond, Morgan, and Kikuchi (2010, 250), quoting Spilka et al., define socialization as 'the process by which a culture (usually through its primary agents, such as parents) encourages individuals to accept beliefs and behaviors that are normative and expected within the culture.' These primary agents in the socialization process are depicted as having the capability to influence the individual towards desired beliefs, norms and values. Socialization theory, therefore, largely builds on the notion that older generations and adults of a society are interested in introducing younger generations to their beliefs, values and ways of conceiving reality, and that they put in place mechanisms to achieving this end. The religious socialization of children, pre-configured on the predominant theory of socialization, is largely defined as the transmission of religious beliefs and tradition from adult socializers, with an especially 'high

value on the role of parents in the process of religious socialisation' (Lövheim 2012, 151). It is against this theoretical framework that religious socialization has been argued as weakening in modern times during emerging adulthood, a trend indicated by a non-conformity to religious beliefs. This trend has been suggested as being inter-generational (Arnett and Jensen 2002; Groen and Vermeer 2013). It is even suggested that the emphasis by contemporary parents on their children's development as independent and autonomous individuals, may further cause religious socialization to fail, even if these parents desire to transmit their faith (Groen and Vermeer 2013).

This view of the process of religious socialization as if it was rigid and impervious to change has been critiqued as one-sided for not giving room to the interactivity between the socializer and the socialized or to the self-socialization capabilities of the socialized (Sherkat 2003; Kühle 2012). Setting out from the literature on socialization, Klingenberg and Sjö (2019), in the introduction to this journal issue, offer a three-point critique to this parent-focused, seemingly one way dyad conceptualization of socialization. They discuss weaknesses in socialization theory, such as the depicting of socialization as if it were a straightforward and stable process; the understanding of children and youth as objects of socialization instead of active agents; and the suggestion within socialization theories that the attitudes and behaviors of young adults are measured against established, transmitted and controlled norms (cf. Lövheim 2012). Klingenberg and Sjö (2019) do not downplay the centrality of parents and family in the religious socialization of younger generations. They do not emphasize a conceptualization of socialization as an overt process where socialization is depicted as having to do with explanations pertaining to the supernatural or to certain behaviors as overt transmission of religious beliefs, norms and values by parents, families and religious communities. Rather, they offer a conceptualization of socialization as a reciprocal process with some form of agency and active contribution of the person being socialized. As suggested by Lövheim (2012, 151) 'the life situation of young people today calls for a rethinking of these premises.'

In light of these theoretical and conceptual debates on religious socialization, we examine in this article religious socialization among young adults from three contexts: Ghana, India and Poland. In these contexts, religious socialization is often conceived of as personal religiosity being in accordance with the values and beliefs of parents and family, making religious transmission from one generation to another appear like a seamless affair. In these contexts, particularly Ghana, young adults often ascribe a central role and influence to primary socialization agents, usually parents, with references to the role of the family as essential. However, data from these contexts also point to how secondary socialization agents, such as religious groups/communities, peers, media and secular education, play a central role for how young adults maintain their personal religiosity through self-socialization.

As young adults are at an important stage of establishing a religious identity, which they will maintain throughout adult life (Park and Ecklund 2007), the young adults in these contexts provide an excellent resource for examining religious socialization. Not only are they located in the stage and process of making their own decisions on religiosity and religious identity; they are also placed among diverse agents of religio-social influence (socialization). We aim, specifically, to explore the essential socialization agents that are available to young adults in forming their views and beliefs in these three countries. We also aim to see how the young adults discuss the relevance and

importance of other socialization agents they identified in relation to these essential agents. The overarching aim is to underscore how the changing context of young adults' experiences of the world requires highlighting the role of reciprocity as central to any religious socialization. Furthermore, the aim is to illustrate how diverse agents, including the self, are an inherent characteristic of the process of socialization of young people, and how socialization is thus not a stable and rigid one-way dyad, controlled by adult socializers (see Arnett and Jensen 2002; Park and Ecklund 2007; Kühle 2012; Lövheim 2012; Moberg and Sjö 2015; Klingenberg and Sjö 2019). The following questions therefore become pertinent: (i) which are the essential socialization agents that young adults in these contexts identify as forming their religious life-views and beliefs; (ii) how are these socialization agents discussed in relation to each other; and (iii) how do young adults' discussions of personal choice and autonomy on matters of religion relate to the discussion about religious socialization? These questions help clarify and contribute to the debate on the need to develop a more nuanced understanding of agency, especially that of primary agency, within the context of the socialization debate.

Religious socialization and young adults in contemporary society

Religious socialization, according to Sherkat (2003, 151) is 'an interactive process through which social agents influence individuals' religious beliefs and understanding' and 'is the process through which people come to hold religious preferences' (Sherkat 2003, 152). Hunt (2015, 12) sees it as a process 'by which fresh generations gradually attain the religious values, beliefs and conceptions of preceding generations.' Religiosity or religiousness itself is defined as 'the importance that religion plays in a person's life and this has multiple dimensions, which include beliefs and practices' (Bao et al. 1999, 370). It has to do with 'a manifestation of conforming and of internalised traditional behaviours and attitudes' (Aron, Shamai, and Ilatov 2008, 379).

Religious socialization, as earlier noted, has been conceived of as the transmission of religious values, norms and beliefs, usually by parents and adult families, trans-generationally. There are also religious groups and schools, which are places 'characterized primarily (but not only) by the presence of adult socialisers aiming to transmit religious content to the new generations' (Kühle 2012, 119). However, families are identified as primary as compared to the individuals' religious groups, which are categorized as secondary socializers. Research in religious socialization is replete with the acknowledgement of families, especially parents, as the primary socializers of young adults (Bao et al. 1999; Arnett and Jensen 2002; Sherkat 2003; Park and Ecklund 2007; Aron, Shamai and Ilatov 2008; Milevsky, Szuchman, and Milevsky 2008; Groen and Vermeer 2013; Maliepaard and Marcel 2013). Parents are identified as essential in the process of this 'intergenerational transmission of religious beliefs and practices' (Bao et al. 1999, 362), as they desire to transmit their religious commitments to their children (Groen and Vermeer 2013). This modeling of religious socialization as transmission and continuity of parental religiousness has been rife in religious socialization theory to the extent that 'the model of a transmission of religious traditions from parents to children often assumes command of the concept of socialization' (Kühle 2012, 116).

Religious socialization researchers, using this model of socialization as transmission, therefore, largely focus their research on accounting for either the weakening or positive

and significant correlation of religiosity among younger generations when compared with their parent's or previous generations' religiosity and beliefs. While some researches on religious socialization continue to indicate a significant and positive correlations between inherited childhood religion and that of emerging adulthood (Park and Ecklund 2007; Milevsky, Szuchman, and Milevsky 2008), others suggest that childhood socialization has limited effects on emerging adulthood which serves as a moment of decline in religiousness – at least in terms of religious participation (Arnett and Jensen 2002; Groen and Vermeer 2013). This suggestion is grounded in the no or weak correlations between childhood religious socialization and that of young adulthood which shows a continuous disconnection and disaffiliation with primary socialized notions of religiosity and religious beliefs (Arnett and Jensen 2002; Groen and Vermeer 2013). This religious decline in young adulthood, at least in the West where most research has been carried out, is largely generational, whereby each birth cohort participates less and less in religion and religious communities than the ones preceding them (Groen and Vermeer 2013). This development, Collet-Sabe (2007) defines as the crisis in religious socialization.

It is suggested that the quality of religious transmission and especially that of parenting goals and values is crucial to the process of religious socialization of newer generations. This determines the lasting effects of religious socialization and whether young adults will conform to or disaffiliate with the religiousness transmitted. Groen and Vermeer (2013), for instance, see a probable cause of religious disaffiliation in the Netherlands as the result of the failure of parents to pass on their religious commitments to their offspring. Where parents appreciate the values of individual and personal autonomy and a balanced view of live more than religious conformity, this weakens the tendency of parents to transmit their faith (Groen and Vermeer 2013). Arnett and Jensen (2002) have identified the desire for individuality as a strong factor in the weak correlation between childhood religious socialization and the religious beliefs of emerging adulthood. This is described as a result of the desire of young adults to be autonomous as 'the emerging adult expressed a high value on thinking for themselves with regard to religious questions and on forming a unique set of religious beliefs rather than accepting a ready-made dogma' (Arnett and Jensen 2002, 459). This they do by forming sets of beliefs during young adulthood that are independent of the religious socialization given to them by their parents and family (Arnett and Jensen 2002). This gradually shows in generational difference (or even conflicts) in religiosity, usually with regard to conformity and participation, with a demonstrable shift towards non-conformity, non-participation and/or disaffiliation.

In recent years, however, the question whether conceiving religious socialization as the overt transmission of beliefs from parents to children or from families to their offspring reflects the reality, or is even desirable, has become central (Kühle 2012). This is especially so in a contemporary society where young adults interact with diverse socialization agents; where the range of socializers extend beyond adult and families towards a diversity of sources of (secondary) socialization, especially peers and the media (Kühle 2012). These sources offer the emerging adult the opportunity to evaluate varied information in the light of inherited beliefs, values and norms towards self-socialization, and probably some level of disconnections with inherited beliefs and values. Once children leave home, the strength of family socialization weakens and socialization outside the family

increases as the young adult increasingly interacts with and is exposed to diverse influences from peers, school and popular culture (Arnett and Jensen 2002). This is the period in the lives of young adults when, irrespective of how optimal and effective primary religious socialization and/or transmission was, they try to mold their religious identity independently of their parents by picking and choosing ideas they would trust in forming their unique set of religious views and convictions (Arnett and Jensen 2002).

Consequently, in the context of the contemporary society within parental socialization appears to inter-weave and interact with many other sources of socialization (Kühle 2012) 'a focus on parent-child transmission will only give us a very limited picture of what is going on' (Kühle 2012, 114–15). Evidently, it is this narrow emphasis on religious transmission that has been fundamental in claims that religious socialization seems to be failing in contemporary societies. Religious socialization goes beyond the family to other diverse adult agents of adult socialization that influence individual religiosity (Arnett and Jensen 2002; Park and Ecklund 2007), and in the lives of young adults, the importance of peers and their acceptance become central (Aron, Shamai, and Ilatov 2008). Theorising socialization beyond parents and families does not mean an entire break with or rejection of adult family socializers; neither does it render them unimportant in the religious socialization process (Kühle 2012). While parent (and family) religiosity is still an important predictor of religiosity, it is worth noting that 'religious socialization by parents never stands alone, but always happens in interactions with other kinds of socialization' (Kühle 2012, 122). Sherkat (2003) suggests that agents of socialization have the preponderance to influence individuals only if the source is a trusted and valued connection. He writes, 'individuals have considerable agency to reject socialization pressure, and to choose which connections guide religious preferences' (Sherkat 2003, 151). Consequently, simply depicting a 'generation gap' as accounting for adolescents' and emerging adults' conformity or not with adult socialized beliefs and norms seems weakened in light of socialization research (Aron, Shamai, and Ilatov 2008). What must be understood in the relationship between childhood religious socialization agents and religiosity at young adulthood is that 'the emphasis may have changed from parents as socializers to self-socialization' (Kühle 2012, 123).

The study contexts

The three cases and/or countries involved in this article do not only represent different geo-political and cultural contexts, but also different types of societies in terms of secularism and the role of religion. This is typified by the extent to which religious institutions are able to socialize younger generation through religious transmission and the structures and institutions available to facilitate such transmissions. However, as depicted in this article, these three contexts seem to reflect a certain trend of religiosity and religious socialization among their emerging young adults.

Ghana is a religiously active terrain with features of religiosity conspicuous everywhere (for a brief overview of religion in Ghana see for instance Osafo et al. 2014). This depicts Ghana as country where 'religious activity [...] is vibrant, with diverse forms of religious expression' (Golo and Yaro 2013, 285). The vibrant and active religious terrain of Ghana is supported by data from the 2012 Census and Living Standards Survey carried out by the Ghana Statistical Service (GSS 2012) which reports high claims to religious affiliation and

participation in Ghana. According to the GSS (2012) Christianity and Islam are the most prominent religions with about 71.2% affiliated to Christianity and 17.6% to Islam. Although there is a paucity of data on religious socialization in Ghana, the general perception is that, except in the case of specific social or religious skills and trade that may require strictly the father, mother or a specialist, the entire community is responsible for the socialization of the child into the communities' values and norms. This includes religious communities, with the primary responsibilities being placed on parents, immediate care-givers or guardians and secondary responsibilities on religious communities which provide the framework for socialization on many aspects of lived reality. As we shall see, this is attested by the YARG data (see also Osafo et al. 2014).

While there are some studies on religious socialization among Indians in the West (see e.g., Naidoo 1980; Wakil, Siddique, and Wakil 1981; Park and Ecklund 2007), religious socialization in India itself is an understudied field (see Anthony, Hermans, and Sterkens 2007 for an exception). The data from India was gathered in the state of West Bengal. Having more than 91 million inhabitants (as of 2011), West Bengal is one of the most populous states of India. While Hindus at 70.5% make up the majority in the state, according to the latest Census of India (2011), Muslims comprise 27% of the population, making them a large minority. Among the smaller religious minorities, Christians (0.72%) and Buddhists (0.31%) are the most noteworthy. The capital of West Bengal is Kolkata (Calcutta), often called (particularly by its inhabitants) the cultural capital of India. Nevertheless, West Bengal is predominantly an agricultural economy.

In the case of Poland, it important to underscore that during the last several decades, the Polish society has undergone profound transformations. Major societal, political and economic changes took place after 1989, when the communist regime collapsed and the systemic transformation began. The process of modernization has influenced not only the structure of Polish society but also value orientation and religiosity. Since the Second World War, Poland has been a religiously very homogenous state, with Roman Catholicism as the main religion – today around 90% of the population are Roman Catholics. Religious minorities thus constitute but a small minority of the population. Although declared religiousness remained relatively stable for several decades, there has recently been a decline in religious attendance and a growing proportion of people who declare themselves as partial or complete nonbelievers (Public Opinion Research Center CBOS 2015). The slow but steady decline in major indicators of religiosity in Poland is accompanied by the privatization of faith (Ramet 2014, 42).

Method and data

The research findings presented in this article are based on data collected as part of the project Young Adults and Religion in Global Perspective (YARG, 2015–2018), which was a cross-cultural, comparative and mixed-method study into the religious subjectivities and values of young adults, using university students in 13 countries: Canada, China, Ghana, Finland, India, Israel, Japan, Peru, Poland, Russia, Sweden, Turkey and the USA.¹ The YARG data include a survey, which included the Portrait Values Questionnaire

¹YARG was an Åbo Akademi University Centre of Excellence 2015–2018 and funded by the Academy of Finland 2015–2019 (no. 288730).

(PVQ), that was filled in by a total of 4964 students. The research design also allowed the use of the Faith-Q Sort (FQS), which is a new instrument for assessing subjective world-views developed by David Wulff. In total, 562 FQS interviews and subsequent semi-structured interviews were carried out (for more on this project, see Klingenberg and Sjö 2019). The Ghanaian data was collected at a large university in the capital, Accra, while the Polish data was collected at a university in the city of Poznan. In the case of India, in order to capture the diversity of West Bengal, the data was collected at three universities of West Bengal: one in metropolitan Kolkata, another in semi-urban Nadia and the last one in rural Malda. While YARG was a mixed-method study, this article mainly focuses on data from the qualitative interviews gathered in the project.

From the rather extensive YARG survey, we focus on four questions (see Table 1). Two are meant to measure formal and affective religious belonging: ‘Do you consider yourself as belonging to one or more religious groups, communities or traditions?’ and ‘Whether or not you belong to any, are there religious, spiritual or philosophical communities, traditions or practices that you feel close to?’ The first of the second set of two questions is intended to measure self-reported religiosity: ‘Regardless of whether you consider yourself as belonging or close to a particular religious group, community, or tradition, how religious would you say you are?’ and the second the perceived religiosity of the family: ‘How religious would you say the family you grew up in was?’ The last two questions were measured on a Likert scale of 0–10 (with 0 being not religious at all to 10 being very religious).

Ghana rates very high on the first of these questions, which is unsurprising when one considers the high rate of religious affiliation reported by the GSS (2012). Elsewhere in the survey, when questioned on how often they engaged in private religious activities such as prayer and meditation, no less than 82.4% of the sample from Ghana reported doing so on a daily basis and only 1.1% not at all. More surprising, however, is the low self-declarations of belonging in both India and Poland. The latest Census of India (from 2011) reports that 97% of the populations of West Bengal (where the YARG survey was collected) is either Hindu or Muslim. In Poland, again, Public Opinion Research Center CBOS (2015) indicate that around 92% of the Polish population belongs to the Roman Catholic Church. It is unclear what these large differences are caused by. In the case of Poland, in particular, other studies confirm a decrease of religiosity among young people. However, in the Indian case, there may be other factors at work at well, as when subsequently interviewed, almost all of the persons who had claimed no religious belonging self-identified as Hindu, Muslim or Buddhist (see also Broo, Kheir, and Sarkar 2019).

The second set of questions (see Table 2) further confirmed the high religiosity among the sample from Ghana, but it also showed that both the Indian and Polish samples rate

Table 1. Formal and affective belonging.

	Do you consider yourself as belonging to one or more religious groups, communities or traditions?	Whether or not you belong to any, are there religious, spiritual or philosophical communities, traditions or practices that you feel close to?
Ghana (<i>N</i> = 420)	65.24%	43.81%
India (<i>N</i> = 298)	38.9%	17.5%
Poland (<i>N</i> = 299)	33.4%	12.7%

Table 2. Personal and family religiosity.

	B10: Regardless of whether you consider yourself as belonging or close to a particular religious group, community, or tradition, how religious would you say you are?	B11: How religious would you say the family you grew up in was?	Difference B11-B10
Ghana (<i>N</i> = 420)	6.78	7.81	-1.03
India (<i>N</i> = 298)	4.53	6.21	-1.68
Poland (<i>N</i> = 299)	4.50	6.38	-1.88
YARG total (<i>N</i> = 4911)	3.93	4.99	-1.06

their own and their families religiosity higher than the mean of the global YARG sample. Interestingly, and confirming the picture given by the previous table, the Polish sample shows the highest inter-generational decrease of religion (1.88 scale points) here. Again, while Ghana shows the highest self-representation of both personal religiosity and religiosity of the parents, it also shows the least decrease between the generations.

The above survey data is complemented by extracts from in-depth interviews conducted with some of the survey respondents (*N* = 40, 36 and 43 for Ghana, India and Poland, respectively), which were done to further probe the participants' religiosity and the contextual determinants of their religiosity, including agents of socialization. We want to emphasize that in these three contexts when reference is made to family, we are not referring to the family in the narrow sense of 'father' and 'mother'. Confirming the assertion by Park and Ecklund (2007) that family in certain contexts extend beyond parents, we show that family in the three study contexts extend beyond parents to a constellation of broader and extended family relationships, including uncles, aunts, cousins, grand-parents and so on.

Primary religious socializers and young adults religiosity

As earlier hinted at, the three case studies, Ghana, India and Poland, show the centrality of the (religious) family in the religious socialization of the young adults interviewed. Nonetheless, they are also contexts where young adults are interacting with other secondary socialization agents and are therefore constantly negotiating with information and new knowledge of religious relevance. These provide the young adults the opportunities for the affirmation of inherited beliefs and constructing religious identity beyond their primary religious socialization. In the following pages, we present what the young adults surveyed in Ghana, India and Poland say about their religiosity and the importance of primary adult socializers in their religious socialization.

Ghana

Considering the high percentage of religiosity reported in Ghana and coupled with a social structure which requires parents and other adults to be responsible for the socialization of children, the transmission of ideas and knowledge about religion would be expected to be

central in the socialization of children and young adults. This is corroborated by a majority of the young adults surveyed for this study, whereby primary religious socialization, especially by strict and devout parents, is central in these young adults' understanding of religion and religious values. It is unsurprising, therefore, that responding to one of the survey items regarding the sources that young adults rely on for their guidance as they live their lives and make decisions, no less than 90.6% chose 'family' – generally pointing to the influence of primary socialization agents. Regarding parents in particular, this is evident in the response of a Ghanaian young adult to a question whether the religious views he holds about life is reflective of his background socialization. He responded:

Yes! Yes, because looking at my background, whilst we were growing up our parents taught us to be and to do things that will please God. Not to do things that will make God bring um, confusions and curses on us. So had it not been for that background or knowledge I would have rather been probably someone who would have been at the other side of the issue probably doing drugs, smoking – but since I was brought up from a Christian home, I think it has had influence on my life and it has made me who I am today. (YGHFB127P)

A Muslim young adult also noted:

I come from a very religious Muslim background and for instance, my dad influences me religiously because he wouldn't want to see me without my hair been covered. – Yeah, my dad doesn't want to see me without my hair been covered. Even if you are at home he wants you to cover your hair. He sees that to be very vital as a Muslim. (YGHFB128P)

The above response depicts a strict and religiously devout father eager of overt transmission and conformity to Islamic values and norms. The above respondent, responding to the question whether this socialization plays any role in shaping her life as a Muslim, noted:

Yeah, I think it does a lot because it gives me my own identity as a Muslim and being Muslim maybe at home his friends or workers will come and visit and you are not been expected to be seen undressed or improperly dressed. You have to cover. (YGHFB128P)

A young woman who described her mother as a Pentecostal and her father as a Roman Catholic who insists on church attendance, even when he himself does not have the opportunity to attend church, had the following to say in response to the question whether she considers the views she has about the world a result of her religious background and upbringing:

Yeah. I believe the person I am today really stems from my background. As for that there is no doubt about it. My background led to the views I have which has shaped and molded me to be who I am today. Mhmm, so I believe that is what happened, my background because most of things I said stems from my parents, going to church, Sunday school here and there and the things they taught me there really molded me. My convictions about things, views about life in general. (YGHFB318)

Responding further to whether her primary religious socialization has some lasting influence and/or effect on the life choices she makes in her life now, she said:

It has influenced my life as a person because through that I've gone to church and then read the bible and then I have gotten some convictions that – my stands on sexuality like this [referring to a question earlier]. If it hasn't been the Christian background that I had, am

sure that I would have been any other neutral person in this world now and when they bring out strong views as to – and they are convincing – as to why they should be either lesbians or bisexuals, I would have even caved in, because, why not? Their views are true. But because of what I've learnt from the bible – because of the background I had, I believe that is all sinful because it is like if you have a good foundation that's how it all starts. – I don't know if you remember. I said sometimes when I am making a major decision I ask myself; "what is the bible saying about this?" And the bible is the foundation of a Christian's life and it all started from my Sunday school, go to church, go and learn, going to SHS to learn all those things. So, yeah, it affects my major decision-making. (YGHFB318)

From the above, it is obvious that these young adults take recourse to primary socialization as that which shapes their life-views and the decisions they make. It is also clear that they largely consider what they have been socialized into by their adult family members as important for their lives. Conformity is to them a sign of belonging and identity. As the same person says:

And the community I grew up in – even though they had the traditional believers there with their small, small gods in the immediate environment, my auntie's friends and stuff, they were Christians so – and looking at the background I had and my auntie's believe in the Christian faith I didn't go the other way. I didn't go to the other faith. I still maintained the Christian beliefs. (YGHFB318)

In another vein, making reference to the earlier noted insistence or strictness of her religious parents towards her commitment to religious activities, she also noted:

He is not but that's – so they've really – because if he had been any other parents, he doesn't get the time to always go to church so he too wouldn't care whether you go to church or not. But he still insists that you go to church. As for my mother she has been going. Like one prayer to the other. All-night, today all-night, another time, so the foundation was there so they helped me. (YGHFB318)

The responses do not clearly highlight the importance of a particular gender when it comes to their parents or adult socializers. However, what can be gathered from some of the responses, like the ones above, is that religious socialization at home is largely an overt transmission of belief by devout parents/adult family caregivers. Young adults' religious belonging is thus largely determined or influenced by the belonging of their parents or adult family/caregivers, with fathers showing more imposition and strictness regarding the conformity of the young adult.

India

While the material from India can make no claim about describing anything else than the subjective experiences of those interviewed, it nevertheless presents a wealth of information about primary religious socialization that does not only correspond very well with the survey data presented above, but also presents important additional insights. The importance that the interviewees attach to their mothers; imposing fathers; relationships to religious and less religious fathers; and other primary socialization agents are central topics in the interviews.

In the Indian case, 81% chose 'family' as a source of guidance as they live their lives and make decisions. This is a slightly lower number than the total mean of 87%, but nevertheless high, and it is reflected in the interviews as well. Some interviewees (e.g., YINMS013,

YINSR092) mention both parents as their most important inspirations in life. Nevertheless, the parent most often mentioned is the mother (e.g., YINSR006, YINMS047, YINMS092). A female Muslim interviewee (YINMS004) spoke at length about the importance of her mother in her life, both when battling with negative feelings and thoughts, as when she noted: 'That time I talk more with my mother. Then a good feeling slowly takes over my mind', but also in practical matters such as education. Sometimes not only the influence of the mother but of a large matrilineal group is mentioned. Speaking about the customs of the Durga Puja festival, one Hindu female said:

For many years in our house, Ma Durga and goddess Kali are being worshiped. What is termed as everyday rituals are also being followed by us. It is kind of a heritage which has been passed on. I mean, my grandmother, my mother, me and my sister, we all follow this tradition and worship god. It's like family values and tradition. Today, there is Purnima Puja [full moon worship] at my relatives' place. It's like an entire thing actually. (YINSR052)

The relevance of important and imposing fathers is also noticeable in the socialization of the Indian young adults interviewed. Some interviewees, such as YINMS038, YINMS048, YINMS050, YINMS058, describe their fathers as their most important inspiration in life. Often, they link this to the sacrifices their fathers are perceived to have made. The theme of religiously strict parents sometimes emerges in the Indian findings too. One Muslim female respondent describes her father as a religious man, who does all the prayers and reads the Qur'an daily, but also as a rather strict disciplinarian, who tries to get the rest of the family to live up to his standards as well, albeit without much success. She noted:

As I said before that one of my brothers is in Dubai. He says that he goes to the Mosque, perform the daily prayers five times a day, but whenever he returns home he does not perform any of the rituals. My younger brother too reads the prayers in his hostel, but after coming back home, he does not. They take rest. [...] My father tries to make them understand but they are reluctant. (YINMS004)

The place of a religious mother and a less religious father in the religious socialization of the young adults is also noticeable. As we have seen above, the Indian respondents ranked their parents' religiosity significantly higher than their own. This is mirrored in the interviews, where many explicitly trace their own religiosity or lack thereof to the parents. In all the cases but two – YINSR008, YINSR064 – the mother is reported to be more religious than the father. One Buddhist female said:

I wouldn't say that I am an overly religious person but yes I am religious person to some extent. It mainly came from my mother, she is very religious and spiritual. When it comes to religion, she is very strict about it and maybe it is because of her socialization that I believe in god and am religious toward him. (YINSR006).

Asked whether that father is not that religious, she noted:

No he is, he is. My whole family is, but my mom is overly religious [LG]! She is over the top. (YINSR006)

Sometimes the more religious mother will influence the father as well. As one Hindu female respondent said,

No, my father is not a religious person, he doesn't pray or anything, but since my mom is so much into [goddess] Adya Ma, my father believes in her but doesn't pray or anything. He accompanies her to religious places but doesn't pray or follow. (YINSR071)

Growing up with such a religious mother and non-religious father can lead to a complex religious identity, as in the case of the above interviewee who considered herself to be located somewhere in between them.

I think I am balanced, the reason being my father is not at all a religious person. He does not believe in god at all. He does not pray or do such stuffs. On the other hand, my mom is [...] a highly religious person. While visiting a temple, tears roll down her eyes, she is very much emotional. So I find myself balanced, obviously I believe in god, I do pray every day, but I do not really visit religious places. [...] What I do is that if there is a religious gathering in the family I try to attend it. Again that is not compulsory, if I feel like I do. My parents never pressure me for anything but every day personally I pray to god before I go to bed and before leaving the house. This is what I do on a daily basis. So I think I am moderately religious. (YINSR071)

The role of other primary socialization agents is also noticeable in the lives of interviewees. One Muslim female respondent (YINMS001) has lived almost all her life with a maternal uncle, following the divorce of her parents and her mother's death. Similarly, in a society where day-care services are rare, divorce coupled with the need for her mother to work outside of the home has led another Hindu female respondent (YINSR057) to be brought up by her maternal grandparents, while another (YINSR070) speaks at length about the loving way in which her paternal grandparents brought her up.

Furthermore, the role of grandparents can be seen in another case, where a Hindu interviewee (YINMS038) describes her relationship to her religious teacher (guru) at length, mentioning how she was initiated with a mantra already as a child and how the mantra has cured her from illness and given her strength. The guru has also helped her in her studies and even in reconciling her parents to her boyfriend.

Poland

In the case of Poland, the role of family religious socialization can be studied by comparing self-declarations of religiosity with how the respondents perceive the religiosity of their families of origin. As for the vast majority of respondents in Poland (85%), the family is an important agency influencing their ways of living and decision-making and one could thus predict its important role in religious transmission. However, the YARG data shows that, generally, young adults are less religious than the families within which they were brought up. While only one respondent described the family as completely non-religious, 11% of respondents declared themselves to be 'not at all religious'. In comparison to the religiosity of their families, young adults less frequently describe themselves as very religious.

However, the interviews confirm the theory that the family plays a central role in the religious socialization of young adults. Both believers and non-believers emphasize the impact of their family religiosity on their understanding of religion and current attitudes towards religious beliefs and practices. The main agents of religious socialization are parents and grandparents (for more on grandparents see Vrubevskaya, Moberg, and Sztajer 2019). Here are two examples of the influence of grandparents:

Since I was little, grandma and grandpa told me: God exists and – I somehow adopted it. So when I read about other religions I think that I couldn't manage – uhhh to change it into a different religion. (YPLSS104PT)

Another interviewee, when questioned about the importance of religion in his life generally, and his daily life, noted:

Very important. I mean, well – I do not know how – if I had to choose among three most important things, I would say religion is my first priority. But I learned many things in my family home because religion has always been my first priority. I was brought up in such a way – that – I mean, my grandma very often says that if your relation with God is okay, then everything will be okay. What is most important is that I have good relations; and thanks to that my future life will be easier. One can be more attentive, harmonious and thus one's life is not entangled and confused. So yes – well, I learned it at home and I try to practice it. (YPLSS122PT)

Religious upbringing in the Catholic family and a cultural environment dominated by the Catholic tradition can be so strong that young people take this tradition for granted and are not able to become aware of possible alternatives. For instance, one interviewee noted:

After all, I was brought up as a Catholic. My parents and a priest at school told me that it was as it was. How could I know that it was not? Of course. But when one starts to think about it, one starts to create one's own worldview. And then everything changes. (YPLSS308PT)

He admitted that:

It did not occur to me that one can have a religion other the one which surrounded me. Since all people had that religion, I should also have the same. When I think about it today, I find childish thinking terrible. (YPLSS308PT)

Religious transmission in Poland has been under significant influence of confessional religious education in schools. In some cases, religious instruction strengthens religiosity acquired through family education and provides a new understanding of religion, while in others it provokes a critical reaction toward the religious tradition. When asked about her experience with religious instruction in school, one of the participants indicated that, coming from the Sub-Carpathian region, she attended religious instruction lessons all the time, as there was no alternative (YPLSS308PT).

When asked how it was to attend religious instruction lessons at school while having other beliefs, the interviewee said:

I was just learning about other people's beliefs and – I would say that I assessed them – I took note of them. For example, when I was twelve years old, I argued with a priest. And then, though it was in disagreement with my tendency to educate other people – I admit that we had a priest in a high school who was a kind person and I could not talk to him in such a way; I realized that he would be hurt {LG}, so I was not active and did not attack him. (YPLSS308PT)

What becomes clear from the above is that young adults from the Catholic dominant Poland are primarily socialized towards accepting the religious norms and values by adult socializers who extend beyond parents to other family members such as grandmas and grandpas. By influencing younger adults to understand and accept the centrality of religion in their lives, these individuals become part of an overt transmission of and

conformity to inherited religious norms and values. In some cases the confessional education system plays similar roles.

Socialization beyond primary socializers: self-socialization

Do the young adults interviewed necessarily conform to the inherited and/or socialized religiosities of their families, parents and other primary socialization agents? In other words, do adult socializers always succeed in the overt transmission of their religious beliefs, norms and values? In the three cases researched in this article, it became evident that while primary socializers have been important and influential in the interviewees' religiosity, the participants also make reference to the importance of secondary socialization agents, such as peers, media and secular education and to the central role these agents play in how the participants maintain their personal religiosity through processes of self-socialization.

Ghana

Recurring significantly also in the survey data, with regard to the options that the young adults resort for their decision and guidance in life, are what they identified as 'own intuition or feelings' (61.14%) and 'own reason and judgment' (68.84%). In addition, quite a significant number indicated the importance of social media (26.15%). This suggests that beyond primary socialization, especially parents, and the centrality of adult socializers in families and religious groups, there are other socialization agents that young adults interact with; and which influence the young adults in their decisions, values and norms with regard to religion – religiosity. One respondent had this to say about how she self-socializes:

I guess, when I was growing up most of the things I believed in were the result of what I have learnt from my family and then from my immediate environment and then the people I used to interact with. But as I grew up, my circle grew bigger and then I observed people and I observed a lot of things in society. So those are the things that have influence my present convictions now. (FGHFB035P)

When requested to elaborate on her disassociation with the idea of centering his or her life on a religious or spiritual quest, another respondent, who identifies herself as a church-attending Pentecostal Christian and who was introduced into the church by the parents, noted:

I don't think I'm obliged to do that. I mean there are other things to live for rather than focusing solely on a quest for the spiritual. I mean, yes, so I don't – I don't agree with that. (YGHBG018P)

The above respondent rated the religiosity of the family as 8 and that of herself as 4 on a Likert scale of 0–10. This position indicates a sharp and surprising decline in an evangelical Christian religiosity and a probable disconnection with primary inherited religiosity. She explained that, however, it should not be construed as not at all taking interest in spiritual matters; she does to some extent inasmuch as there is a spiritual aspect to the world. The respondent, when asked whether she considered herself expressing the views of her church submitted:

I hold my views based on my own personal convictions. Well some of the views – I hold might be from the church; but mostly I just hold my personal convictions not more of the church. (YGHBG018P)

When questioned as to where she got her views from, she noted:

My environment, the way things are going and then I take inspiration from that too and you know to form my personal convictions because I believe some of these things that the churches do say are not things that are actually feasible enough. (YGHBG018P)

With regard to personal choices in matters of religion, a Ghanaian young adult had this say:

There was a point in my life anything the pastor says I will just take it as it is. – But as I grew up I realized that it's important to also find God on your own. Like when you don't understand something it is necessary for you to follow up and research on it to better understand it. – So you should also do your own personal research to affirm or disregard what the person is saying. (FGHFB035P)

Further responding to the question as to whether a Ghanaian young adult thought it was important to decide on what one personally believes in or to rely on others, if your parents have taught you something whilst you were young, she said:

Oh okay. I think is important for people to decide for themselves what they believe in because most of the time when people try to align themselves to what others have told them to believe in, they end up having conflict within themselves. Because when you start having doubt about what you believe in it becomes difficult to question your beliefs. Because it might – if my parents tells me that believe in Jesus Christ and I don't believe in Jesus Christ but am believing in Jesus Christ because my mother said so, it becomes difficult for me when am having conflict with my faith because I can't question it because am scared that my mother might have a problem with me having doubt about my faith. And then in cases like that too your faith is not really well grounded. Yes! That is what I think. (FGHFB035P)

The above two citations suggest how personal choice and agency is understood in relation to religious socialization. They reveal the understanding of young people that they have the autonomy to decide what they would believe in.

India

A Hindu female respondent (YINMS092) mentioned having taken up the custom of religious fasts from her mother and another (YINSR071) learning a lengthy Sanskrit hymn; thereby suggesting primary socialization. Nevertheless, from the point of view of parents, socialization has not always been successful. Some interviewees voiced scepticism as to whether or not religion can really be passed down in the family (e.g., YINSR071). A Hindu male respondent (YINSR053) explained the way by which a new, urban environment can influence a childhood religiosity.

Ok, I am a very simple person, I think of myself as being quite down to earth. At first when I was small, I used to believe in religion, I used to hear many things about religion from my parents and my elder ones. They used to tell me about religious culture, and I used to believe in it. But as soon as I got much more exposure to world, like when I came to Kolkata from [rural] Burdwan, I understood that this religion thing is very complicated

and it's been like a very complicated matter for me, whether to believe in it, or whether to not believe in it. (YINSR053)

One of the two instances in this material of someone having a more religious father than mother also represent an active rather than a passive individual in the process of religious socialization. This individual, a young woman had this to say:

So, I am a regular college going girl, university going girl, with an urban family upbringing in a middle class family. So, my father is a typical, self-righteous person who believes in Hindu fundamentalism. And when I was younger, I was really very impressed by his talking, and religion used to play [an important part in my life], I had schooling also from a very religious school. So until the age of my puberty I was very religious, I used to believe in god. Although I did not believe in idol worship, still I used to believe in god. [...] But as I grew up and I started questioning things, I really got no answer from religion. Religion had only one answer that is have faith in god and that will solve every problem. But that was not really a solution for me. Whenever I used to doubt something, religion could never, no particular religion could ever clear my doubts, like who is god, how does he exist, what is his ontology, how can he be omnipresent or omnipotent? Or if I can do everything by myself, then what is the necessity in believing in god? And also another thing: [...] why should I believe in an after-life because nobody ever has experienced life after death? So I started feeling doubtful about religion and then read I about all other materialistic philosophies of this world and I started feeling sceptical about religion. (YINSR064)

This respondent is now a member of a Marxist-Leninist party, engaged in university politics and also a feminist activist. From her views, it is important to note that apart from rational arguments, the one thing that really turned her away from religion was what she perceived as an outdated, patriarchal view of feminine sexuality found not only in Hinduism but in religion universally.

Poland

The traditional religion instilled by the early influence of family and school has, in the case of Poland, become challenged by other socialization agents such as peers, distant family members, teachers, various kinds of media, including print media (books and magazines) and electronic media. In such cases, the religious tradition, once taken for granted, becomes an object of reflection and undergoes transformations when confronted with new understandings of religion and religiosity. Freedom of choice seems to be a very important part of the process of working out one's own understanding of religion. A respondent noted:

I support individual freedom. Even if I see that something is wrong, I cannot, in principle, force anybody to behave another way; instead, one should just explain it to him. The same is true about me – I have freedom to believe in something or not. Freedom is important {LG}. Very important. (YPLSS308PT)

The challenges to religion, passed through generations, may result not only in rejecting religious faith but also in striving to maintain the religious tradition despite the awareness of its transformations. One participant says:

I mean that I am less and less religious in a strict sense because as I recall my deceased grandmother, she was definitely more religious than my mother, and I am even less religious than she is. So it seems to me that it more and more disappears, but we still maintain the most

important traditions. So these traditions are important and we cannot forget about them.
(YPLSS63PT)

Religious believers are sometimes aware that their religiosity is different from the religious attitudes of their parents and grandparents, but nevertheless they decide to maintain the religious tradition passed down within their families.

Discussion

It is important to underscore that religious socialization will largely entail an adult socializer who is involved in the process of the dissemination of the knowledge, values and norms of the inherited religion which ground religious (and at times cultural) identity to younger generations. As depicted in the responses from the young adults in Ghana, India and Poland, some of this knowledge and the norms and values will be overtly transmitted and conformed to, depending on the circumstances and contexts, especially that of upbringing.

In the case of Ghana, one can see that while there is a slight decline in the religiosity between current emerging adults and the families in which they grew up, Ghanaian young adults still largely keep to the religious beliefs, norms and values transmitted by their families. There are therefore conspicuous connections with adult primary religious socializers and socialization. However, it is also evident that Ghanaian young adults have the agency and capacity to form their own beliefs independent of adult socializers, particularly the family. The Indian young adults interviewed also show the tendency to conform to the religious beliefs and value overtly transmitted by parents and adult family socializers especially grandparents. The role of grandparents in supporting parents in religious socialization has been noted before (Arweck and Nesbitt 2010), but in these Indian young adults, as in the case of Polish young adults, the grandparents do not simply support the parents, they sometimes become the primary socialization agents themselves (cf. Vrublevskaia, Moberg, and Sztajer 2019). Evidently, the roles of primary socialization agents have been noticeable in the lives of Indian young adults. Similarly, it is evident in the religious socialization of Polish young adults that primary religious socialization plays a fundamental role in shaping their understanding of religion. The family is the first agency where young people acquire religious knowledge. Both parents and grandparents initiate children into religious belief and practices. The second important agent of influence in religious socialization is school where religious education is based on confessional instruction. These two institutional settings – family and school – in the lives of Polish young adults should be seen as points of departure for further development of young people's religious attitudes. Religious family upbringing at home and religious education at school are experiences common to both cohorts of young adults who remain religious in their later lives and those who abandon religious faith.

Nevertheless, it is worth emphasizing that socialization of any sort within contemporary globalized society, including religious socialization, takes place in an environment with diverse socialization agents that communicate diverse types of information and meaning making (Kühle 2012). As suggested by Kühle (2012), parental socialization happens in interaction with other forms of socialization and that when children get to young adulthood their socialization go beyond parents to self-socialization, as well as from family to other diverse agents of adult socialization that influence individual religiosity (see

also Arnett and Jensen 2002; Park and Ecklund 2007). Thus, when young adults have the opportunity for personal choice to make decisions independent of their primary religious socializers or when they decide what to believe and how to believe, there clearly emerge some re-negotiations of, even disconnections with, the primary socialized religious beliefs and values they formed and lived with through socialization during childhood.

While Ghanaian young adults do not necessarily disaffiliate from their faith, they nonetheless engage in a rethinking of religious views, leading to negotiations and alterations of inherited and/or transmitted beliefs and the construction of one's own beliefs, based on trusted sources of information. Indian young adults similarly tend to question and negotiate their inherited religiosity as they become sceptical of the necessity to transmit religious beliefs over time; and thereby engaging in the search for diverse agents in understanding religion, religiosity and their religious identity. Polish young adults' understanding of religion undergo changes under the influence of socialization agents such as the media, friends and peers, teachers, and distant family members. However, equally important is the process of self-reflection and ability to make personal choices concerning one's religiosity. There are several different patterns of transformation. The most visible pattern is the weakening of traditional religiosity and increasing privatization of religious life. Another is maintaining, or even strengthening, religiosity acquired during the process of primary socialization despite the corrosive influence of secular environment.

Consequently, the impact of primary socialization agents, even if they were dominant and unyielding as in the contexts of young adults interviewed in Ghana, India and Poland, now face competition for choice and conformity from other socialization agents in the contemporary society. This is very much so in light of social change and the normality of religious pluralism and its resultant influence in families such as the emergence of religious heterogeneous families (Park and Ecklund 2007), and the influences of the media (Lövheim 2012; Moberg and Sjö 2015; see also Moberg et al in this volume) and peers in schools. Thus, religious socialization processes and agents cannot be taken for granted as if it were a one-way dyad whereby parents or adult families transmit religious beliefs which emerging adults must conform to. This is generally evident in the case of young adults in Ghana, India and Poland, who are increasingly self-socializing.

The responses from young adults from the contexts of Ghana, India and Poland, largely affirm that other socialization agents, including oneself, play a central role in how young adults maintain their personal religiosity. Therefore, when young adults exercise their personal choice and autonomy about matters of religion, it is a confirmation that young adults or individuals are not passive recipients of adult desired and controlled beliefs, values and norms but active and reciprocal subjects in the process of religious socialization. This claim corresponds with the views of Arnett and Jensen (2002) that young adults do not just accept what has been told to them but explore for themselves and decide on their beliefs, especially when they become skeptical. These situations of personal choices in matters of religion and self-socialization that have become conspicuous in the religious lives of young adults studied in Ghana, India and Poland, further correlate with claims expressed by Sherkat (2003) that socialization can influence individuals only if the source can be trusted and valued and that individuals have considerable agency to choose which connections guide their religious preferences.

It is also worth noting how the three case studies tend to broaden, and somewhat question, the category of primary agents in socialization theory. In all the three cases, it became

evident that when participants talk about family, they often refer to a network of family members within the extended family, who at times take over roles often and traditionally defined as that of parents. These people include aunts, uncles and grandparents, thereby affirming the claims by Park and Ecklund (2007) that family in certain contexts does not equate with ‘father and mother’. In some cases, as depicted by the three study contexts, reference to ‘my parents’ may not necessarily refer to biological parents. Furthermore, the essential roles that the family, including the new family of religious group or community, play in the religious life of young people, render the description of biological parents alone as primary socializers problematic. This further suggests the category ‘primary socialization’ depicts its limitation to a controlled geo-cultural context and renders its universal applicability problematic.

Conclusion

Religious socialization has often been conceived as a process of influencing younger generations through the overt transmission of religious beliefs, norms and values by adult family members, usually parents, to which the younger ones conform. The failure to conform raises the apprehension of and debates about religious decline and disaffiliation in the theory of socialization. We therefore asked about the agents, the nature and forms of religious socialization among young adults in Ghana, India and Poland. What has become evident is that the contemporary society of mobility, secularity, social change and saturated media symbols and information, offers individuals the opportunity to interact with diverse information and socialization agents. These, coupled with the desire of individuals to exercise choice when interacting with these realities of the society, show that any conceptualization of religious socialization that emphasizes overt transmission of and conformity to parental and/or family religiosity; and thereby giving primacy to families, especially parents, over other socialization agents that young adults encounter and interact with, is misleading. This is because such conceptualizations suggest the young adult is unable to learn and make informed choices about their religiosity, from the world of people and experiences they encounter. As discussed in the introductory article to this issue (Klingenberg and Sjö 2019), any such simplistic and one-dyad view of religious socialization as religious conformity and participation fail to comprehensively analyze the contemporary context of secularity and social change. Furthermore, considering that different contexts do not necessarily negotiate social change, media culture and other interacting agents of religious socialization in the same way; and in light of the way labels are used to define socialization agents, this calls for further research into and comparisons between the nature of religious socialization in different contexts.

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