



MARGIT WARBURG

‘This is not really about Religion’. Introducing the Entanglement of the Religious and the Secular

The entanglement of the religious and the secular is often associated with borderline cases of the division between the two, where there is disagreement about the interpretation of the concrete case: It is about religion or not? In the analytical development of the entanglement of the religious and the secular, I will briefly argue that the entanglement of the religious and the secular refers to a common sociological condition of a highly differentiated modern society. I will then expound on the concept of entanglement using an example from Denmark from the last months of 2012. The example is the controversial “Christmas tree affair” which

began when the Muslim majority in the board of a large housing association decided to abandon the tradition of having a Christmas tree on the premises. When the press caught news of the affair, it escalated rapidly and soon divided politicians and the public on issues of national traditions, integration and religion. Finally, a new board gave in and reinstated the traditional Christmas tree just before 1 December.

My analysis of the different proponents’ arguments reveals wild disagreement among both agents and spectators about the issues of the Christmas tree affair and whether it had to do with religion or with national coherence. I ascribe this disagreement to an entanglement of the religious and the secular, in this case represented by the Christmas tree as

a symbol which refers both to the
Danish nation and to the